parity
OCTOBER 2019 VOLUME 32 — ISSUE 8
ISSN 1032-6170

chp
council to homeless persons

Preventing and Sustaining Exits from Youth Homelessness in Canada

Contents

Parity
Australia's national homelessness publication
Published by Council to Homeless Persons

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Contributions to *Parity* are welcome.
Each issue of *Parity* has a central focus or theme. However, prospective contributors should not feel restricted by this as *Parity* seeks to discuss the whole range of issues connected with homelessness and the provision of housing and services to people experiencing homelessness. Where necessary, contributions will be edited. Where possible this will be done in consultation with the contributor. Contributions can be emailed to ***parity@chp.org.au*** in Microsoft Word or rtf format. If this option is not possible, contributions can be mailed to CHP at the above address.

The 2019 *Parity* Publications Schedule
November: Responding to Homelessness in Tasmania
December: The Future of Aboriginal and Māori Housing

Cover image
Bed by Jesse Dekel, whose first experience of homelessnss was at 18 years old, Montréal, Québec.

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Foreword

Dr. Stephen Gaetz, Professor, Faculty of Education, York University;
President of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness;
Scientific Director of the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab and
Melanie Redman, President and CEO of A Way Home Canada and Partnership and
Implementation Director of the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab

It is with great pride that A Way Home Canada (AWHC), the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) and our Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab publish this edition of *Parity* with a special focus on Canadian efforts to transform how we respond to youth homelessness. This edition is a showcase of a range of efforts across policy, systems planning and practice domains to support a move from predominantly a crisis response to one that focuses on prevention and sustained exits from homelessness. Also featured are contributions from people with lived experience of youth homelessness, as it is critical that their experiences and insights drive our collective efforts.

It is sometimes said that comparing and transferring knowledge between countries is difficult, if not impossible, in some areas of public policy and the general approach to addressing youth homelessness. Well, we have found that the shared learning across international boundaries is incredibly useful and can in fact be transformative, leading to some major, paradigm-shifting 'Aha!' moments. We refer to this as overcoming the 'specialness disease.'

Research from jurisdiction to jurisdiction is confirming that the causes and conditions of youth homelessness are basically the same, and therefore our response should build on what works across those boundaries. Australia, for example, has been the global leader on school-based early intervention approaches. We have been actively mining these successes for a number of years now and working to adapt them to the Canadian context.

In Canada, the context for a shift to prevention is improving. In 2019, the Government of Canada released a new federal homelessness policy called *Reaching Home*.[1] Priorities of *Reaching Home* include:

- chronic homelessness reduction (50 per cent by 2027–2028)
- homelessness in community reduced overall and for specific populations
- new inflows into homelessness are reduced
- returns to homelessness are reduced.

Though the federal investment on homelessness services and supports is a fraction of the overall amounts provinces and municipalities invest, the Government of Canada plays an important leadership role through *Reaching Home*. What the above priorities signal is that the door has finally opened for prevention and sustained exits from homelessness. It also creates space for communities to prioritize youth and other vulnerable populations.

In August, 2019, the Government of Canada released *Everyone Counts 2018*.[2] The report provides the preliminary results from the second nationally coordinated Point-in-Time (PiT) count of homelessness in Canadian communities. One of the most shocking findings from the report is that 50 per cent of those enumerated first experienced homelessness before the age of 25. This tells us that if we want to make a dent in chronic homelessness, we must invest in youth homelessness and prevention.

So why has prevention not been prioritized until now? There are many possible answers to this question; a few which we are tackling head on at AWHC and the COH.

Until recently, there was no shared language about what prevention is, what it is not, and why that distinction is so important. In 2017, the COH released *A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention*[3] which seeks to uncover what it will take to stop homelessness before it starts, to avoid its often-traumatizing effects. The document provides a definition and typology of homelessness prevention, and a review of the evidence base. The aim of the framework was to begin a nation-wide conversation on what prevention looks like and what it will take to shift toward homelessness prevention.

Locations of contributors to this edition of *Parity*

Using international examples, the framework operationalizes the policies and practices necessary to successfully prevent homelessness and highlights who is responsible. Above all, it situates prevention within a human rights approach.

Building on this important work, the COH and AWHC released the *Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*[4] just one year later. The Roadmap integrates our learning from a pan-Canadian consultation with people with lived experience of youth homelessness (*What Would it Take*)[5] and an international scan of evidence of youth homelessness prevention COH and AWHC conducted for the Wales Centre for Public Policy.

So we now have both a language for youth homelessness prevention, but also practical examples of prevention in action in policy, planning and practice. In addition, AWHC and the COH are refining and testing models of prevention and Housing First for Youth[6] in communities across Canada through our Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Demonstration Lab and collaborating with partners internationally who are engaged in similar efforts. Most recently, the Government of Canada's Research Tri-Council invested an initial $17.9 million in our Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab (a Network of Centers of Excellence) in order to allow us to conduct and mobilize quality research specific to youth homelessness prevention and sustained exits that builds on the work of our Demonstration Lab — all of this with the goal of achieving the best possible outcomes for young people and their families.

While AWHC and the COH are doing their part, communities are also mobilizing for change. We see examples from across the country of individuals, organizations, and local governments doing the very difficult work of integrating prevention strategies into their homelessness response. Our role as researchers and advocates is to support these communities by showcasing what works, both nationally and internationally, building new evidence where there are gaps, and using our resources to support communities through training and technical assistance and robust peer-to-peer learning opportunities. This edition of *Parity* is part of that contribution to the increasingly important dialogue about prevention.

Endnotes

1. For further information on the Government of Canada's homelessness strategy visit: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/homelessness.html>
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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following individuals for contributing their time, guidance and passion to this edition of *Parity*:

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Northern Exposure

This edition of *Parity*, our national specialist homelessness industry magazine, examines Canada's approach to youth homelessness. We are fortunate to have partnered with Melanie Redman (A Way Home, Chez-Soi) and Dr Stephen Gaetz (The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness) to have made this happen. We thank our colleague Associate Professor David McKenzie for the introduction.

There are many reasons to explore what we can learn from our Canadian counterparts. While it takes a day to fly there, from this end of the earth, we have much in common. Both societies were colonized by the British who put in place both countries' founding institutional structures; and both nations have First Peoples who suffered immeasurably and on-goingly from that dispossession. Both Canada and Australia also share a growing problem of homelessness, fueled by the increasing cost of private rental housing, and an inadequate supply of social housing.

This edition of *Parity* focusses on youth homelessness. It aims to examine new service responses in Canada that prevent and sustain exits from homelessness for young people, and which are fundamentally changing that country's response to youth homelessness. This edition provides us with the opportunity to hear about the hard won experience of our Canadian counterparts, and to read about, discuss, debate and discern what is relevant and applicable to our own social, political and cultural context, and what is not.

The Canadian framework for prevention addresses both the structural factors that cause youth homelessness, including social inequality, and articulates the service responses needed to end individual's experiences of homelessness. This includes stabilizing young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, through the provision of appropriate housing and supports that promote the young person's integration back into the community. Particular importance is given to enhancing the natural and family supports around a young person and maximizing the positive influence of adults in their lives long-term. Most importantly, the Canadian response to youth homelessness is a 'Housing First' response.

Under the bridge, Griffintown, Montréal *Photo by Coastal Elite*

> *'Youth homelessness prevention thus necessitates the immediate provision of housing and supports for youth experiencing homelessness, or the immediate protection of housing, with supports, for youth at risk of homelessness.'*[1]

Our hope is that this edition will further support the adoption of a framework in Australia that will both prevent youth homelessness and provide for a Housing First response.

Endnote

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Acknowledgements

CHP would like to acknowledge and thank Stephen Gaetz and Melanie Redman for their support and assistance in making this edition happen, in particular for organizing the sponsorship support for the edition. CHP would also like to thank Amanda Buchnea in particular for her work in coordinating the development and preparation of the edition as well as the work of colleagues on the edition Steering Committee.

This edition is funded by the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab, which is co-led by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home Canada. Making the Shift is funded by the Government of Canada's Network of Centers of Excellence program. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

Introduction

We Can't Wait: The Urgent Need for Youth Homelessness Prevention

Dr. Stephen Gaetz, Professor, Faculty of Education, York University; President of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness; Scientific Director of the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab, Kaitlin Schwan, Senior Researcher, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, York University, Melanie Redman, President and CEO of A Way Home Canada and Partnership and Implementation Director of the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab and David French, David French, Director of Policy and Planning, A Way Home Canada

In countries around the world, many young people experience a profound injustice that threatens their health, safety, wellbeing, education, and futures: they experience homelessness. In most cases we respond to this injustice *reactively*. Rather than intervening before a young person is on the streets, we typically wait until they are in crisis before supports and services kick in. Even then, in most cases what is offered is designed to meet basic needs, rather than sound strategies to remedy their homelessness. In many cases young people are expected to exit homelessness on their own. Moreover, there are barriers to accessing these services. Many supports and services are not available until youth reach a particular age (for example, age 16 or 18), meet a particular qualifying criteria (for example, homeless for six months), or are able to meet specific expectations (for example, attend school five days a week). In effect, we ensure the ongoing suffering of many of our young people.

The consequences of this approach in Canada have become very clear, as demonstrated by the *Without a Home* study,[1] the largest pan-Canadian survey on youth homelessness ever conducted:

1. Early Experiences of Homelessness
   Many young people became homeless before they were 16 (40.1 per cent). Young people who left home at an early age also experienced greater adversity on the streets (for example, multiple episodes of homelessness, greater likelihood of attempting suicide).

2. Housing Instability
   Young people often had multiple episodes of homelessness –75.9 per cent had experienced homelessness more than once, and 36.9 per cent had more than five experiences.

3. Chronic Homelessness
   Almost one third of the young people (31.4 per cent) were chronically homeless, meaning they were continuously homeless for more than one year.

4. Histories of Abuse and Involvement in Child Protection
   A high percentage of young people (63.1 per cent) had experienced childhood trauma and abuse, and 57.8 per cent had child welfare involvement at some point in their lives.

5. Declining Mental Health
   Many young people reported struggling with mental health challenges, associated with childhood adversity and exposure to crime, violence, and exploitation on the streets. A total of 85.4 per cent of youth reported high symptoms of distress and 42 per cent reported at least one suicide attempt.

6. Unemployment and Low School Participation
   Over three quarters (75.7 per cent) of the young people indicated they were unemployed, and 50.5 per cent were not currently involved in any formal education, employment, or training.

These findings make it clear that we are largely failing to prevent young people from entering homelessness, and we are not helping them to exit homelessness quickly or permanently. In the meantime, harm is accumulating. The adverse consequences of a prolonged experience of homelessness are well known: declining health, mental health and well-being, trauma, criminal victimization, social exclusion and entrenchment in homelessness. For this population, the consequences of not addressing the problem early are quite profound. The homeless youth of today become the homeless adults of tomorrow, given that Canadian Point-in-Time Count data indicates that 50 per cent of homeless adults had their first experience of homelessness prior to the age of 25. It is time for a preventative approach. If we could do a better job of preventing youth homelessness in the first place through a focus on well-being, we might have a bigger impact on chronic homelessness amongst adults in the long run.

Defining Youth Homelessness Prevention

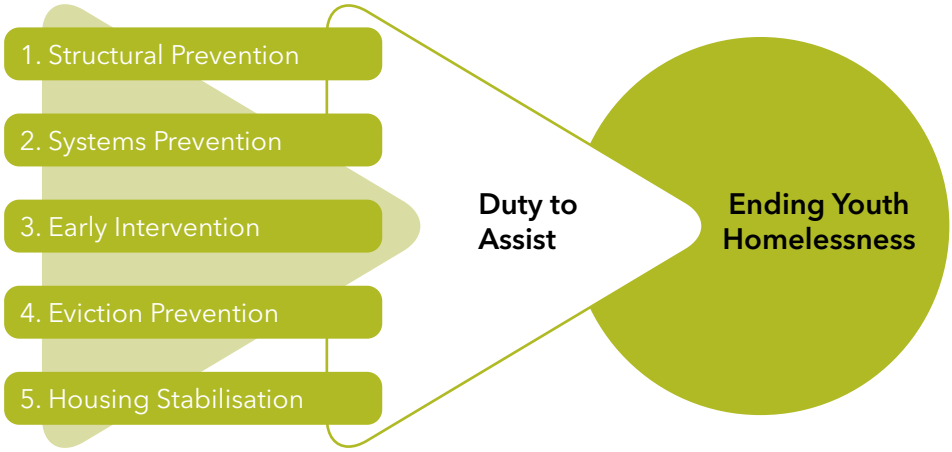
While all agree that preventing a problem before it arises is a good thing, there has been less clarity about how to define and operationalize the prevention of youth homelessness. *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*[2] offers a concise definition of youth homelessness prevention:

> *'Policies, practices, and interventions that either*
> *(1) reduce the likelihood that a young person will experience homelessness, or*
> *(2) provide youth experiencing homelessness with the necessary supports to stabilize their housing, improve their wellbeing, connect with community, and avoid re-entry into homelessness. Youth homelessness prevention thus necessitates the immediate provision of housing and supports for youth experiencing homelessness, or the immediate protection of housing, with supports, for youth at risk of homelessness.'*[3]

Defined in this way, youth homelessness prevention involves not only reducing the likelihood that youth will experience homelessness in the first place, but also ensuring that those who have experienced homelessness are given the proper youth-focused supports to exit this situation so they do not cycle back into homelessness. Youth homelessness prevention thus includes primary, secondary, and tertiary forms of prevention. Preventive interventions seek to not only stabilize housing, but also improve health and wellbeing, promote social inclusion, and contribute to better long-term outcomes.

Importantly, not all policies and interventions that assist youth should be considered preventative. While programs such as life skills training may be highly valuable and improve quality of life for young people, such programming cannot be considered prevention unless they are also provided in the context of immediate access to housing. As explained in *The Roadmap*, *'If a young person remains in an ongoing state of homelessness within a program or service, with no immediate prospect of exiting, these interventions should not be considered prevention.'*[4]

A move towards prevention requires a shift in how we think about who is responsible for addressing the problem of homelessness. In Canada, the response to homelessness is usually guided by the homelessness sector. A shift to prevention means we need to consider systems coordination and integration, addressing homelessness as a 'fusion policy' issue. That is, other mainstream institutions and services, including education, child protection, health, mental health and addictions supports, justice, employment, and others, can and should play a more significant role. This is particularly the case for institutions that may be contributing to the problem in the first place through inadequate, or even absent, transitional supports out of care, prison or hospitals, for instance. Addressing youth homelessness requires an all-hands-on-deck approach, with active recognition of cross-ministerial (institutional) responsibility.



Typology of Youth Homelessness Prevention

In order to organize our understanding of prevention, *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness* outlines five categories of youth homelessness prevention, built upon the work of Gaetz and Dej.[5] Each of these categories is necessary, but not itself sufficient, for the prevention of youth homelessness. As such, these categories are mutually supportive and co-constitutive. In The Roadmap, we provide real world examples of policies, programs, and interventions that focus on prevention.

Homelessness Prevention Typology

1) *Structural Prevention*
   Legislation, policy, and investment to address risks of homelessness and increase social equality. Examples include: legislating housing as a human right, addressing the consequences of our colonial history and ongoing racism against Indigenous peoples, poverty reduction strategies, and income supports.

2) *Systems Prevention*
   Breaking barriers and enhancing access to services and supports. This includes transition supports for those leaving public institutions, such as correctional facilities, hospitals, and child protection systems.

3) *Early Intervention*
   Strategies designed to act early and address the risk of homelessness, as well as provide crisis intervention to those who have recently experienced homelessness. Examples include: effective outreach, coordinated intake and assessment, client-centered case management, and shelter diversion.

4) *Eviction Prevention*
   A type of early intervention, programs designed to keep people stably housed and help them avoid eviction. Examples include: landlord/tenant mediation, rental assistance, emergency financial assistance, and legal advice and representation.

5) *Housing Stabilization*
   Supporting people who have experienced homelessness to find and maintain housing. This includes Housing First and supports to enhance health and well-being, education and employment, and social inclusion.

Duty to Assist: A Rights-Based Approach

In addition to these five categories, we also add a sixth legislative strategy — Duty to Assist. As explained in *The Roadmap*,

> *'A Duty to Assist means there is a statutory obligation, or a legal duty, requiring that local authorities make reasonable efforts to end the person's homelessness or stabilize their housing. This means ensuring that young people under 25 are provided with information, advice, and housing-led supports to avoid an experience of homelessness, or to make that experience as brief as possible.'*[6]

The concept of Duty to Assist has been put into practice in Europe with the *Housing (Wales) Act* of 2014, and is currently being adapted in Canada through the collective work of Bridgeable, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, and A Way Home Canada.

Youth Homelessness Prevention: Human Rights in Action

Youth homelessness prevention should be implemented using a rights-based approach. This approach requires that we understand homelessness as necessarily a denial of young peoples' inherent and indivisible human rights, including:

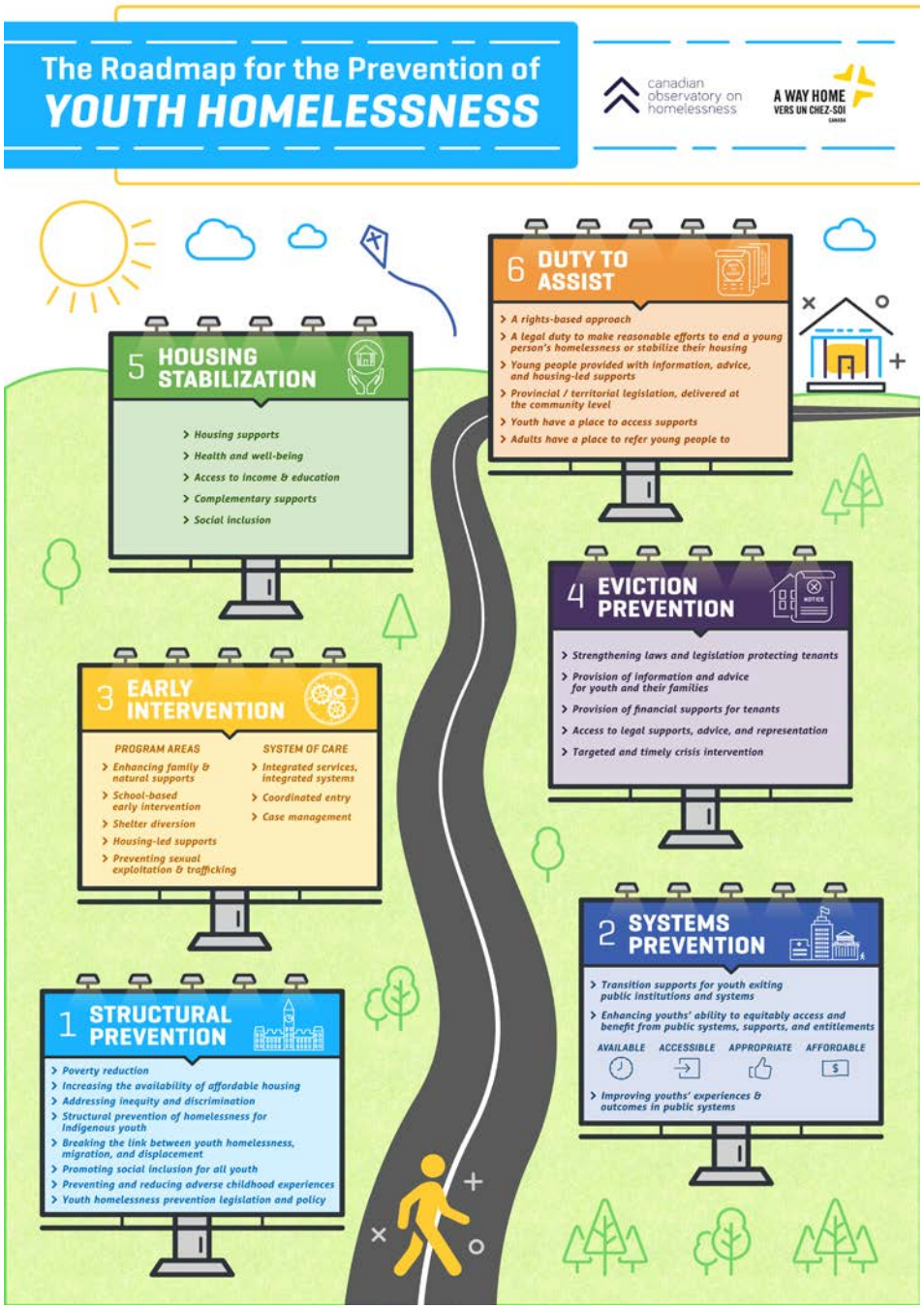
- the right to an adequate standard of living
- the right to housing (recently enshrined in Canadian legislation)
- the right to life
- the right to education
- the right to personal security and property.

As a human rights violation, youth homelessness must be remedied. All governments have a *positive obligation* to prevent homelessness for all young people. Practically, human rights must guide the development and implementation of all policies, laws, and strategies that aim to prevent and end youth homelessness.

Moving Forward

A preventive approach to youth homelessness is long overdue. This injustice demands a proactive, evidence-based response in countries from around the world. Fortunately, there are strong examples of youth homelessness prevention we can draw on to support this global movement, and a growing evidence base.[7,8,9] This paradigm shift will require the voices and experiences of young people to be at the center of policy and program development, investing in rights-based strategies, and thinking innovatively to drive systems change.

The articles in this volume draw from research and practice to provide examples from Canada of how we are exploring the implementation of strategies to prevent youth homelessness. The shift we are beginning to see comes after years — actually decades — of inaction and in many cases active resistance to considering, let alone implementing, homelessness prevention as a priority in Canada and the United States. Our belief is that we can never truly reach the goal of ending youth homelessness until we fully implement a prevention agenda. We *CAN* end youth homelessness around the world, if we choose to.



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Making the Shift: A Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab

Dr. Stephen Gaetz, Professor, Faculty of Education, York University; President of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness; Scientific Director of the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab and Melanie Redman, President and CEO of A Way Home Canada and Partnership and Implementation Director of the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab

Making the Shift is a Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab with a mandate to contribute to the transformation of how we respond to youth homelessness through research and knowledge mobilization specific to youth homelessness prevention and housing stabilization.

One of the barriers to moving strongly in the direction of prevention is that many service providers, advocates and policy makers complain that there is not a solid evidence base. This perspective is somewhat contradictory, in that outside of Housing First and permanent supportive housing, there is very little evidence for most of what we do in the realm of homelessness.

At the same time, while there is growing interest in moving in the direction of prevention, because there is not deep experience in doing this kind of work many organizations and governments struggle with the challenge of what to do and how to do it.

These are some of the challenges we face in trying support a broader the shift to prevention, and admittedly, it is not an easy task. Youth homelessness is what we call a 'wicked problem'; a complex and urgent policy challenge in need of a comprehensive solution. Wicked problems such as homelessness cannot be solved by a single profession, organization or even sector. To address such challenges there is a need for some shared agreement on the nature of the problem, and intense collaboration between groups to identify what works and for whom, and to sort out what we know and what we do not. As with other wicked problems, the solutions curve on homelessness is not keeping up with challenges (problems) curve.

This is why we are going down the road of social innovation. Social Innovation Laboratories (SIL) — also referred to as 'design labs' or 'change labs' — have emerged as a creative response to challenging social issues. Social Innovation Labs can be key drivers of systems transformation, helping to find solutions to complex problems, through research, program design, prototyping, demonstration projects and other means to identify potentially transformative policies, practices and processes. The goal is for social research and development to enhance our understanding and knowledge base through the intersection of research AND practice in order to improve social outcomes; however, we need a greater ability to research, prototype and experiment.

Co-led by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home Canada, the goal of Making the Shift is to conduct and mobilize quality research that supports governments, communities, and service providers to make the shift from managing the crisis of youth homelessness, to a focus on preventing and enabling sustainable exits from homelessness.

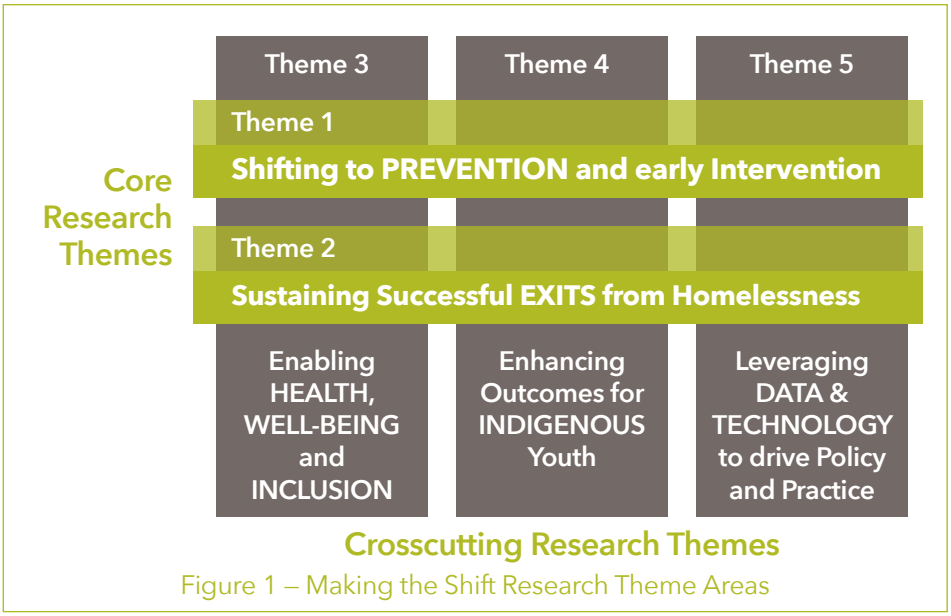


Figure 1 – Making the Shift Research Theme Areas

MtS brings together researchers from across Canada to work in partnership with service providers, government and policy makers, funders, private sector partners, people with lived experience of youth homelessness and advocacy organizations. Such purposeful collaboration is essential to carrying out all aspects of our work, from the identification of challenges, to the design of evidence-driven policy and practice transformations, and to the mobilization and replication of proven strategies and solutions.

MtS Research Agenda

The MtS program of research has been developed based on the belief that there are realistic and practical solutions to youth homelessness, and that communities can achieve this end when informed by credible evidence and supported by appropriate policy and funding frameworks. Communities can implement effective strategies and interventions that produce better outcomes when informed by credible evidence and supported by appropriate policy and funding frameworks. Our research themes will build evidence for these strategies and interventions.

The Making the Shift research program is guided by *five intersecting research themes* designed to most effectively achieve MtS' mandate, including two core themes that are the foundation of the project, and three crosscutting theme areas.

Within each theme area there are four to five sub-themes are noted, which allows for subject-specific insights from academic and community experts, including people with lived experience of youth homelessness. Through this research framework, MtS will identify what prevention programs, policies, and interventions should be pursued, who they should engage, and in which contexts they are likely to be effective, thereby providing solutions to reduce the life-long health, social, and economic burdens of youth homelessness.

Through our knowledge mobilization (KMb) strategy, we intend to generate new insights, cultivate and mobilize innovative and effective solutions to youth homelessness, and support implementation of effective policy and program models by governments, funders, and communities alike.

The MtS knowledge mobilization Research to Impact Cycle consists of four mutually reinforcing components and is designed to mobilize the knowledge generated through the five research themes. MtS is designed to provides decision makers and practitioners at the national, regional, and local levels with critical and timely information, practical, evidence-based and innovative policy and program models, resources, and technical supports that will inform the implementation of effective strategies to prevent youth homelessness. Promising initiatives emerging from these systematic incubation efforts will be advanced through the innovation pipeline to be further developed, assessed, and brought to scale.

As a means to this end, MtS has built a training program focused on enhancing the capacity to deliver change and widening impact by training and mobilizing others. This will be done by delivering educational, training and technical support opportunities to raise


Jesse Dekel. First experience of homelessnss at 18 years old, Montréal, Québec — *waller street*, 2019

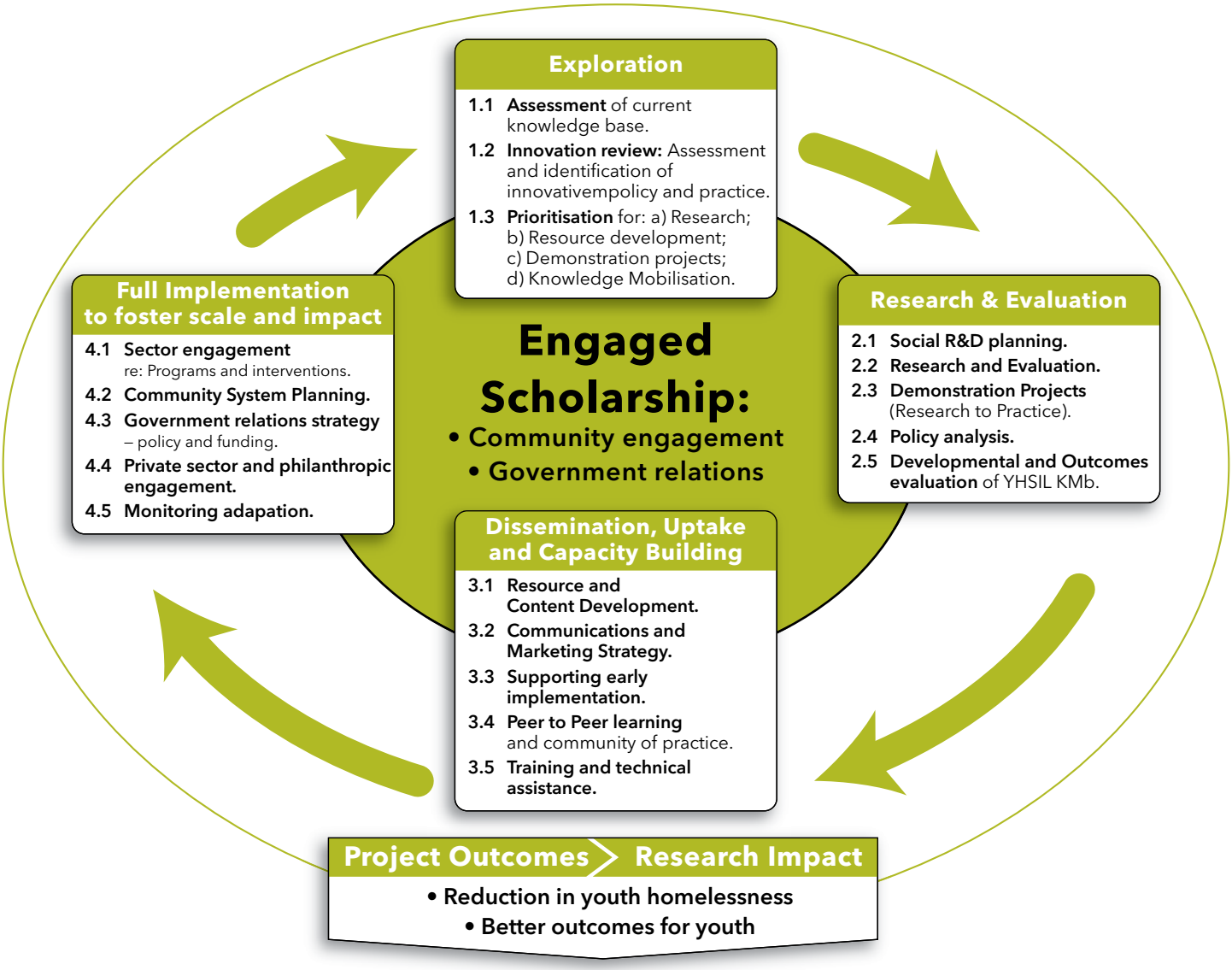


Figure 2 – Research to Impact Cycle

the 'homelessness prevention IQ' amongst researchers, students, service providers, policy makers, people with lived experience of youth homelessness, and funders.

Making the Shift Demonstration Projects (MtS DEMS)

The main vehicle for driving innovations in the prevention of youth homelessness is demonstration projects. MtS DEMS uses design thinking to expand our knowledge and understanding of innovative approaches to preventing and ending youth homelessness by identifying, developing, testing, evaluating, and mobilizing innovations in policy and practice, through the implementation of comprehensive demonstration projects.

The following are our current demonstration projects. Through the broader work of the MtS Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab, it is anticipated that additional demonstration projects will be added.

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is a rights-based intervention for youth who are experiencing, or at risk of homelessness. It is an adaptation of the well-established Housing First model, designed to meet the needs of developing adolescents and young adults. There are HF4Y demonstration projects taking place in Hamilton, Toronto, and Ottawa (CMHA; JHS; YSB).

Youth Reconnect (YR) is a preventative intervention designed to provide support to vulnerable young people in the communities where they have developed social connections and supports, while encouraging youth to engage or re-engage with education. Hamilton is currently running a YR demonstration project.

Enhancing Family and Natural Supports (FNS) is focused on preventing and ending youth homelessness through strengthening relationships between vulnerable young people and their support networks, including family. There are eight demonstration projects taking place in Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Red Deer, and Toronto.

The Upstream Project Canada (TUPC) is a school-community collaborative early-intervention initiative led in partnership with AWHC, the COH and Raising the Roof. Based on The Geelong Project in Australia, work is underway to adapt and implement the Community of Schools and Services (COSS) model for the Canadian context.

This edition of *Parity* incudes pieces that further explore some of these demonstration projects and their connections and contributions to the discourse on youth homelessness prevention policy and practice.

Chasing Pain

Shane Pelletier, Saskatchewan, Canada

In retelling my experience in homelessness and looking back on my life two things have become inextricably clear: My homelessness started long before I didn't have a place to live, and secondly, the keys out of homelessness lay in the hands of my child self buried in the recesses of my psyche. You see, for me homelessness doesn't just mean not having a place to live, nor did solving or ending my homelessness mean just having a place to live. My homelessness was rooted deeper than that; its beginnings shrouded in secrecy and silence. And if I ever wanted to escape the clutches of homelessness for good, I needed to traverse the gauntlet of my trauma and reach inside to find ground zero.

I was never one of those teens who felt like they knew it all; I didn't have the confidence for that. In fact, at 15 when I would spend my first night rough sleeping, I knew then that I didn't know how I would survive without a roof over my head. The great unknown and all of the circling fears ready to devour me at any moment. I slept under an evergreen tree in a public park and even made a little fire to keep warm — I didn't know anything about survival on the streets.

What I DID know was pain and violence. The pain that comes from years of physical violence and emotional abuse. Pain so deep that it shuts down one's 'emotional fuselage'. Pain that reaches into your core and freezes you in place. Pain delivered at the hands of those who are supposed to love you. Pain in the form of domestic violence. Domestic violence was as much a part of our home as the wallpaper; always there you just had to look up. It was the pain of a life in violence that made me choose to leave. Hopelessness preceded my entry into homelessness.

The official story is that I left home after getting into an argument with my mom's husband, which led to him assaulting me one last time. The culmination of years of beatings and physical discipline aimed to inspire character development. When my mom brought this man into our world five years earlier it was sold to us as the family we always wanted. In reality, the man was a 'wolf in sheep's clothing'. He introduced a legalistic and obedience structured religious faith into our family, which later became a convenient mechanism to shelter our abuse. At 14 we were required to ask permission to go outside in the backyard, everything was dictated. It wasn't a case of mere paternal discernment; it was control and manipulation with frequent violent beatings. And so went our lives, my sisters and I.

At this stage every effort went into holding up a façade of how everything was fine. Our outward image did not match our inward reality. We attended a private school and were surrounded by well-to-do suburbanites; we were utterly ashamed of our world. For us, being honest and forthcoming with the atrocities going on behind closed doors felt more foreign than a language we didn't speak. We protected our secret at all costs. We, the victims, became the defenders of our own demise. Hopelessness settled in and every effort passers-by would attempt were cast down under the force of our own shame.

How can early intervention of youth homelessness crack through the shackles of shame and fear when abused and fractured children are indeed the instruments of defense against those efforts, like with me and in my family?

The unofficial story begins much earlier than that and formed the groundwork for the roots of my homelessness to take hold. I was no more than six years old when, like so many, I too was robbed of my innocence. That day my mom took a version of me home, but not Me. I remained in that place, and in a lot of ways still do, there — alone — homeless. That is the tip of the spear of my homelessness. Three things I carried away from that incident: One — I was dirty, I was bad. Two — those who were given to me for protection couldn't protect me. And three — tell no one. A lifetime of shame imprinting on one's identity forms a belief that stifles resilience; producing and sustaining homelessness.

To parallel the words of someone much wiser than I, if we want to fix youth homelessness, we must treat the trauma that creates the homeless youth.

The early years of my life on the streets were a breath of fresh air, considering the aforementioned, one can understand why. A period of my life I am grateful for and in which I acquired deep personal growth. It's no wonder early intervention didn't interest me — the thought of 'home' or 'having a home' carried so much pain that I avoided anyone who suggested it. I was more interested in pain management and finding my next relief filled my obsessions. Social services and systems couldn't help me the way I needed, so they were of no use to me. As I sunk deeper into my obsession and further away from any form of life preserver the streets started to erode my spirit squeezing every ounce of will and power out of me. When I did start accessing service entry points, I was so far gone that I required a

different approach than the typical treatment model that was available.

I was further traumatized by an underdeveloped system that lumped me into the category of 'work ready' and able-bodied, never supposing I was spirit disabled or nurture ready.

Services and workers attempted, well-intentioned, to address my needs however the factors underpinning my barriers were a mystery to them and me. With addiction, mental health, spiritual disconnection, and emotional blunting persisting even emergency shelters would no longer welcome me, nor could they effectively respond to my needs.

Stairwells and service corridors, laundry rooms and storage closets became warm places to rest. At that point my physical well-being started to deteriorate as I spent days sometimes a week at a time awake — walking. I walked so much that one time when I eventually stopped my mud and blood-soaked socks had embedded into the souls of my feet. I can still hear the sound of them being pulled out as if faint Velcro, the mesh separating from my waterlogged skin. It was like walking on razor blades each step a painful reminder that I had no place to go no place to heal.

It would have been enough had this been my exit out of homelessness, but things went on like this for several years, building up to a trepidatious walk to the high-level bridge and that thought that presents itself when all of the options are gone. In my darkest moment I didn't have the ability to reach out, but I did have the ability to reach in. And when I reached inside, I was able to hold onto a hope that someone else had planted perhaps one of those well-intentioned workers. This seed of hope was the doorway to my journey out of youth homelessness.

Imparting Hope is a key element in service delivery and cannot be understated. The stories of workers impacting youth are varied and many, I know they are with me. It is vital that systems include and lean on people with lived experience for this as they are the experts in this space and inherently — hope personified.

Life after the streets was, as you would imagine, an adjustment riddled with mistakes and learnings. Identifying and presenting as I do, I was lucky to have only experienced the level of pitfalls and challenges that I did. Struggle became the institution of my education; each step forward hard earned.

As I made progress and attained certain benchmarks, I could never really crack the code to why living life on life's terms came so hard. There was something missing something I couldn't put my finger on and for years I lived life in fear of returning to the streets. Each decision a maneuver to escape the impending clutch of homelessness. I walked through life with the mindset that nice things were on loan and eventually I would lose them. The fragility of my housing, employment, and mental health was overwhelming and my maladaptive reactions to it added additional pressure. A pressure that screamed I couldn't go on like this and maintain. I would eventually end up back on the streets without an appropriate intervention.

Here housing made the difference. This time around I did have the capacity to reach out and ask for help, and I did. Housing gave me just enough confidence to address my vulnerability building my resilience and equipping, enabling, and empowering me to meet challenges at the door.

Building supports around housing youth is as important to ending youth homelessness as water is to a flower. And if our response is comprehensive and open ended enough, I believe youth can avoid re-entry into homelessness and we can end homelessness for youth. But what about prevention? Is it possible to prevent youth homelessness completely?

Becoming a self-proclaimed expert on pain I had captured pains weakness, its exposure. With a system of professional and natural supports around me I began to crack the code. Pain leaves a trail. Paying attention to patterns in my life I was able to trace back to where my homelessness began. Those infant stages of an internal voice telling me that I wasn't worth it, wasn't worth working hard for. I began to see how those beliefs laid the groundwork for a foundation of shame to be cemented in impacting the trajectory of my life into homelessness. It has been the work of my life; looking back and reconciling.

Surviving youth homelessness is a scar that I wear, but ending my homelessness by cutting out those roots is a badge of honor; a self-inspiring well that springs me into action everyday. I received a teaching recently that encapsulates my journey *'Everything is about Relationships and Relationships are about Everything'.* This teaching has become profound to me as I reflect on my relationship with myself and how revelations through that lens have been the ingredients in ending my homelessness.

Ending youth homelessness doesn't stop at a door. It begins at the door and can take as many directions as there are youth and what is most sobering is that in some cases it can take years and shift mid-stream. The work of ending homelessness requires that we dig deeper go farther and find those roots. We may not even know what the right questions to ask are yet, so we keep digging.

We don't know what we don't yet know. Yesterday we took the bootstrap approach demanding that youth get a job to end their homelessness. Today it's the harm reductive approach and using people-centered design. What will tomorrow's youth require of us? As we build and adapt systems and policy we must be future-minded keeping space for innovation and risk, realizing that fluidity is perhaps the zenith of systems design. It could be that AI will unearth disruptions in how we address a changing homelessness ecosystem dealing with our lag in service delivery and approaches. Or, reimaging and revisiting ancient tribal approaches to childcare and community investment that circles back closing gaps. It isn't the methods that should draw so much of our efforts in the youth homeless serving system, but the means.

What I, as a person who survived and ended youth homelessness, hope for, is that we move toward a system of care that stares vulnerability in the face and races toward holding that gaze long enough to awaken the power within each of us to change. And where that power doesn't exist to hold those people even closer.

Freedom Through Security:
Providing Safety to Promote Youth Wellness

Responses and Artwork by Matthew, Hamilton Ontario, Karrissa HL, Hamilton Ontario, Tyler H, Hamilton Ontario, and Kenneth Bomberry, Hamilton Ontario

Interviewed by Erika Morton, Community Planning Manager, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

Introduction

In the summer of 2019, eight young people from Hamilton, Ontario participated in the Duty to Assist (DtA) human-centered design project. The young people were tasked with sharing their insights on youth homelessness prevention and on the simulation of a DtA. At the beginning of the project, the young people were asked to create murals using mixed art materials, prompted to create a visual representation of what home means to them. This article highlights some of the participants' artwork, their interpretations of their murals, and some key messages they wanted to share on youth homelessness prevention.

Please tell us about your artwork and how it represents home to you.

Matthew: Home is depicted throughout my artwork with a concept around small distractions. To me home requires an environment centered not only on community, but having a safe place to retreat from the stresses of day to day. Hobbies can be quite important to keeping a youth housed and preventing homelessness in the future.

Karrissa HL: I wanted my art to show what I lacked growing up, as well, to showcase what is important to me now that I have a home. The part of the art that looks like it's drawn more child-like is what was lacking growing up, whereas the rest of the art is showing what is important to me now.

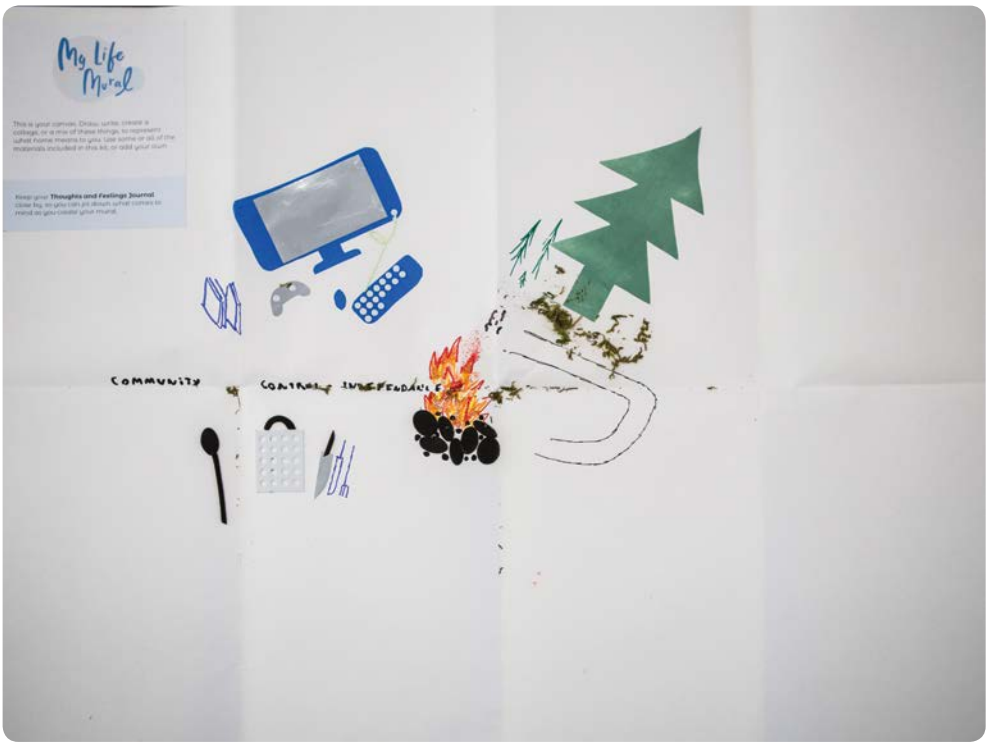
Tyler H: This image was inspired by a feeling I hope to share with the empathetic eye. Our worlds are not the same and until you've experienced homelessness yourself having empathy is the closest you will have to understanding our realities. Please be mindful that being empathetic is one of our greatest strengths.

Kenneth Bomberry: When I thought about home, I drew a picture of a long house that represents what home was for Haudenosaunee people. I wanted to show their way of life, how they lived back then and what I want home to feel like now. The Friendship Belt, Two Row Wampum Belt and Hiawatha Wampum Belt are metaphors for what a safe home should look like. I added a piece from my old art journal which is a dream world or imaginary safe haven. I drew that at a point when I felt like home wasn't safe. It feels like things have come full circle.

Duty to Assist Youth on Youth Homelessness Prevention Matters

Why did you decide to participate with the Duty to Assist project?

Kenneth Bomberry: I chose to participate to get educated on what DtA is and to learn how I can



Artwork by Matthew

Artwork by Karrissa HL

be involved. Also I got involved because of my past lived experiences and knowing a lot of youth in my community where their situations weren't the best. A lot of the time we didn't know where to go or who to reach out to. I am involved with leading some youth initiatives and wanted to gain some experience.

Why should communities include prevention supports as a solution to homelessness?

Kenneth Bomberry: In knowing a lot of the homelessness that goes on, or the extent of this issue, there just should be! Prevention sets the stage to not avoid the issue and tackles the stigma. It will save lives and help to make situations better for people. Prevention services will help people to be safer and more stable and to prevent homelessness from being an epidemic.

Karrissa HL: Prevention is the only guaranteed way to greatly reduce the amount of youth experiencing. This allows more money to go towards prevention based programs. This also saves youth from experiencing homelessness which can be quite traumatic.

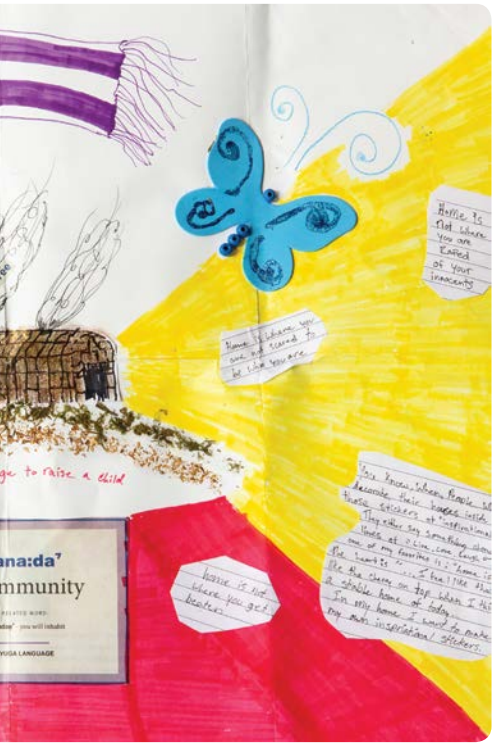
How do you think that youth can be prevented from experiencing homelessness?

Karrissa HL: By starting (intervening) as soon as possible whether it be with initiatives like Duty to Assist… there needs to be programs and supports to help youth in unstable living conditions become stable. There also needs to be affordable housing for youth to access if home is no longer an option. A top priority should be the goal to support youth as much as you can by ensuring they are stably housed.

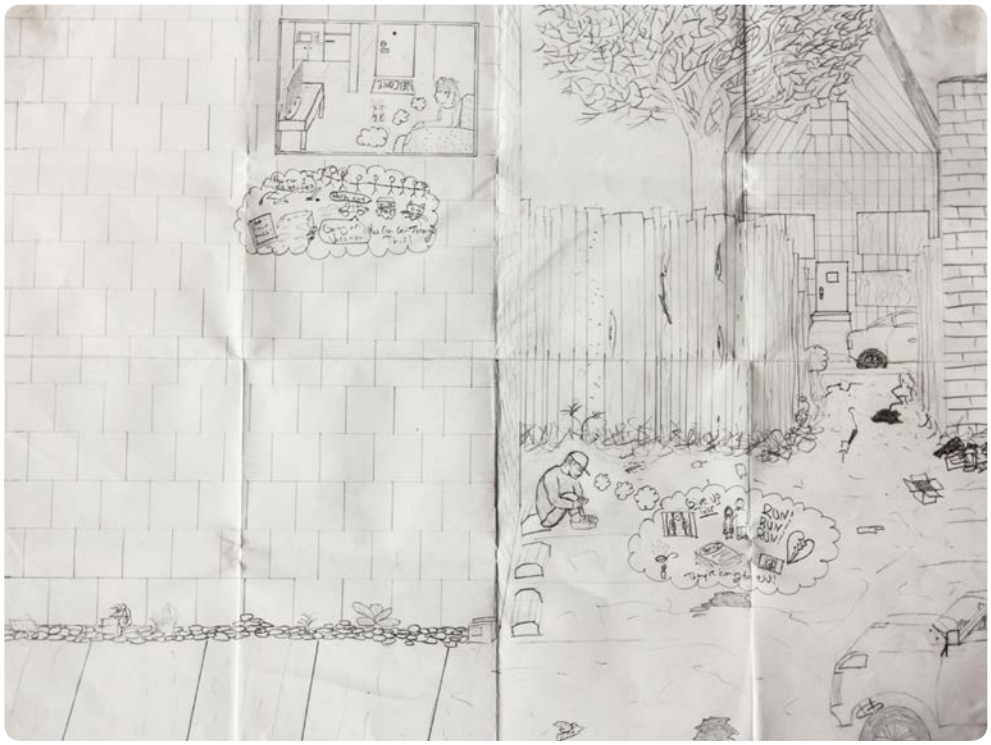
What suggestions would you share with communities or decision makers who are thinking about adopting youth homelessness prevention initiatives?

Matthew: Any potential communities or institutions considering a youth homelessness prevention model should take into consideration the importance of educational organizations. Regardless of what organization takes on a prevention model it can only work if staff is on board and is passionate or vigilant about helping youth in crisis situations.

Tyler H: First and foremost, acknowledge the privileges you bear within the social locations you occupy. Our fictions of today can only become realities of tomorrow after your power is equitably shared.



Artwork by Kenneth Bomberry



Artwork by Tyler H

Making Change Happen: Prototyping Duty to Assist through Human-Centered Design

Chad Story, Director of Practice Innovation, A Way Home Canada;
PhD Candidate, Communication and Culture, York University
and Peter Mackie, Reader, School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University, Wales

Every $10 invested in supports for chronically homeless individuals in Canada yields as much as $21 in savings in other areas of social service provision.[1] Not only does this type of investment make economic sense, but youth who have experienced homelessness overwhelmingly report that more needs to happen sooner to prevent young people from enduring a life of hardship.[2] As one young person put it, 'If you are sleeping outside, in the middle of — like, why does it have to get THAT BAD before you qualify for help that you could have used like a year ago?'[3]

There have been promising developments of late, including the release of *Reaching Home*, the Government of Canada's strategy to address homelessness. However, funding and policy directives on prevention and meeting the needs of youth in Canada are often missing, still largely focused on a reactive (or emergency) response to chronic homelessness, or when present, are unsubstantial and lack teeth.[4] Why? Change is hard.

Every day, service providers are forced to manage, triage, and make sense of myriad problems, each requiring immediate action. This is exhausting work that leaves little time to step back from the daily grind to consider alternatives to the status quo. Change requires a compelling narrative that disrupts commonly held belief systems and practices, while helping to reframe a familiar problem in a new light.

I recently had the chance to put this to the test while working on a 14-week project in partnership with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) and A Way Home Canada.

The project focused on prototyping key elements of Duty to Assist, a rights-based approach to homelessness prevention, originating in Wales and described in *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*.[5]

Duty to Assist is the term adopted in Canada for the core provisions within *The Housing (Wales) Act 2014*. This law places a duty on local governments to take steps to prevent homelessness for everyone who seeks help and is at risk of losing their home. The law marked a step-change in the Welsh context, moving away from a system that prioritized only the most vulnerable homeless people, to a universal model of assistance that intervenes before crisis.[6] In the Canadian context, Duty to Assist is imagined as a law that protects the housing rights of young people, while at the same time giving them legal recourse if these rights are violated.[7] This marks a paradigm shift in terms of how youth homelessness has historically been addressed from a situation in which accessing high-quality and secure housing is an invasive and intensive process in a time of crisis to a future when investment in proactive upstream services focused on mediation and strengths-based prevention is the status quo. The intention is to learn from the Welsh experience and to adapt and improve the Duty to Assist for Canadian youth.

To help prepare service providers for what this change might look like and to build an inspirational narrative that system actors can rally around, we used a design-based approach to co-create a school-based service founded upon the principles of Duty to Assist. We collaborated with service providers, policy experts, and young people with lived experience. The service, called PluggedIn, a name co-developed with young people, supports the successful implementation of Duty to Assist in schools through

Bridgeable team member preseting youth artwork.psd

a combination of advice, support, and scenario-based training. It is made up of four components:

- **Youth-centered school awareness:** A school-wide awareness campaign co-created by students, school staff, and community organizations to promote awareness about Duty to Assist and PluggedIn.

- **AI-driven support:** An app designed for schools to identify students who may be at risk of becoming homeless, along with actionable next steps to connect students with housing-related supports.

- **In-school drop-in center:** A physical space in schools staffed by a dedicated team of support workers from participating community organizations representing a diversity of lived experiences and identities.

- **Duty to Assist real-world training:** In-person and online training for school staff to learn how to identify students who may need housing-related supports and the steps they should take to fulfill their obligations under Duty to Assist.

The concept was brought to life with rich visuals, such as storyboards, audio recordings, and professionally shot photography, each depicting how students and teachers could use the service.

Despite being simulations of what PluggedIn might look like once implemented, these storytelling artifacts appeared real and gave service providers and policymakers space and time to imagine a future in which Duty to Assist is a reality. These simulations also proved useful in identifying unintended, undesirable consequences related to implementation, such as the possibility that Indigenous youth could be singled out and over-reported once the policy is implemented in schools.

There are outstanding practical and policy-related questions about the implementation of Duty of Assist and PluggedIn that still need to be addressed. However, the collaborative process undertaken to prototype key elements of the service has

Bridgeable team at Design Jam at HRIC

proven useful in shaping a common narrative around which the benefits of a prevention-based approach to addressing youth homelessness are now more explicit. This work will continue under the leadership of Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab, co-directed by the COH and A Way Home Canada. The longer-term aim is to scale up these efforts to other systems and jurisdictions to support the transition to a future in which Duty to Assist will become the new norm.

Endnotes

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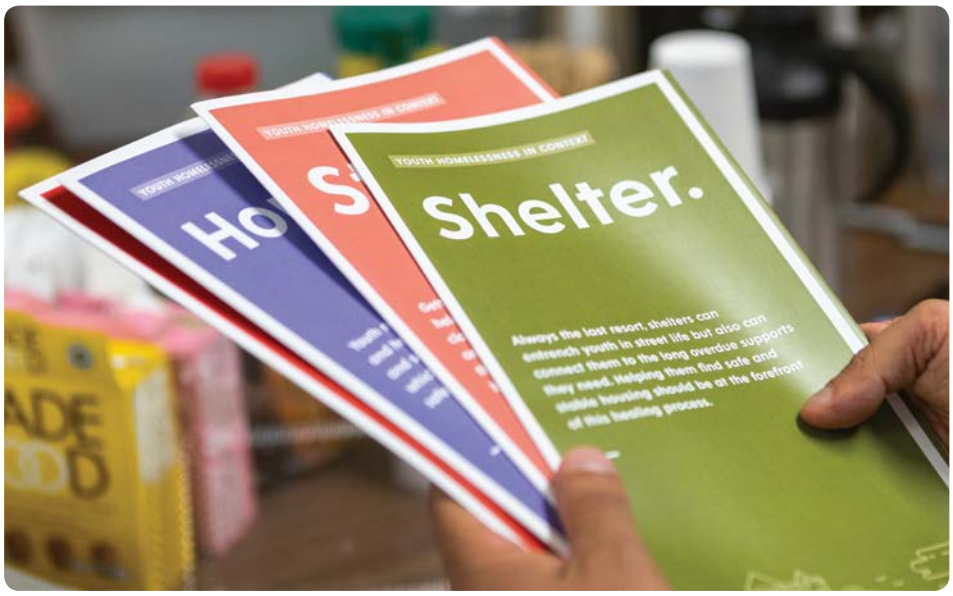


Five-part brochure series called *Youth Homelessness in Context*

Assessments NEED to Match Those We Are Assessing!

Wally Czech, President, WalRhon Psychological and Assessment Services and
David French, Director of Policy and Planning, A Way Home Canada

Youth serving organizations across Canada have long been working in a strength-based, assets-driven approach. Focusing on the range of strengths and assets youth possess comes naturally to youth serving organizations, and research has proven its value therein.

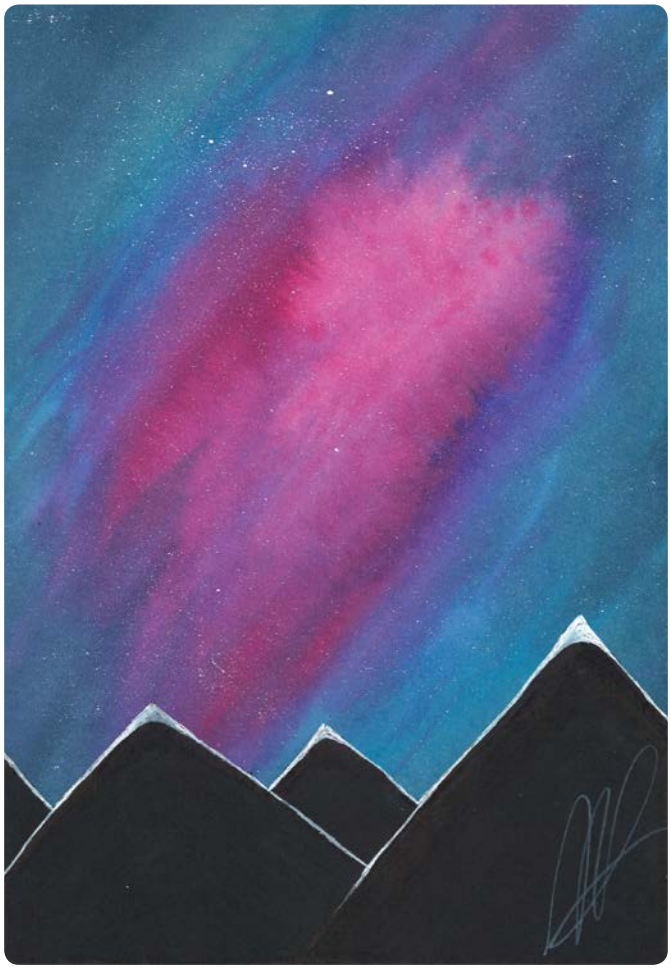
In a nutshell, these organizations have been engaged in Secondary Prevention for some time. Secondary Prevention refers to a range of targeted strategies to quickly support youth who are either at imminent risk of homelessness, or who have recently experienced homelessness.

Secondary strategies should work quickly to help young people to either retain their housing (with their families, natural supports, or independently), or quickly rehouse them into permanent and stable accommodation that is affordable, safe, and appropriate.

Juxtaposing the assets-driven approach with a Coordinated Entry traditional assessment process has proven challenging. Communities across Canada are faced with the challenge of trying to decide who to prioritize for the precious few spots available in housing programs. More often than not, the Coordinated Entry tables are dedicated to chronically homeless adults. When chronicity is the primary criteria used to determine eligibility for a program or service, young people in need can be easily overlooked. This is because the risk factors specific to youths' experiences of homelessness are not the same as adults, and timely early intervention is necessary to prevent the trauma and victimization that can occur if youth become entrenched in homelessness.

Coordinated Entry is key to both systems integration and implementing early intervention program areas for young people at risk of homelessness. The intent is to create a standardized process for intake, assessment, and referral. Accessibility should be an important consideration for coordinated entry. There should be as few barriers as possible for accessing support, with a 'no wrong door' approach, so young people are able to connect with and access the supports they need in a way that is timely, seamless, streamlined, and effective from the perspective of the young person, their family, or the referring adult.

So how can we overcome the disconnect between the strength-based ways in which youth serving organizations are operating on a day-to-day basis, and the deficits approach taken with most housing and homelessness assessment processes? This is where the Youth Assessment and Prioritization (YAP) Tool has found its niche.



Anne A-R. First experience of homelessness at 15 years old, St-Jerôme, Québec — *Sans titre,* 2019

The YAP Tool is a strength-based assessment of youth who are experiencing, or are at-risk of experiencing, homelessness that strives to be as non-clinical and non-prescriptive as possible — which is part of what makes it so different from other assessment tools. The assessment has been designed specifically to determine what the youth's risk factors and strengths are, through a short 'pre-screen' questionnaire followed by a more fulsome interview, if deemed necessary.

The pre-screen is primarily focused on identifying the youth's level of risk of long-term homelessness. The subsequent interview delves deeper into strengths and other factors related to their past and current situation, as well as future possibilities for stability. The information gained

through the assessment helps the interviewer — who is generally a caseworker — to make decisions on the best service pathway for the young person. The tool uses the knowledge of both the youth and the worker completing the assessment, as there is ample space for discussions, clarifications, and recommendations, which are then approved by the youth.

Unlike many other assessment tools currently in use, the YAP Tool's design is strength-based — so it captures the youth's positive attributes, skills, and goals in addition to any vulnerabilities. A strength focus requires developmental supports and opportunities that promote success, rather than those that just get rid of or ignore failures. While this can be a daunting concept, the YAP Tool is a clear example of how to implement a strength-based philosophy in a practical manner.

Development of the tool began in 2013 and was foregrounded by the work of Dr. Eric Rice and his partners who developed the TAY (Transition Age Youth) research tool. The TAY tool was developed as a Triage Tool and through research conducted across interviews with over 700 youth experiencing homelessness in the Los Angeles area, they discovered six 'Core Predictors' for long-term (five+ years) homelessness among the youth:

1. running away from home
2. violence at home between family members
3. religious differences with parents or caregivers
4. first using marijuana before age 12
5. being incarcerated before age 18
6. whether they have ever been, or gotten someone else pregnant.

The TAY authors and the YAP Tool developer, Wally Czech of WalRhon Psychological and Assessment Services, agreed that the research and triage tool should be incorporated into a more extensive, youth-specific assessment tool. Enhancements made to the YAP Tool were made in partnership with not only the Alberta Government, in alignment with their provincial efforts to address youth homelessness, but also community partners from across Canada.

The YAP tool has made it into broad circulation and application across Canada and new communities are being added monthly. An important anchor to the YAP tool's progress, early success and application has been the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Demonstration Lab (MtS DEMS).

MtS DEMS is a multi-year, collaborative project that is working to develop and test approaches to support the prevention of and facilitate sustainable exits from homelessness. Interventions, across 12 sites in two provinces in Canada are working towards the goal of reaching 1,300 young people and providing the best possible outcomes for youth and their families. MtS DEMS is a joint endeavor co-led by A Way Home Canada (AWHC) and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) with support from MaRS Center for Impact Investing.

The YAP tool is not only being utilized within the demonstration projects, but alongside the program interventions. Through efforts made by AWHC and the COH, the tool is being validated by Dr. Tim Aubry and his team at the University of Ottawa.

Users of the tool are able to conveniently access an online site/database dedicated to the tool which provides a venue for using and storing data associated with the assessments. Along with the versatility of this site, users have commented on the benefits they have seen as they integrate the tool more deeply into their practice. Common comments on the YAP Tool include:

> *'We are finding it much easier to determine the support needs or our youth due to the way the tool enables us to come across less intrusive.'*

Another user noted:

> *'The tool seems to be designed to allow for deeper relationship building with our participants and not just gather information.'*

Another program found that youth that were originally unwilling to even talk about mental health, felt comfortable and connected enough to their case manager through the assessment process that they were then interested in meeting with a psychiatrist. The youth themselves have stated, *'I don't feel like I am being assessed. I feel more like I am creating a relationship and having a conversation with my worker.'* They also have mentioned that it is nice to not only talk about what is wrong in their life but to also talk about what is working and what they have going for them.

Using the YAP tool and conducting the assessment effectively does not come without practice and training. Communities and programs interested in incorporating the YAP into their own practice or coordinated systems engage in a two-day training designed and conducted by staff from WalRhon.

Designed as a Train-the-Trainer model, training allows those completing it to then train others in their organization or community on an ongoing and as needed basis. From that point on, the use of the tool is free to trainees and their organizations and includes access to the online portal associated with it as well as unlimited support and consultation from WalRhon. The training balances both the theory, key components and scoring system and includes the practical elements. Trainer certification involves post-training work with co-assessors and additional certification from WalRhon.

Incorporating the YAP tool into practice for organizations reflects that as a system and a sector, we need to continually change and adapt. We feel the YAP tool is the next step; the next step in listening to the needs of youth and communities and understanding a young person's trajectory towards stabilization. With continued refinement, application across programs and investments in shared learnings, assessment will continue to reflect not only the vast opportunities in front of youth but the strength of organizations serving those young people.

Culture as Prevention: How Incorporating Indigenous Teachings Helps Youth to Succeed

Kate Armstrong, Communications and Public Relations Coordinator, Resource Assistance for Youth

Smoke from the smudge bowl wafts gently through a large room: past couches where youth relax, laughing and joking; past computers where youth listen to music and check Facebook; past the kitchen where youth sit sharing a meal with staff; and up to the rafters where pieces of colored cloth hang. As new people enter the space, or catch the scent of medicines, they immediately walk over to the counter where the smudge bowl sits. They form a quiet line, unbidden, waiting for their chance to brush the smoke over their bodies, healing their hurts and washing their cares away, if only for a moment.

This is a regular scene at Resource Assistance for Youth, Inc. (RaY), a youth-serving agency in Winnipeg, Manitoba. For 25 years its integrated service model has provided wrap-around services for young people aged nought to 29 years old. From immediate needs like hot meals, drop-in services, laundry, basic needs, and street outreach, through interventions like housing supports, mental health, addictions, and primary health, to long-term and preventative supports like education, training, and employment programs, RaY provides youth with what they need, on their terms, to better their lives. Most importantly, RaY is youth-centered, providing participants with the opportunity to identify their own needs and responding with innovative, evidence-informed programming.

One area of need identified through this responsive approach was that of cultural supports.

Winnipeg is a city of 750,000 people, where winters often hit temperatures of minus 50°C, is located on Treaty 1 territory, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and homeland of the Métis Nation. It is also home to over 1,500 people experiencing homelessness.[1]

Indigenous youth are overrepresented in the homeless population in Winnipeg. The 2018 Winnipeg Street Census, a point-in-time count conducted on the nights of April 17 and 18, 2018, found that there were 455 children and youth under the age of 29 experiencing homelessness, 73.8 per cent of whom were Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, or Inuit).[2]

The over-representation of Indigenous youth is also present in the Child and Family Services (CFS) system in Manitoba. Indigenous children and youth represent a staggering 89 per cent of all children and youth in care, despite comprising only 26 per cent of the child population of Manitoba.[3]

As stated in the 2018 Winnipeg Street Census, *'One of the most common pathways into homelessness is through having experience in the care of Child and Family Services (CFS).'* For youth this rang especially true, with 57.6 per cent of those experiencing homelessness having spent time in the care of CFS.[4]

These statistics paint a bleak picture for Indigenous youth and their pathways into homelessness, and numbers often fail to capture the nuance of their stories. There are gaps between societal systems that Indigenous youth are falling through, right onto the streets. Indigenous youth experience homelessness differently from non-Indigenous youth and for different reasons. Jesse Thistle's *Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada* (2017) is worth quoting at length:

> *'Unlike the common colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews. These include: individuals, families and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities. Importantly, Indigenous people experiencing these kinds of homelessness cannot culturally, spiritually, emotionally or physically reconnect with their Indigeneity or lost relationships (Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness, 2012).'*[5]

The sense of spiritual homelessness described by Thistle is evident in the experiences of Indigenous youth at RaY. Through residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the modern-day foster care system, generations of Indigenous youth have been forcibly disconnected from their traditional languages, homes, and cultural practices. Growing up in non-Indigenous foster homes is often cited by Indigenous youth at RaY as a contributing factor to their lack of knowledge and comfort with regard to their culture. When these young people come to RaY, they often express shame over their loss of knowledge and identity.

RaY is not an Indigenous-led organization, nor is its mandate strictly to serve Indigenous youth; however, the majority of young people coming through its doors are Indigenous.[6] The long-term, trusting relationships between youth and the organization make RaY the first choice for many young people accessing services. A natural extension of this is for them

to also seek cultural supports at RaY, which they see as a place of safety and trust. RaY provides referrals and warm hand-offs for youth seeking to access cultural supports from Indigenous agencies in Winnipeg, but for many young people, RaY is a safe and familiar place in which to explore their cultural identities.

In recognition of the need for such services, RaY has spent years developing dedicated cultural programming while also integrating cultural practices into all of its programs. The organization has sought advice from — and employed — Indigenous advisors to provide cultural counseling and teachings to all youth who require it. Through informal group discussions about the legacy of residential schools, Canada's formal apology and reconciliation, traditional crafting, land-based teachings, and the opportunity to attend ceremonies, RaY has striven to provide access for young people to learn about and explore their own histories. Since the development of RaY's first formalized cultural program, known as Exploring Cultural Identity, over 300 youth have accessed the growing array of cultural services that RaY now offers.

Support in getting their status cards, reconnecting with their extended families, and researching their genealogies can help youth to understand their identities as Indigenous people and solidify their sense of self-worth. Increasing youths' feelings of cultural confidence and security in their identities can help them be more successful in their more concrete goals, like maintaining housing or completing addictions treatment. As such, RaY's housing programs, addictions supports and employment and training programs all have cultural components actively integrated into them.

One example of the integration of culture into RaY's other services is within the RaY Optional Occupancy Mentorship (ROOM) Program. A pilot program between RaY, CFS, and Manitoba Housing, ROOM is a transitional housing program designed to prevent youth from exiting the child welfare system into homelessness, as is common in Manitoba. Through the ROOM program, youth between the ages of 17 and 21 who have been granted an Agreement with Young Adults are provided housing in fully furnished, public housing suites. The ROOM program gives these young people an opportunity to live independently while continuing to be financially supported through CFS past the typical age of 18.

Youth in ROOM are supported by RaY case managers in goal planning, life skills workshops, and one-on-one supports, while also benefiting from the myriad of services offered at RaY. For Indigenous youth entering this program, one of the supports offered is cultural counseling. As they move into their new space in the transitional housing units, the youth can meet with RaY's cultural manager to smudge their new apartment in order to cleanse and prepare the space. Throughout their stay in the program, youth can connect with cultural staff and elders, receive traditional teachings, and begin to reconnect with Indigenous communities. These supports are integrated with their ongoing housing supports and provide an alternative framework for youth to develop life skills and healthy coping mechanisms to help them maintain permanent housing after their tenure in the ROOM program.

One of the youth who has benefited from integrated cultural supports is an 18 year-old Métis woman named Cassie.[7] Her first involvement with CFS was at the age of one, and her family continued to have CFS involvement until Cassie was removed from the home permanently at the age of 13. Cut off from her Indigenous roots, Cassie bounced from group home to group home, never finding a stable placement. She began using opioids and, eventually, methamphetamine.

Through RaY's ROOM program, Cassie was not only housed, but was connected with cultural counseling and given the opportunity to participate in ceremonies and receive her spirit name. When she attended treatment for her substance use, Cassie's medicine bag — containing the traditional medicines of sage, cedar, tobacco, and sweet grass — became a source of strength for her in her journey of recovery.

Incorporation of Indigenous teachings into regular services like housing and mental health can provide young people like Cassie with additional stability and confidence. When young people are given traditional teachings, it helps provide them with context for the challenges and barriers they face, and gives them strength to overcome them now and into the future.

Endnotes

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Early Intervention Amidst Open Skies Changes Outcomes for Youth

Kathy Morin, Director, Communications, Homeward Trust, Edmonton, Alberta

Summer memories usually include sunny carefree days, ice cream and visits to the local pool. For 60 Indigenous young women and girls, this summer will be remembered for building campfires, culture and self-reliance, thanks to a new pilot program, Preparing Young Women for Safe, Secure Housing.

Located at the picturesque Moonlight Bay at Wabamun Lake, 70 km west of downtown Edmonton, Alberta, the retreat hosted participants ages seven to 17 in three separate sessions. Four camp leaders, two Elders and a number of guest speakers provided information and led discussions related to housing stability, personal safety, independent living, cultural education and ceremony.

The camps were developed in a partnership between the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW) and Edmonton's Bissell Center, with funding from Homeward Trust Edmonton. In response to the high number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls,[1] IAAW and Bissell Center created this off-site program with several partners, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the City of Edmonton. The camps support young women who face a multitude of barriers, including loss of identity, lack of confidence or hope, a limited Circle of Support or mental health issues.

The IAAW had already been running summer retreats for young Indigenous women when the Bissell Center came looking for additional summer programming at their existing camp facility. Survivors of violence said that having safe and secure housing was important to their personal success, and planning began for a prevention-focused intervention for young Indigenous women. The result was far beyond anyone's expectations.

'Providing a program in a safe, remote area allowed these young women to get away from the day-to-day to build their confidence,' said Rachelle Venne, CEO, IAAW. *'We want them to build skills that lead to greater independence, create awareness of the detractors and predators they face in their lives and connect them to vital community services.'*

Partnering with the Bissell Center and accessing funding through Homeward Trust allowed organizers to add a focused housing component into camp workshops. For Jesika Lefebvre, Director of Community Programs and Services at the Bissell Center, the result was *'the most interactive and insightful group we've seen so far.'* Having conversations about housing and independence at a young age is not as far-fetched as it sounds, she adds. *'Housing is not a new topic for youth — they are already thinking about it.'*

As of August 2019, Indigenous people made up roughly six per cent of the general population of the City of Edmonton, but more than 60 per cent of those experiencing homelessness, highlighting a drastic over-representation that has been identified as a clear priority in *A Place to Call Home: Edmonton's Updated Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*. In response to this, Homeward Trust developed a request for proposals that would support 'Innovative Practices for Indigenous Youth', that helped make this partnership possible.

The workshops, created by youth-focused housing workers, were practical and age appropriate. But workers did not necessarily expect the level of participation by the youngest members of the group who were filling out budget spreadsheets and practicing making financial decisions with monopoly money alongside their older counterparts.

Elsia Teaches

Over four days of exploration into personal worth, financial literacy and a range of career options, leaders witnessed a shift of attitude in campers. What they saw was a group of engaged young women focused on setting life goals and taking an active role in shaping their future.

> *'I got to learn more about my culture and being myself.'*
> — Youth Participant

Once the campers return to Edmonton, Bissell Center continues to offer housing supports to them and their families at-risk of experiencing homelessness. This focus prevents young Indigenous women from experiencing homelessness in the first place, supporting them in their rights as tenants, and shows them the types of programs available, how to appropriately budget and other important skills they may not otherwise have accessed.

When asked what they learned that was most helpful to them, one camper responded, '[I know what] my priorities are and how to save mo*ney and not get ripped off by landlords,'* while another said they now know *'how to plan a budget and how to know If your landlord is trustworthy.'* Yet another camper stated, '[I] *know what I am entitled to as a renter.'*

The camp program instilled a sense of cultural pride in these young Indigenous women and, through the partnership between IAAW and Bissell Center, empowered youth to imagine the kind of home and community they want to create. At the end of the program, an Elder at the camp presented each camper with a feather, representing their role as 'Elders-in-the-Making' who will leave camp and go on to build homes, relationships and communities.

During one workshop, campers were asked *'What does it mean to be a good neighbor?'* A young camper told the group that when she lived in an apartment, she had a neighbor who would bring them cookies, so she described a good neighbor as one who *'makes their neighbors feel special.'*

Endnote

1. For more information about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada, visit: <*https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/*>

LGBTQ2S Youth Homelessness: A Call for Structural Intervention

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Recent literature details the overrepresentation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and 2-spirit (LGBTQ2S) young people among the population of youth experiencing homelessness, and the need for inclusive and affirming service provision for this population.[1,2,3] As a result, policy recommendations, reports , trainings, toolkits, and best practice guidelines have been developed to address the unique needs of LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness and to help ensure service providers are appropriately equipped to best serve this population of young people.[4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12] This is critically important work, given that LGBTQ2S youth frequently report negative and discriminatory experiences when accessing housing and drop-in services, not only from their peers and staff, but also due to institutional and structural barriers.[13,14]

LGBTQ2S youth experience an increased risk and longer durations of homelessness compared to their cisgender[15] and heterosexual counterparts.[16,17] Some LGBTQ2S youth are more likely to experience homelessness, poverty, and discrimination than others, including Indigenous youth and youth of color. In a recent U.S.-based study, nearly half of LGBTQ young people surveyed (N=442) reported stress over meeting their basic needs, including finding somewhere to sleep (48 per cent), obtaining food to eat (45 per cent), finding a place to wash their clothes (44 per cent), and a place to shower or wash themselves (42 per cent).[18] Homelessness, discrimination and social stigma have serious consequences on the health and wellbeing of LGBTQ2S youth, leading to significant mental health issues, substance use, anxiety, depression, and suicide, especially for young transgender[19] people.[20,21,22,23]

Although absolutely fundamental, it is not enough to provide LGBTQ2S inclusion training workshops to individual service providers, organizsations, or even municipalities. Preventing, reducing and ending LGBTQ2S youth homelessness requires specialized responses and targeted strategies that carefully consider the unique and diverse needs of LGBTQ2S youth. The structural conditions that produce, maintain, and normalize homelessness among LGBTQ2S youth, particularly LGBTQ2S youth of color, must be continuously addressed. Among these structural conditions are cis/heterosexism, colonialism, racism, and adultism.

Structural intervention is particularly required on both ends of the homelessness services spectrum — preventing homelessness and ensuring sustainable exits from homelessness.

Prevention

Preventing homelessness among LGBTQ2S youth requires a multi-system approach to promote awareness and education, and ensuring that the appropriate supports are in place for young people and their families. These supports may include sexual and/or gender identity related information, however, supports must not stop there. To prevent an experience of homelessness, young people and, at times, their families, may benefit from financial assistance, career opportunities, information about tenant rights, and/or advocacy within the legal system.

For some LGBTQ2S youth, preventing homelessness may be very much connected to their sexual and/or gender identity. For other LGBTQ2S youth, the factors placing them in precarious housing situations may be similar to their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts. However, targeted approaches are warranted in all cases, considering the discrimination LGBTQ2S people, particularly transgender people, report when attempting to access support and services.

At times this discrimination is outright, in the form of service denial or victimization by their service-using peers. At other times, discrimination is more subtle, manifesting as institutional erasure and exclusion. For instance, housing and healthcare services and key institutional forms are often designed to only include women/girls and men/boys, rarely considering or including people's gender identity and related needs. In these instances, any individual who does not fit into binary gender categories is not included and thus experiences major barriers accessing services.

Sustainable Exits

The topic of sustained exits from homelessness is critical to examine for any population, but perhaps crucially so for young people, who frequently have little work experience, may have limited educational attainment, and for whom living independently is a new frontier. Young people who are members of marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ2S young people and young people of color, may face greater challenges than their cisgender, heterosexual, and white peers in sustaining exits from homelessness. These challenges may be particularly difficult for transgender and gender expansive (TGE)[24] young people.

The challenges TGE youth face are rooted in heterosexism, cisnormativity, colonialism, and misogyny. These structural conditions likely contribute

to experiences of homelessness for TGE youth, limit their access to services that are meant to assist youth experiencing homelessness, and create barriers to obtaining and maintaining independent housing. For example, not having legal identity documents that correspond with one's chosen name and/or gender identity makes it extremely difficult to secure formal employment, obtain housing and access education.

With the goal of sustainable exits for LGBTQ2S youth in mind, the intersecting areas of employment, education, and social integration must be addressed. As long as LGBTQ2S people, and particularly TGE people, are pushed to the margins of society and rendered invisible in public policy, sustaining exits from homelessness will prove difficult. LGBTQ2S people have inequitable access to education, employment, housing, and other supports that are granted to heterosexual and cisgender people. A cultural shift must occur such that LGBTQ2S identities are not pathologized.

Any public policy meant to ensure equitable access must explicitly include LGBTQ2S people. For example, non-discrimination policies designed to protect individuals in employment, education, and housing sectors must include sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. Policies that are implemented to address youth homelessness should explicitly acknowledge the overrepresentation of LGBTQ2S young people and young people of color in the youth population experiencing homelessness, including the barriers they face and the associated negative outcomes they experience. LGBTQ2S young people must have equitable access to income, employment, education, and other social supports in order to better ensure sustained exits from homelessness.

Conclusion

Although structural intervention may seem a daunting task, progress is occurring in both the United States and Canada. A movement is building in both countries that centers the experiences of those young people most marginalized within society, emphasizing the systemic challenges that exist and seeking to address them at the local level. In Canada, *A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention* utilizes an intersectional lens and a human rights framework to operationalize the policies and practices needed to prevent homelessness. In the United States, A Way Home America has launched a 'grand challenge' to end homelessness among LGBTQ youth and youth of color in ten cities. These are examples of large-scale efforts to shift the systemic response to homelessness.

Changes at a smaller scale are also crucial to ensure homelessness is prevented among LGBTQ2S youth and, when not prevented, that LGBTQ2S youth are stably housed. Using concepts from universal design, local systems and organizations are acknowledging that when services and supports meet the needs of LGBTQ2S youth, they better meet the needs of all youth.

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Take a Look through My Eyes…

Sultan Nawaz, Durham Region, Ontario

I left my home in October, a month after my 17th birthday, when I overdosed on my Mom's old prescription of Percocet.

At 17 I was ignorant to a lot, like how to rent, maintain employment or how to file taxes so being on my own was daunting, beyond the fact that I didn't have a house or family.

It was a typical day, I woke up exhausted, but got out of bed, took a shower and headed to the kitchen to prepare my siblings' lunches. After sending my siblings off to school I spent an hour contemplating skipping, just like I did every day, but in the end saner heads prevailed and I headed towards school 45 minutes late.

I hated my new school, I knew no one and was failing two classes, in fact I had just received a failed test back the same day. I tried to distract myself from the screaming and threats that I was going to hear when my Mom and Uncle found out I failed, but all that was echoing through my head was their disproving voices 'you are nothing, you do nothing, and you will achieve nothing', so I left school and went home.

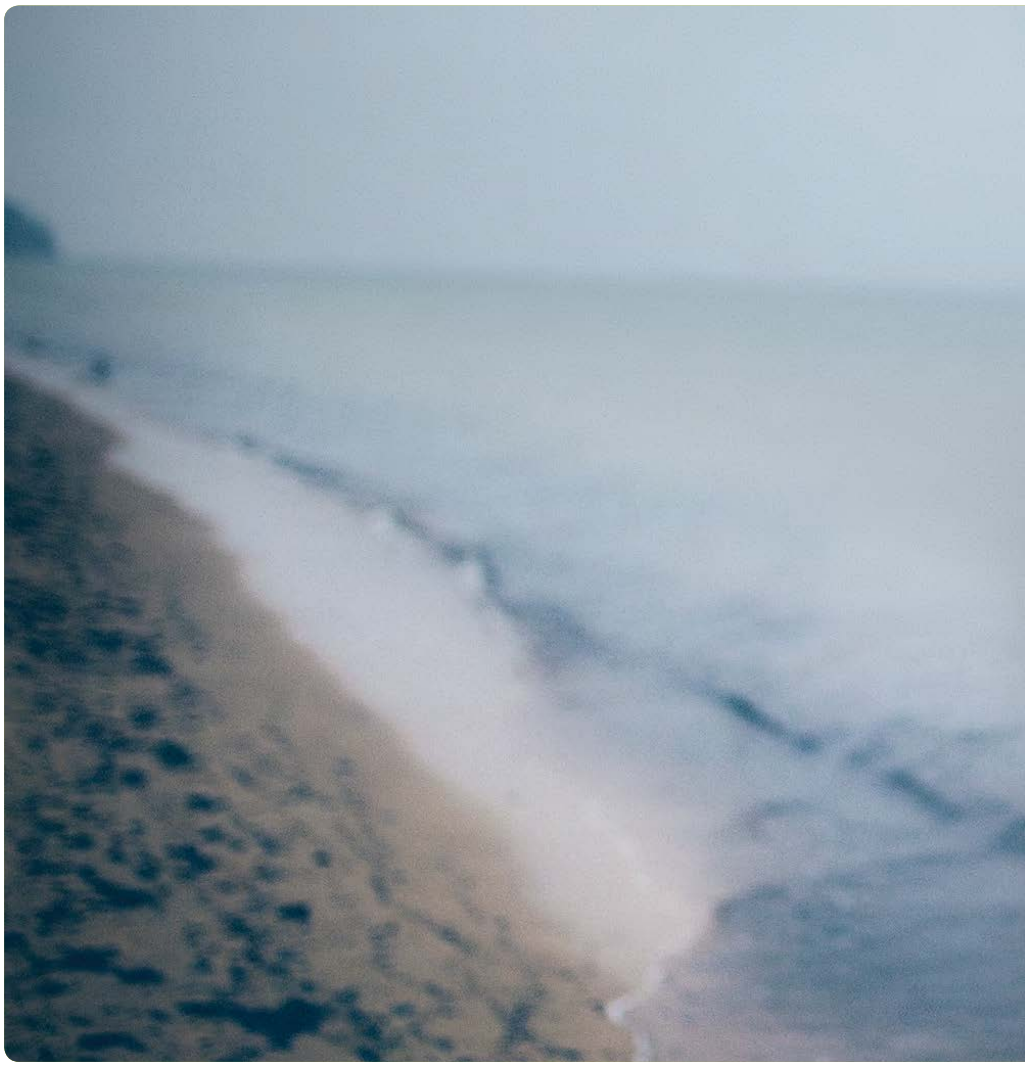
An hour later my siblings got back, and I spent the day with them doing everything they liked. Finally, after tucking them in, telling them I love them and making sure they were asleep, I began writing my suicide note. I wrote how I wished my mother had showed more love instead of constantly diminishing my accomplishments and focusing on my faults. I wished she encouraged me through example, rather than expecting me to change through guilt and shame. I wish they had taken a moment to try to understand how I was feeling, what I was facing and what it was like to go through a day being me.

I had a lot of responsibility as the oldest sibling in a single parent family household, but they couldn't acknowledge that I had anything to stress over. Even when I overdosed and spent a week in the hospital, she claimed I did it for attention.

I decided I needed to leave home if I was going to prevent myself from ending up in this situation again, so I headed towards Joanne's house.

When I got to Joanne's house, the only youth homeless shelter in the whole Durham Region, everything changed. I had a team of supportive staff that acknowledged being a teenager can be rough. They showed empathy and celebrated my accomplishments with me, like when I finished school, found a job or applied for college.

Not everything was sunshine and butterflies though, being homeless was still rough, the stigma alone was a huge barrier. For example,



Cover image from *Without a home: The national youth homelessness survey*

landlords not wanting to rent to teens and library security hovering around us youth from Joanne's house, harassing us as we tried to find a way to spend our time.

This is a tiny glimpse of what me and other youth dealt with daily, while trying to access supports and services. The first month when I stayed at the shelter, I was given a mandatory weekly meeting, case management, where I went through my goals with staff and they would help connect me with the correct services or offer support if they could. Beyond that, they encouraged me to achieve my goals and treated me like a human in general.

Compassion goes a long way when you're at a low point in life, simple things make all the difference. After a year and a half working with me, providing support, and teaching me skills such as prioritizing, time management and budgeting, I'm extremely honored to be able to call this establishment my workplace.

Now I'm 18, about to start college, and no longer homeless.

Looking back, what could have prevented me from leaving home would have been a more open minded, caring and educated family. Had they spoken to me rather than threaten and shame me, accepted that their way wasn't always the right way and actually realised mental health exists/was having a detrimental effect on me, things might not have escalated as far as they did. Skills like making lists or taking scheduled breaks could have saved me a lot of trouble too. It sounds silly but they're life skills I took for granted and I think a lot of us do, especially when you don't have a role model to show you how effective they can be.

Having someone to check up on us at school would have been nice, because I didn't really have anyone that I trusted at home. It's nice to know you have back-up; someone who will care about what you have to say. We should be aiming to eradicate

Sultan Nawaz — *Take-a-look-through-my-eyes*

homelessness, and to educate and reduce the stigma around these vulnerable young people who more often than not are already coming from situations of abuse or discrimination. The place for this type of support and education would best be in schools and education centers, places where prevention could happen. If we're supporting youth early on, when we notice they need extra support they might not become homeless at all.

Not every homeless youth is drug addicted, gang affiliated, lazy, or any less human then you or your child are. I'm a human, you're a human, we are all humans.

Homelessness isn't a slow process; it took a single day to turn my life upside down. You typically don't have a choice. It's like being tossed into the sea with an island a few miles away and everyone is yelling at you *'The island is right there, just stop drowning!'* It's a helpless feeling that grows through discrimination and lack of care.

So many young people who get kicked out or leave home are so bright, from Joanne's House alone I know two aspiring musicians, a barber, an aspiring police officer and I, myself, want to be an artist. All the potential is there, waiting to be acknowledged, and nurtured into its best form. All of us together need to start caring for each other in an honest way, whether that means our neighborhood, city, province, state, country or continent. It takes a little bit of kindness to encourage a lot of greatness.

Not Homeless Enough? Supporting Youth Before Crisis with Youth Reconnect

Jessica Ward, Program Manager Community Based Programs,
Good Shepherd Youth Services, Hamilton

For over 25 years Good Shepherd Youth Services has been in the business of serving homeless youth. The approaches that we take and the interventions that we use, have grown and changed over the years as we continue to learn more about best practices and the strengths and needs of our community. However, until recently we were hearing some consistent messages from the young people and families we serve, the staff who do the work, and the partners we work with: interventions just are not quick enough. Young people who were still living in the family home and had some loose connections to school were not considered to be in a bad enough situation to access or be prioritized for community-based support. However, for many young people, having to wait until they became 'homeless enough' and lost their connections to family, school and natural supports to get help was simply too late.

In 2018 Good Shepherd Youth Services opened its Youth Reconnect Program as a demonstration project with Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Demonstration Lab. When developing the program, we looked at several factors: What is the community missing? Who are the folks we need to work with to make this work impactful? What services are already in place that we can leverage to work in the most efficient way? Most importantly we asked young people and their families 'what could have helped?' As a result of the feedback to these questions we knew we had to develop a program that would work with young people younger than age 16, before crisis hit, while involving their families and chosen supports in the work whenever possible.

Since the program began working with youth in 2018, we have been delivering intentional case management services to young people and their families that are mobile, flexible and outcome focused. Every young person who participates in the program outlines what they would need to feel successful and the case manager works to connect them to the ways they can meet that need. This usually takes the form of the case manager assisting the youth in reconnecting to their family, to their school and to the community of Hamilton. The importance of community integration cannot be lost in this work. Young people and their families can be given all of the skills necessary, and provided with the most comprehensive supports but if they lack connection and a safety net they will remain at risk.

There have been several lessons learned along the way as we do this work. These learnings are what we would tell any community who is looking to increase their ability to fight homelessness in its early stages. One of the first major lessons we learned is that family work is a slow and intricate process. Simply providing families with one or two

Panhandler near Harbour Center (Vancouver)

structured mediations is not enough. Structured mediation needs to be paired with skills coaching, ongoing and open dialogue, and the acknowledgement that improvement takes time. The Youth Reconnect team has learned to be less afraid of the 'failures' families experience while supporting them and instead, focus on how to use these as opportunities to learn and grow. Allowing youth and families the opportunity to experiment and play with their new coping strategies, communication methods, and skills leads to empowerment for all members involved.

Another important lesson is the importance of knowing and using your community. Since the initial stages of Youth Reconnect we have consulted and worked closely with the key players in the already ongoing fight to end youth homelessness. We knew that our community has strong housing supports, that we needed to work with schools, and that child welfare always had to be a part of the conversation.

Photo by William Chen

Sabina A., age 13, Calgary, Alberta — *Untitled*

The questions we asked (and continue to ask), are: What gaps exist within all of these services that Youth Reconnect could fill? What services are already being provided that we don't have to duplicate? What services do these programs attempt to offer that may fall slightly outside of their scope or are under resourced? To answer these questions, we continually map our community, consult with our partners and have ongoing conversations to make sure that our programs are working together. Since the beginning of the program we have worked with Programs such as the Youth Housing Support Project, Hamilton Catholic Children's Aid Society and the public and Catholic school boards to develop clear understandings of when and how our programs will work together to best support young people.

One last piece of advice that we would offer is to invest in educating the community. The first part of this education is being very clear with the community on what your program is, what it can and equally important, what it cannot offer. While doing this education it is important to ensure that we are letting our partners, stakeholders and community members know that youth homelessness is not an issue that can be or should be solved by one program or one sector. It is not an issue that should be contained to family homes and dealt with behind closed doors. The Youth Reconnect program has given us the opportunity to demonstrate that youth homelessness is an issue that needs the support of our entire community to address. Being creative about who is brought into a youth's circle of support has also yielded many great outcomes for the youth we are fortunate to serve.

The impact of the program has been felt across the sector. We have received feedback from multiple agencies that Youth Reconnect has been providing youth a service that has been missing for some time. One partner described the Hamilton service landscape as a group of islands and Youth Reconnect as the water that connects them. One way of highlighting the success of this program has been the impact on the shelter occupancy, which has dropped significantly. So far, the Youth Reconnect Program has served 191 young people, and of this number, only three have had to come to shelter for short stays.

In closing, we offer these last pieces of advice for anyone looking to implement a Youth Reconnect Program in their community: Do the work to set yourself up properly. Hire and train the right staff, talk to your community, young people and their families and develop the program to meet the needs of your population. Once you are set-up, be open to feedback, be flexible and be prepared to be vulnerable. Learn from your mistakes, celebrate your accomplishments and be prepared to share what you learn.

Working Upstream: Preventing Youth Homelessness Through School-Based Intervention

Jacqueline Sohn, Postdoctoral Fellow, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and
Mary-Jane McKitterick, Community Planning Manager, A Way Home Canada

While Canada has made great strides in addressing homelessness through legislating the right to housing (with the *National Housing Strategy Act* — passed in June 2019), youth homelessness remains a broad social problem and human rights issue. Housing is a basic human need, and yet, an estimated 35,000–40,000 young people experience homelessness over the course of a year in Canada today.[1] Youth at-risk of and experiencing homelessness face immense barriers to educational opportunities and outcomes, as well as compromized health and safety. Needless to say, these young people lack the supports needed to thrive and successfully transition into adulthood.

Across Canada, increasing attention has been given to the need for better solutions to meet the needs of these marginalized young people — beyond siloed initiatives within fragmented systems. As the other articles in this issue illuminate, there is a need to shift away from a crisis-driven response to youth homelessness and prevent it from happening in the first place. How can we ensure that youth do not slip through the cracks and are identified and supported before they become entrenched in life on the streets? How can we support these young people to have equitable educational experiences and outcomes?

As part of the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab — The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, A Way Home Canada and Raising the Roof, are leading a schools and communities initiative called The Upstream Project Canada (TUPC). Adapting an innovative initiative originating in Australia (The Geelong Project — since renamed The Upstream Project Australia), TUPC works to prevent and eliminate youth homelessness through the coordinated efforts of schools and communities, by identifying young people at risk of homelessness and providing them and their families with a suite of supports. In Australia, researchers have documented a 40 per cent reduction in the number of adolescents (ages 12 to 18), entering the local homelessness system, and a 20 per cent reduction in the number of adolescents leaving school early, over the three years following implementation of the original model.[2]

Why the School System?

Virtually all youth have been in the school system at some point in their lives — legally, until age 16 in Canada. Educators are often aware of students at-risk, but do not have the capacity to support them. As well, navigating the disjointed social services systems poses a major challenge. Connecting at-risk youth with effective supports and resources entails a research-informed, deeply collaborative approach in working towards integrated systems of coordinated care with schools as an ideal gateway to access.

The Approach

Collective Impact

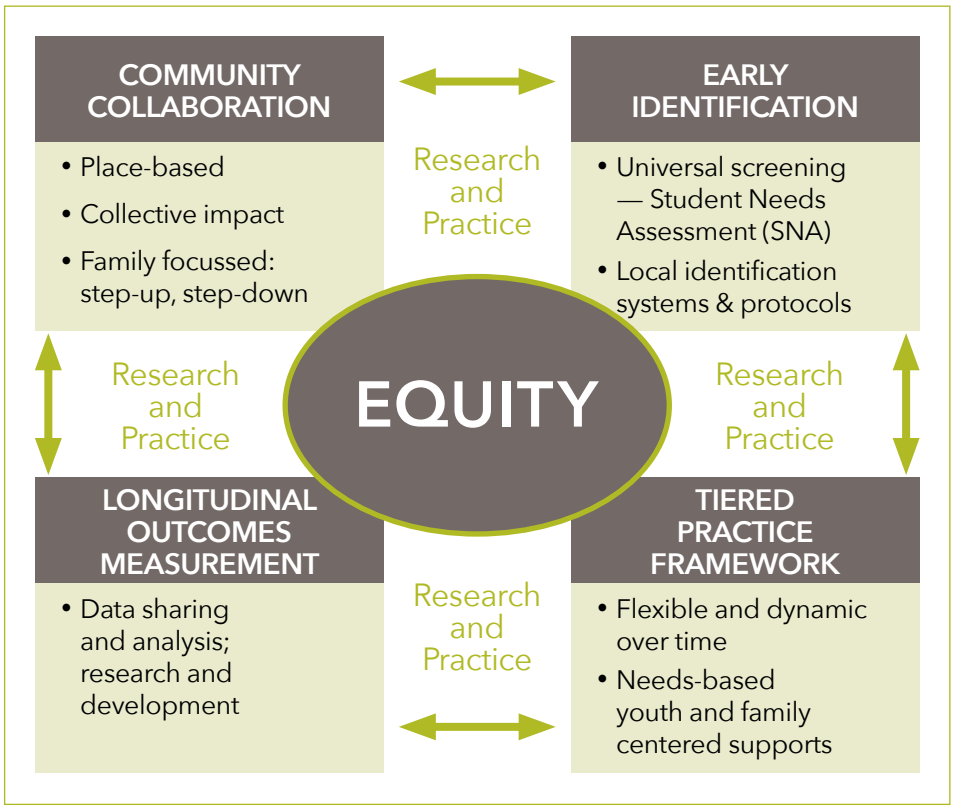
TUPC is based on a Collective Impact model.[3] In brief, this entails the commitment of a group of systems/agencies from different sectors at all levels to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem, using a structured form of collaboration. For TUPC, the social problems at the center are the incidence of youth homelessness and early school leaving. Establishing community collaboration toward an integrated system of coordinated care is vital to effectively supporting at-risk youth and their families. In order to achieve significantly improved outcomes in addressing youth homelessness and school disengagement, the work must be a genuinely collective, involving deep engagement by schools, services and data sharing with a committed, equitable approach.

Adapting an Australian Model in Canada

Underpinning The Upstream Project Australia is the Community of Schools and Services (COSS) model, consisting of four foundations: community collaboration, early identification, the practice framework and early intervention support work with families and a robust, embedded longitudinal monitoring and measurement of outcomes. It takes on a place-based approach, focusing on bringing together people and resources in a given community to impact rates of homelessness and early school leaving. Partners in this system are committed to transforming the system from the bottom up.

Based on the original model, TUPC is flexible by design. Importantly, it is a collective, system-level intervention; it leverages existing infrastructure and resources as much as possible; and it relies on the iterative use of data to inform both student and system-level actions. At the same time, TUPC's adaptation also includes the core components of the COSS model (see Figure 1). If any of them are lacking, or not implemented well, the work could not be fairly characterized as TUPC.

Critically, given the significant disproportionalities in youth homelessness related to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity, equity is at the forefront of the Canadian adaptation of The Upstream Project Australia in



every aspect of intervention, design, implementation, and evaluation and data analysis. As such, the model places a commitment to equity at the center, with implications for each of the core elements.

The Intervention Approach: Individualized, Coordinated Care

Each young person identified as at-risk through a universal student needs assessment, is unique in terms of the supports they require, appropriate to their individual and family needs. Casework, for example, is not necessarily appropriate in all circumstances, and the nature and levels of support are susceptible to change over time as needs evolve. A flexible and responsive practice framework provides young people and their families with three levels of response: 'active monitoring', 'short-term support', and 'wrap around' case management for complex cases. The capacity of TUPC's early intervention platform to operate flexibly is a key to positive outcomes. When casework is required, it is a place-based, 'no wrong door' approach that is youth-focused and family-centered. For those who need major support, a coordinated care plan will be developed. TUPC's approach is based on 'early intervention workers' (case managers typically employed by partner CBO(s) working closely with school staff (such as counsellors).

Data-Informed Responses

With an equity lens, outcomes measurement is a critical aspect of TUPC. Race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity will be featured in the analysis to examine equitable outcomes among marginalized groups. The objective is to examine the entire community cohort of vulnerable young people and monitor what has been achieved over time. Outcomes data and evidence is evaluated for continuous learning about more efficient and effective ways to support at-risk youth and in working towards system reform.

Conclusion

A commitment to equity in education entails working upstream to provide marginalized young people with the supports they need to thrive. Working to adapt and scale this promising innovation across Canada will require deep collaboration between schools, communities, people with lived experience, researchers and government. The Upstream Project represents the next stage in the evolution of school-based early intervention programs in Canada but it does not stop there.

The success of The Geelong Project in Australia has led to international interest in other countries as well. The Upstream International Living Lab (UILL), is an international social research and development consortium involving university and service partners from Australia, Canada, the United States, and Wales. The core work of this international consortium is to facilitate the adaptation and implementation within each of the participating countries. Participation in the UILL provides local Canadian demonstration projects with unprecedented access to international support and collaboration alongside a platform to showcase Canadian innovation and leadership in school-based youth homelessness prevention.

Core Components of TUPC:

Identify and Assess —
In this stage, students who are at-risk of homelessness are identified using a proven screening method known as the *Student Needs Survey*. Ideally this should begin with Grade 7 students to create early opportunities for intervention.

Connect to Services —
This stage involves providing wraparound supports to students identified in the previous stage as being at-risk, and their families. Students are divided into three tiers depending upon their level of risk with Tier 3 students facing significant risk of becoming homeless, early school leaving or mental health issues.

Measure and Replicate —
A comprehensive program evaluation will inform scaling to communities across Canada. Evaluation occurs developmentally to facilitate an iterative research-practice cycle for continuous improvement; it is not just an evaluation of end-results.

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Post-Secondary Student Homelessness (PSSH) and Canadian Youth: Stigma and Institutional Responses to Student Homelessness

Eric Weissman PhD, University of New Brunswick, Saint John Department of Social Sciences, Sociology, Jeannette Waegemakers-Schiff, University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work and Rebecca Schiff, Lakehead University, Department of Health Sciences

Introduction

Formal education is necessary for children and youth to develop socially and to progress from lesser to greater roles in society.[1,2] Much attention has been paid to educational barriers such as poverty and homelessness in K-12.[3,4,5] For youth experiencing poverty and homelessness in post-secondary, educational rites of passage are more difficult to achieve because of systemic failures to address their needs with policies and programs. Though anecdotally, educators and policy makers have been aware of the issue for some time in Canada and the US, it is only recently that post-secondary student homelessness (PSSH) has become the subject of systematic and broad scrutiny in Canada. Based on the preliminary research, PSSH may affect 70,000 Canadian students per year, mostly youth 17 to 25.[6,7]

Research on Post-Secondary Student Homelessness

One of the first pieces of research specifically about PSSH in Canada at the University of Alberta found that 4 per cent of respondents were experiencing homelessness at the time of the study and that 45 per cent of respondents had negative housing and education experiences (Kovacs-Burns et al., 2015). Research also shows that PSSH is very common for international students.[8] There is a literature gap on PSSH in Canada and the urgent nature of the issue has led some researchers to conduct an exploratory online survey study.[9] In 2017, 2018, and 2019, online post-secondary student surveys were undertaken at Red Deer College (RDC), University of New Brunswick (UNB) and the University of Calgary (U of C), respectively. The goal was to get an idea of the prevalence of PSSH and to refine a methodology for a proposed national study.

The vast majority of students in colleges and universities in Canada are youth ranging in age from 17 to 25.[10,11] In the three sites discussed below, approximately 80 per cent of respondents (n=457, youth= 360) are between ages 17 to 25, which places youth experiences directly at the center of our preliminary research, and within the parameters of the *Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness*.[12]

Our data revealed interesting themes with implications for understanding youth homelessness prevention in broad terms, and designing upcoming research. For example, respondents often conflated housing insecurity and hidden homelessness with typical hardships common to their social worlds, family histories and expectations for student life. Many respondents had not seen themselves as homeless until they read the *Canadian Definition of Homelessness*[13] and *The Indigenous Definition of. Homelessness in Canada*[14] in the survey preamble. Students expressed a lack of knowledge about what to do about their housing precarity.

The average percentage of students in homelessness, at the time of the surveys (most of it hidden), was around 4 per cent, though over 26 per cent had prior experiences with homelessness of some kind, many during K-12. There were over two million post-secondary students in Canada in 2017, suggesting that many thousands faced homelessness on a daily basis.

Intergenerational and prior experiences of poverty and housing precarity subtly seed life courses with expectations and values that impact attitudes at personal and institutional levels towards prevention.[15,16]

Youth with prior experiences of poverty or homelessness can come to accept this human condition as normal and, therefore, are less likely to self-advocate or mobilize to address the issue. Perhaps most importantly, communities, policy makers and institutions have historically been unaware of the hidden and profound dimensions of PSSH, so their role in prevention is under examined in scholarly research and in practice.

Homelessness is highly stigmatized on campuses, despite being fairly common.[17,18,19,20] Students may not admit their experience to themselves, or avoid talking about it outside of close friends and family. Some recognized other students in jeopardy, but did not know how to talk about it with them. Students at UNB and RDC revealed in informal conversations that the stigma is rooted in the fear of being seen as needy, unfit, mentally unwell, and incapable.

Students feared not being accepted into programs or advancing to professional placements if their precarity was known. Being seen as homeless was thought to eradicate the social and cultural capital necessary to have vibrant and meaningful relationships. The mental and physical stress associated with homelessness was also overwhelming.

According to the IPSOS Public Affairs, *Children and Youth Mental Health Survey*, 50 to 70 per cent of Ontario students experience anxiety and miss school as a result.[21] In the PSSH surveys, 52 per cent of students had received treatment for a mental health issue; on average, 25 per cent of this was ongoing. Close to one-third of students worried about housing, and for many of them, this was a major source of their stress that impacted their

academic work. Housing precarity only exacerbates school-related anxiety and underlying conditions.

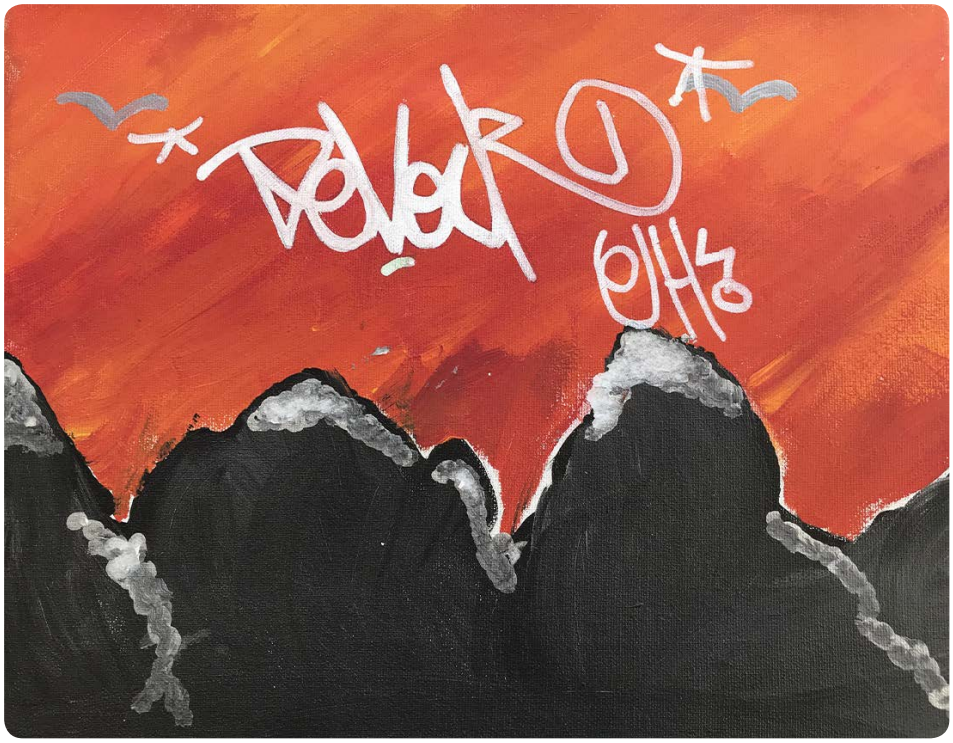
As a result of stigma, youth who might be facing homelessness generally do not come out and say, especially to teachers and administrators, 'I am homeless, help me.' Planning successful exit strategies, in part, requires creating safe administrative spaces for students to talk about this issue, and learning how to hear about PSSH as a complex problem with many facets, rather than how to talk about the problem based on narrow policy lines.

Institutions are now addressing PSSH in promising ways, such as the Nova Scotia Community College. According to Lisa Mader, the director of the Metro Emergency Housing Project (MEHM), success requires collaboration between municipal, educational and student organizations, and tying in the housing piece to other support initiatives like food banks, meal plans and health providers. The *Housing Needs Survey* at NSCC found that, *'178 students would have utilized an emergency housing program if* [NSCC] *had one in place, and 70 per cent of these students did not complete their program'*.[22] In the PSSH surveys, close to 60 per cent of students agreed that they would leave school if homelessness was an issue.

Preventing Post-Secondary Student Homelessness

There are two points of PSSH prevention that seem key from our research. The first point of prevention happens before students get to post-secondary school. K-12 institutions, families experiencing housing precarity, schools and service providers need to have open and safe dialogues about housing precarity in order to help alleviate the stigma associated with it. With the current emphasis on talking about mental health and food insecurity in public schools, addressing housing precarity seems to be a logical next step.

School and community supports would include safe spaces for students to talk about their needs, and proper guidance and life skills training to help students develop more effective strategies to deal with their housing precarity throughout



Cody M., age 16, Calgary, Alberta– *Untitled*

K-12. There should be aggressive engagement with funders and communities to support students in need, and more government financial aid specifically for housing students as they transition into post-secondary.

The second point of prevention is for post-secondary schools themselves to develop supports for students as they transition into post-secondary. Post-secondary institutions know more about these issues than when the research began in 2016, and want to play a role in helping their students overcome hardships and excel.

Post-secondary institutions may be able to see the potential for PSSH in the presentation of other types of insecurities and develop services to help students navigate their hardship. Kevin Friese, the Associate Dean of Students at the University of Alberta states that the university's *'expanded Safe House Homeless Program offers medium term housing support, access to financial counseling and assistance, connection to food security resources, and connection to social supports and mental health resources. 90 per cent of those who use the service are youth'.*

Speaking of the experience of stakeholders at the University of Alberta, Friese says:

> *'once they were educated in the systemic factors that create precarity and perpetuate homelessness, they began to realize that most students will not simply present at their front desks as homeless… many students will present with academic problems, food security issues, financial stresses and the like. It is only when we begin to tease apart these issues that homelessness may present itself. This has been a key learning that our project team will continue to integrate into our project efforts and homeless education work on campus'.*

The program saw a 100 per cent increase in use during 2018–2019, which is partly explained by the way administrators have learned to look at PSSH, listen to student narratives, and to approach it in a destigmatizing fashion. Prevention requires hearing students without judging them. Educating administrators, policy makers, service providers and students, about how students in jeopardy talk around or indirectly to their homelessness because of the stigma attached to it, is a key part of designing prevention and intervention strategies and programs.

A major key to relieving PSSH is to provide suitable and affordable housing to students. Institutions themselves are reckoning with the pitfalls of leaving students who are not suited for or able to qualify for residences to fend for themselves in the private rental

Homelessness in Montréal

Photo by Caribb

market. While many universities provide on-campus residences for students, they have stood back while much of the housing stock in their communities has been bought up for speculative development. The result has been that students fall victim to predatory landlords and are forced into housing precarity that would have been avoidable.

Post-secondary institutions have the resources and fiscal vehicles to invest in student housing on larger scales and to encourage new modes of co-housing and cooperatives on property they own and on land in their vicinity. Post-secondary schools here have not explored their role as landlords fully. StudentDwellTO has discussed having post-secondary schools rethink their role as landlords, beyond the campus and real estate they already own and redesigning student housing to work for students. The need is to provide affordable student housing and post-secondary institutions and their partners must be part of this.

Conclusion

The major goals of the next stage of PSSH research are to employ a comprehensive, national integrated mixed-method study to understand youth PSSH and to include youth in the research process, designing programs and policies directed at prevention, and sharing this new knowledge with the public. We are developing a survey protocol for looking at Indigenous post-secondary experiences through the lens of the Indigenous Definition of Homelessness in Canada. A key piece for future consideration is a national student-led, faculty supported youth student advisory specifically focused on housing issues across post-secondary institutions in Canada. Youth need a safe place to talk about and resolve their housing issues.

PSSH causes severe personal traumas and disrupts educational outcomes. Because of the stigma attached to being a homeless student, it is under-reported and socially isolating. It impacts youth of all nationalities, gender identities and ethnicities. There is urgent need to explore PSSH at the national level, as part of a youth homelessness prevention strategy. The research suggests that PSSH is a life course event tied to antecedent experiences; it would be useful for preventive policies to address early warning signs and lived experiences and to develop institutional capacities to hear and help students in need.

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Reducing Intergenerational Cycles of Homelessness: Early Intervention with Pregnant and Parenting Young Women

Jill Doyle, Manager of Programs, Choices for Youth

Choices for Youth (CFY), supports young people in St John's, Newfoundland and Labrador to access housing, education, and employment while working towards family stability and better health. Youth within the organization may experience challenges including substance use, mental illness, poverty, and homelessness. All programs incorporate proven philosophies, models, and approaches to supporting youth. Yet there was a disconnect for participants who had children as they identified a need to access programs and services in a different way than non-parenting youth.

Models of prevention and early intervention, such as Housing First and reunification with a client's natural supports typically need to be tailored to the needs of young mothers. While these types of programs and services are effective when working with youth, for a variety of reasons their effectiveness is much lower when serving young mothers. For example, young women who are pregnant or parenting face unique challenges when trying to secure safe and affordable housing as they must consider the needs of their children alongside their own needs. Choices for Youth shifted their service delivery model to better support young parents, and in 2009 the Momma Moments program was launched.

Momma Moments is a peer-to-peer support program for pregnant and parenting young mothers (ages 16 to 29), that provides a wrap-around model of support. When the program began there were 9 moms with a combined 13 children participating in the program, and all program participants were precariously housed and involved in the child welfare system. At the point of intake into Momma Moments, all but one of the 13 children were living in a foster care placement. Referrals to

the program are open to any mom, whether prenatal or postnatal, in our community. Referrals can come from anyone including community partners, other CFY programs, or moms can self-refer to the program. Participation in the program is voluntary: nobody can mandate young mothers to participate in the Momma Moments program.

Over the two-year period that followed, 11 of those children were returned back to their mother's care, two were placed in agreements with extended families, and all families became securely housed. As the program grew, there was a three-year period where child apprehensions did not occur.

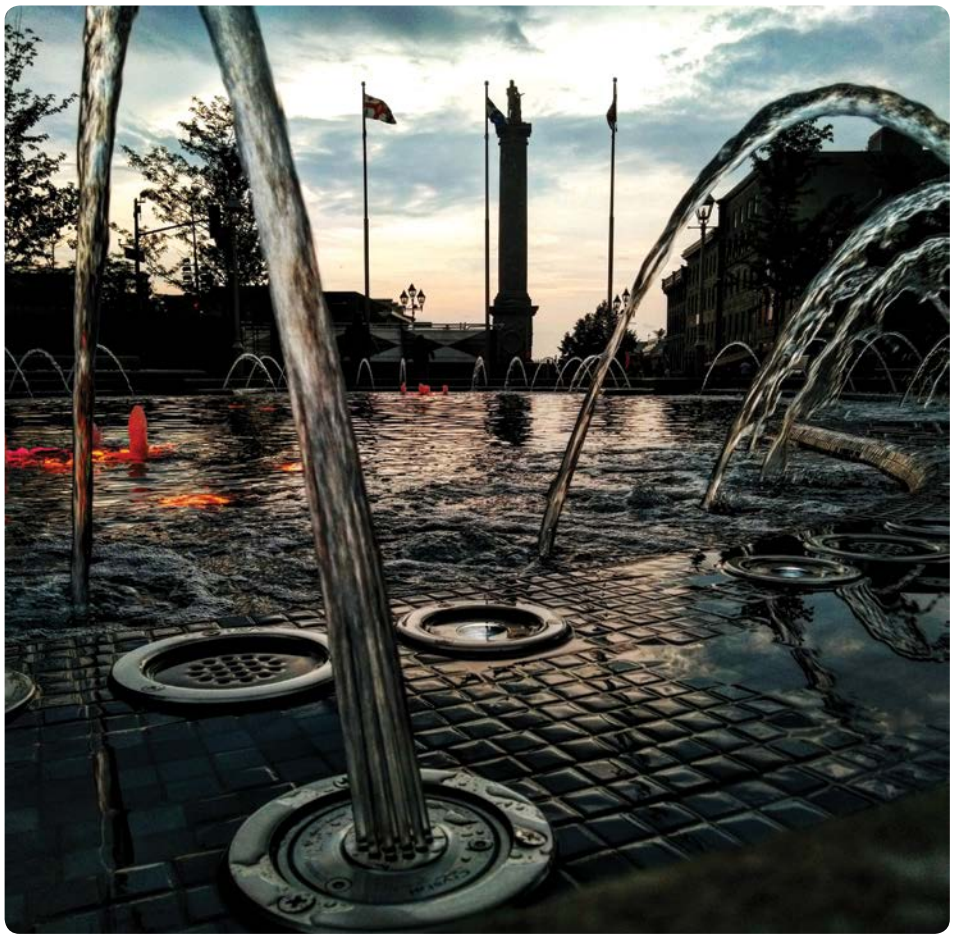
Momma Moments supports young families through individualized case management and weekly on-site group sessions that include child minding, transportation, and a hearty meal in order to reduce barriers to participation. The group environment provides an opportunity for increased social inclusion for both moms and their children. The Momma Moments staff team works collaboratively with government departments, legal aid, the regional housing authority, health services, the child and youth advocate team, community organizations, and multiple community partners. This wrap-around support model allows families to experience better outcomes in all areas that impact the social determinants of health.

We have seen a consistent decrease in child apprehension rates; increased engagement with educational systems and employment opportunities; an increase in addressing physical and mental health issues for both moms and children; a decrease in social isolation by providing opportunities to engage with their peers in safe and healthy ways; and long-term stabilized housing for participants. Over the course of the last 10 years, demand for Momma Moments has also increased: there are now 80 mothers and 106 children participating in the program with 11 on the waitlist. Currently, of the 80 mothers participating in the program, only two are experiencing homelessness.

The following example illustrates how the Momma Moments program prevents sustained exits into homelessness. Jenna,[1] was referred to the program when her son was in a kinship agreement with his grandmother. Jenna was involved in an unhealthy spousal relationship, and her life spiraled into substance use and criminal behaviors, which resulted in her loss of visitation rights with her son. Eventually, her housing broke down and she became homeless. She identified that she had hit rock bottom after being arrested for shoplifting and reached out to Momma Moments for support.

Through Jenna's determination and support from the Momma Moments team, including the collaboration of multiple wrap-around supports, she has broken through many barriers to regain control of her life. She began attending the Suboxone Treatment Program located at Choices for Youth's integrated service delivery site, secured temporary housing, accessed legal representation through Legal Aid, applied to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation for permanent housing, enrolled with an alternative educational program, and graduated from a 16-week program to re-enter the workforce. Jenna continues to move forward and strives to reach her goals to maintain safe and affordable housing and regain full custody of her son.

The Momma Moments program has proven success and is unique in providing support to a sub-population of homeless individuals — parenting young mothers — in order to prevent family homelessness. Momma Moments is an example of how models of prevention can be tailored to the needs of young mothers. These young moms are also changing the trajectory for their own children, potentially avoiding future cycles of poverty and homelessness as they transition to adolescence and eventually adulthood. When we consider effective homelessness prevention programs for young families we should consider the many complex factors that make us look beyond traditional eviction prevention and Housing First models. It is not just about housing, but must be inclusive of every system that impacts the health, well-being, and success of mothers and their children.



Dan Tapia – *Fuerte Hermosura*, 2019

Endnote

1. The participant's name has been changed.

From Crisis to Careers with PEP!

Alicia MacDonald, Program Coordinator, Phoenix Employment Program and
Alisha D, PEP Participant

Introduction

Finding your first job or getting into a career you are passionate about can be hard, even in the most opportune situation. Imagine trying to find a job without having stable housing; being transient while trying to maintain full-time employment; getting to work without consistent access to reliable transportation, or; not having somewhere safe for your kids to go while you work. It takes skills, support, resiliency, and an incredible amount of drive to succeed.

This is the reality for many of the young people who access services at Phoenix Learning and Employment Center, one of ten programs that make up Phoenix Youth Programs.[1] Staff at Phoenix work diligently to make employment more accessible with so many young people coming through the doors who want to work and have the skills and talents to contribute to the workforce.

Youth homelessness prevention includes 'policies, practices and interventions that either:

1. reduce the likelihood that a young person will experience homelessness, or

2. interventions that *'provide youth experiencing homelessness with the necessary supports to stabilize their housing, improve their wellbeing, connect with community, and avoid re-entry into homelessness.'*[2]

In Phoenix's nineteen years of supporting young people in employment we have learned that supports go beyond resumé writing and job searching and cannot simply end when an offer of employment is made — it is the on-going supports that make the difference. These include actions and advocacy to help guide youth through challenges in the workplace, financial support for work equipment such as work boots, assistance with transportation costs, housing stability, and helping to find affordable childcare. Maintaining great relationships with employers who are willing to work with us to support the youth is also critical.

Launching PEP

In 2018, the Nova Scotia Department of Labor and Advanced Education recognized the importance of wrap-around and long-term employment supports in youth homelessness prevention and exits. The department partnered with Phoenix to fund an ideal program that pulled case management, housing and employment supports together — the Phoenix Employment Program (PEP).

PEP uses an early intervention employment model to help avoid or break the cycle of homelessness, poverty, and reliance on government assistance — ultimately leading to independence and sustainable employment. The program is adapted from a model developed by the Center for Employment Innovation at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada. The program is 24 months, during which time youth participants must be able to commit to 30 hours per week.

PEP works with youth ages 18 to 29 from underrepresented groups in the labor market — African Nova Scotians, youth with disabilities, youth on income assistance, etc. — who are already connected to Phoenix. In addition to low income, these young people have other barriers to employment such as transportation needs, childcare requirements, additional skills training, and lack of financial resources for workplace equipment. A main purpose of this program is to support youth labor market participation, attachment and integration in order to address precarious housing and prevent homelessness.

Participating in PEP

To identify participants, the Phoenix Learning and Employment Center (PLEC) staff, who operate PEP, connected with staff in other Phoenix programs, sharing information and program requirements. Staff across Phoenix connected with young people who they felt would be interested and employment ready. The identified young person then went through an application and assessment process for us to determine who would be the best fit for the program and time commitment.

Phoenix youth, Alisha, heard about the program and immediately wanted in:

> *'Securing housing without proper employment is a challenge. PEP came along at a time when I was at risk of homelessness and so were my kids; not having a spot for my kids to call home was one of the worst feelings I ever experienced. When a Phoenix staff told me about PEP, I was hands-down interested.'*

Phoenix staff worked with each young person to identify careers of interest and developed individualized plans to set them up for success. Having experienced foster care herself, Alisha's career interests centered around youth and family care stating:

> *'It was my dream since I was eight to be a social worker. Eventually I want to be doing child protection.'*

Youth participants include those who are at-risk of homelessness, as well

Alisha with YWCA supervisor Lindsey

Phoenix Learning and Employment Center

as young people with previous experiences of homelessness. Young people receive case management support while in PEP to help address life issues or needs as they arise, which includes assistance to maintain safe, affordable and appropriate housing. This ensures that these young people are able to focus on their responsibilities as employees, stay engaged with work and perform well in their jobs.

Depending on each young persons' needs, their individual plans could include having monthly costs covered for transportation and childcare. This is made possible through collaboration and service integration with other Phoenix programs, such as the Housing Support Worker and Trustee. Workplace essentials such as clothing, equipment, tools, and safety gear are also provided. Participants showed up on the first day of work armed with any necessary workplace training — an impressive feature for employers.

> *'My childcare is covered through PEP and the Phoenix trustee is helping me with debt repayment and money management. I have mental health support from my case manager. I'm over the moon happy with all the support!'*
>
> — Alisha

PEP provides employers with well-prepared and motivated employees, as well as a 70 per cent wage subsidy. Employers also have the ongoing support of experienced employment specialists at Phoenix to navigate any challenges during the program. The employers engaged in PEP are committed to providing trajectory-changing learning and growth opportunities for youth. Alisha has said that while working at the YWCA of Halifax:

'I'm learning so much. I'm working with many different people to support them and a variety of programs. My supervisor is very supportive and patient. I'm learning a lot about time management skills. Everyone's open and willing to help me learn. They have supported me in every dimension possible.'

Conclusion

Ten young people between the ages of 18 and 29 are currently engaged in PEP. One-year into the program, many participants are well on their way to establishing sustainable employment. One participant has already been permanently hired and several other employers are focusing on possibilities for long-term employment and growth opportunities for participants. Some participants have used this experience to solidify plans for higher education to provide them career advancement opportunities in their field.

The length of the program alone helps to provide an exit from homelessness or prevent homelessness. Full-time employment for a two-year period is substantial, so advocacy with landlords becomes much easier to get youth into an apartment. At the end of the program, most youth will retain their employment, as this was an expectation at the start of the program. However, should employers face a changing landscape and not be able to keep PEP participants at the end of the placement, participants have two years of employment experience, many new skills, and solid references.

Alisha says:

> *'Phoenix has changed my life. I feel calmer. Some may say being a stay-at-home mom is easy, but I was always wondering how I would support my family. Now my kids have a home. Life seems easier, or at least I feel more willing and ready to take on the struggles.'*

Endnotes

1. Phoenix Youth Programs has been operating since 1987 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Phoenix provides a wide range of services from early intervention to crisis management to supports for independence. Phoenix is a social justice, charitable agency providing free services to youth ages 11 to 24, their families and communities. People are leaders in their own lives; Phoenix is a leader in supporting them. For more information, visit: <*www.phoenixyouth.ca*>
2. Gaetz S, Schwan K, Redman M, French D and Dej E 2018, *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*, A Buchnea (Ed.), Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, Toronto, ON.

Integrated Youth Services in Response to Youth Homelessness Issues

Jessica Hutton, Executive Director, Camrose Open Door Association

'You saved my life.' These are words every service provider hopes to hear as indicators of success against multiple odds. Unlike the medical profession, where interventions are more clear and defined, saving lives in a social services environment is much less straightforward. Complex issues such as homelessness, mental health and addiction can be a result of multiple factors, complicated by the level of an individual's resilience and self-sufficiency skills and attached to the degree of connection that a client has to supports, family, friends and professionals.

As social service professionals, we know that when we respond to early risk factors, we can then mitigate the more complex issues later in life. After years of struggling alongside clients with the complex issues, whose early risk factors were missed or not acted upon, The Camrose Open Door Association (The Open Door) has created a model to respond to youth at every stage. The Open Door provides both prevention and intervention to meet the needs of the youth through integration of services and systems navigation.

In September of 2017, The Open Door launched the first Integrated Youth Hub (the Hub) of its kind in the Province of Alberta, Canada. The Camrose and Area Integrated Youth Hub provides holistic, wrap around services. Simply put, services support every aspect of the youth's well-being, including mental health, medical, employment, education, spiritual, cultural, familial, and basic needs. The Hub serves the rural East Central region of Alberta which is roughly 35,000 square kilometers. The Hub provides services to youth between the ages of 11 and 24. Since its inception in 2017, the Hub has connected with over 2,500 young people.

The Open Door has existed prior to the addition of the Hub for 21 years, providing supports to youth. These supports include a 24-hour helpline, an emergency housing program, a transitional housing program, 24-hour outreach supports (including employment and education supports), a tenant education program for youth, a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder supports program, a program focused on building helping skills within the youth population (Community Helpers Program), a restorative justice program, SMART recovery, and a grandparent program and youth mentorship programming.

These programs focus on both prevention and intervention simultaneously, targeting risk factors such as mental health, trauma and abuse, education and employment and homelessness. Programs offering mentorship provide long term connection to natural supports, while restorative justice provides the capacity to both intervene and prevent further involvement, while responding to the root issues of the casual factors.

The Hub exists with the understanding that *all* young people have mental health needs and *all* young people are at risk. In a world full of new potential threats with social media, cyber bullying, sexting, new drugs to take and try, changes in family unit functioning, and new and foreign responsibilities, risk factors exist everywhere. The Hub seeks to connect young people immediately, and for the long-term. To make this happen, the Hub has brought together system stakeholders including the health system, the hospitals, policing, the justice system, community agencies, school districts and various other supports.

System integration has been found to benefit three main areas including continuity of care, coordination of services and efficiency of care. The Hub model works to provide prevention and intervention to the degree both are required. By connecting youth to long-term, wrap around and holistic services, youth remain connected, thus preventing and reducing the risk of homelessness, and intervening with those who are homeless. Providing the services earlier in the young persons' journey, gives youth a place to go before significant crisis.

Young people are referred by other agencies, law enforcement, medical personal, educational professionals, by their families, or by themselves. Young people who reach out for assistance are provided with a range of supports immediately. Their case is triaged by a navigator who collects information and gathers other relevant supports. Instead of being referred from one agency to another, the agencies work to do warm transfers of clients, with the navigator acting as the primary case manager, overseeing the case and doing the follow up.

The navigator is responsible for initial assessments which provide the foundation for referrals and supports. These assessments include a thorough case history, the completion of a risk assessment, the GAIN-SS, and various other assessments, as needed. The navigator builds and strong, long term relationship with the youth and/or their family as they journey together. They check in, provide support, follow up to ensure appointment attendance, organize case conferences, help complete paperwork, complete

assessments, and organize goals and other program attendance (school, treatment programs, employment, etc.).

Information sharing agreements exist to create avenues for information flow without asking youth and their families to share their stories over and over again. These agreements were put in place following the development of a toolkit by the provincial government that established the authority to share and articulated sharing pathways. This seeks to reduce youth feeling unheard and experiencing re-traumatization by reliving their experiences. Instead, young people and their families are supported to move forward. *'It was so nice just to tell one person what was going on in our family, not have to retell my painful story over and over again,'* one parent said.

Anne A-R. First experience of homelessness at 15 years old, St-Jerôme, Québec — *Violet sunset cloud*, 2019

An integrated systems approach allows for a spectrum of services to be offered. From early intervention such as education supports, to evictions prevention and emergency shelter, to keeping young people stabilized, integration of services dramatically increases supports for a youth. Instead of relying on young people or their families to make their own phone calls, make their own appointments, arrange their own transportation, and follow their own referral path, the Hub does it for them. This enables young people and their families to focus on help, rather than expecting them to know what services exist, locate and participate in them while in potential crisis. Long-term follow-up ensures that young people remain connected and supported, instead of being left to their own devices to transition to adult world. The capacity to respond 24/7 is imperative to connect with young people with speed and accuracy, before they may be lost.

Early intervention and connection will reduce the likelihood of homelessness or risk of homelessness by surrounding the young person with the connection and supports they require. Already, evidence collected from the Hub is demonstrating that connections to youth with risk factors that previously would have inevitably caused homelessness, are now avoiding homelessness altogether. Young people who may be homeless because of an undiagnosed or untreated mental illness are connected to the Hub sooner, treated through medication and/or psychotherapy and are able to continue to live independently, or with their family instead of spiraling into crisis. Parents are accessing supports that enable them to be better equipped for responding to their child, reducing the risk of child welfare involvement.

The Hub has identified themes such as lack of access to medication, insufficient access to food, untreated or undiagnosed mental illness, and family unit break downs as significant risk factors for homelessness. Identifying these earlier through school involvement, family physicians and community or family members has increased the response to mitigate these risk factors. Young people who once required long stays in emergency housing or were chronically at risk of homelessness are now stabilized.

Increasing connection with youth creates resilience and long-term supportive environments and systems. It has been demonstrated that the opposite of addiction is connection. The Alberta Youth Suicide Prevention Plan, outlines that 'strong connection to community and a sense of belonging'[1]) is a protective factor against suicide. The young persons' holistic being is supported when they are provided connection through an integrated system that responds to the youth as a whole, wrapping around and filling in where needed, thereby having a ripple effect to all areas of their life.

Given the rural context of this Hub and its sheer area of coverage, keeping youth connected within their own communities, as well as to larger urban systems, is an utmost priority. In the two years since the Hub began, the local hospital has reported that they have seen a reduction in youth presenting with suicide ideation, self-harm and anxiety, and when a young person does present in the Emergency Room, they are quickly attached to the Integrated Youth Hub to insure appropriate connection and support. Teachers, police, probations, social workers and physicians recognize that it is imperative to connect young people to a Hub that will review all of their needs, and ensure that all the pieces of the puzzle are connected. Each professional is one piece of the puzzle, and each young person requires multiple puzzle pieces to create a strong foundation for them.

As the Hub continues to grow and evolve, opportunities for more sophisticated connections and supports will continue to present. The Hub has created a detailed understanding of the gaps within the systems that support youth. By identifying these gaps, solutions have, and will continue to be mobilized at a large scale, systems level. Service integration brings together supports in a way that maximizes prevention and intervention models, weaving the two together to respond quickly and efficiently, reducing wait times and inappropriate referrals, and increasing connectivity and effective response. The Hub has relied on innovation and partnership in response to local issues facing youth, and that innovation has saved lives!

Endnote

1. Government of Alberta 2019, *Building Strength, Inspiring Hope: A Provincial Action Plan for Youth Suicide Prevention 2019–2024*, p. 11.

Les petits pieds du bonheur

Laurence, Montréal, Québec

On me dit qu'on ne sait comment m'aider,
Ils me disent de m'en aller,
Je ne sais pas si j'ai besoin d'aide,
Ou si j'ai simplement besoin d'être

Anormal, je souhaiterais parfois être anonyme,
Ostracisé je me sens, leur décision
était unanime cependant,
Hivernal, la saison m'opprime vers,
Ma continuité fragilissime,
Dogmatisé, le parfait pseudonyme

Je suis en cavale défoncé sur l'endorphine,
Qui me garde en vie même si je suis en mode survie,
Je veux rentrer à la maison,
À Montréal,
Mais je n'y ai plus d'habitation,
Et c'est infernal

Je me sens étrangère, trop compliquée pour être aidée,
Je marche seule, sans réel seuil d'entrée,
Qui puisse m'accueillir, m'inviter, me réconforter,
Me dire que tout ira bien et que la vie,
À plus d'un chemin à me proposer

J'ai l'impression de vivre à travers les émotions des autres,
Et j'en conçois,
C'est de ma faute,
Voilà qui est dit, je suis comme cela

Comme un artiste qui n'existe
Qu'à travers l'ombre de la cour d'autrui,
Et qui toute sa vie,
Ne peut composer ses mélodies,
Qu'au gré de se qui l'entoure

Je souhaiterais partir plus ou moins loin,
Où personne ne me connait,
Je sais, je crois que ce serait de fuir,
Alors je n'ose me prononcer,
Ce pourrait être pire, je sais,

J'ai mes deux jambes, j'arrive à manger,
Difficilement à gambader,
Mais à être en vie,
Et même si celle-ci n'est pas remplie,
J'ai le choix d'en faire ce que j'en ai envie

Je ferais un feu de joie,
Si ce n'était que de moi,
Je volerais au dessus d'un nid de passepartout,
Mais mon cœur d'enfant a peur, il est nerveux,
Plein de torpeur,
Il est incapable de regarder le monde dans les yeux

Il ne veut pas grandir,
Car la perdition de son innocence,
Serait pareil comme de mourir,
Ne plus être soucieux,
De son inconscience,
Et de devoir laisser place à quelque chose de périlleux,
Cette étourderie et son inadvertance,
Est le risque de finir ses jours avec un esprit vieux,
Et chargé de redondance

Comme un artiste,
Je compare la cour de mon voisin,
Toujours, sans l'ombre d'un doute,
Ayant l'impression que la mienne,
Coute que coute,
Perdurera loin du soleil

L'hiver me garde au froid, en éveil,
Où je sens que malgré tout,
Mon cœur s'alimente du peu de braise qu'il lui reste,
J'ai le souffle court, mais je garde le calme,
Je savoure l'amalgame du vent,
Qui prend place autour de mon cœur et de mes sentiments

Je deviens enfin confiante, mais craintive,
Ambivalente et combative,
J'ai atrocement peur, mais suis motivée,
Je me convainc que même avec des idées de grandeur,
J'y arriverai

De toute façon, bien que je demeure incomprise,
Je suis déjà à terre… et sur terre,
"Tu n'as qu'à te relever " me dis-je,
"Cesse de figer et fonce" me répète mon intimité,
Qui me donne toujours la même réponse

Deviens le temps,
Le temps qu'il faut,
Et prend le temps de prendre ton temps,
L'instant d'un remontant illusoire,
N'essaie pas de remonter le temps en ne vivant,
Que dans la création de ton exutoire,
Car dans le monde des vivants,
Cette idéalisation n'est que provisoire

Les petits pieds du bonheur, quant à eux,
Observent, accueillent,
Sans pleurs, ni regrets,
Il y a là tout intérêt,
À miser sur une profonde légèreté,
Qu'est de pouvoir rire aux larmes,
Sans être capable de s'en empêcher

The Little Happy Feet

Laurence, Montréal, Québec

They tell me they cannot help me,
They tell me to leave,
I don't know if I need help,
Or if I simply need to be

Abnormal, I sometimes want to be anonymous,
Ostracized, their decision was unanimous
however,
Hibernal, the season oppresses me towards
my ever so fragile continuity,
Dogmatized, the perfect pseudonym

I am on the go, high on endorphins,
Keeping me alive even in survival mode,
I want to go home,
In Montreal,
But I no longer have a house,
And it feels like hell

I feel like a stranger, too complex to be helped,
I walk alone, with no real threshold,
to welcome me, to invite me in, to comfort me,
to tell me that all will be well and that life,
has more than one trajectory to offer me

I feel I am living through the emotions of
others,
And I conceive,
that it is my fault,
There, it is said, that's who I am

I am like an artist that only lives
through the shadows of others,
And who during her entire life,
Can only compose her melodies,
On what surrounds her

I would like to leave more or less far away,
Where no one knows me,
I know, I think it would be running away,
So I do not dare to speak,
It could be worse, I know

I have my two legs, I manage to eat,
Not so much to stroll around,
But to stay alive,
And even if my life is not full,
I have the choice to do with it as I please,

I could make a bonfire,
If it were up to me,
I would fly over a bird's nest,
But my child's heart is scared, it is anxious,
Filled with torpor,
It is unable to look the world in the eye

It does not want to grow up,
For the loss of its innocence,
Would be like dying,
To not be worried,
About one's recklessness,
And to have to give way to something perilous,
This absent-mindedness and inadvertence,
Is the risk to finish my days with an old spirit,
Filled with redundancy

Like an artist,
I look at my neighbor's situation
Always, without the shadow of a doubt,
Thinking that mine,
Come what may,
Will survive far from the sun

Winter keeps me cold, and awake,
Nevertheless, it is where I feel
how my heart feeds off the little embers it has left,
My breath is short, but I stay calm,
I savor the wind,
Which settles in around my heart and my
feelings

I finally become confident, but fearful,
Ambivalent and combative,
I am horribly afraid, but I am motivated,
I convince myself that even with delusions of grandeur,
I will make it

Although I remain misunderstood,
I'm already on the ground... and grounded,
"Just get up" I tell myself,
"Stop stalling and go" my intimacy tells me again,
And I always get the same answer

Become time,
The time you need,
Take the time to take your time,
A time for an illusory stimulant,
Don't try to go back in time and only live
in your makeshift escapism,
Because in the world of the living,
This idealization is only temporary

The little happy feet, as for them,
Observe, welcome,
Without tears, without regrets,
They have a vested interest
in relying on a profound lightness,
Which is to be able to laugh to tears,
Without being able to stop.

Prevention Intervention Profile: Host Homes

Dr. Stephen Gaetz, Professor, Faculty of Education, York University; President of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness; Scientific Director of the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab, Kaitlin Schwan, Senior Researcher, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, York University, Melanie Redman, President and CEO of A Way Home Canada and Partnership and Implementation Director of the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab and David French, David French, Director of Policy and Planning, A Way Home Canada

What is Host Homes?

Host Homes is a community-based intervention that provides short-term accommodations and supports for young people who cannot return home, have been kicked out, or have run away from home. Within the Host Homes model, accommodation is not an emergency shelter, but rather a community member's home. Host Home programs are designed to provide both young people and their families with short-term community-based supports, with the goal of keeping young people 'in place.'

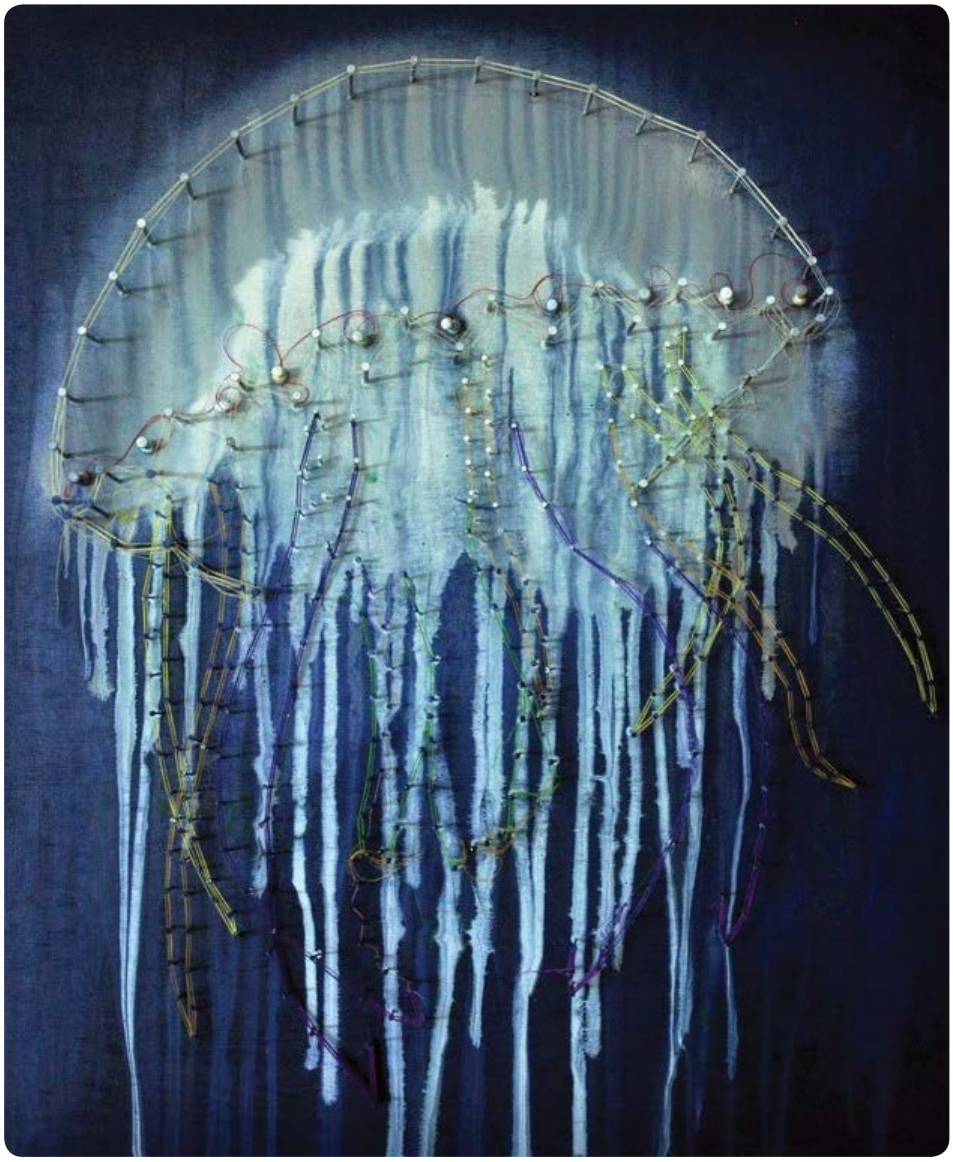
How Does It Prevent Homelessness?

Host Homes is a program model that fits under the umbrella of 'Early Intervention'. As a form of early intervention, Host Homes aims to divert young people from entering homelessness and the emergency shelter system. This form of shelter diversion is important because Host Homes are locally-based, and programs provide community-based case management. This enables youth to stay in their communities, remain in school, and stay connected to their families and natural supports. In some cases, the stay may be short and case management light, if young people or their families simply need a 'time out'. In other cases, where the situation is more complex, the level of support will increase. If youth are unable to return home or if it is not safe, arrangements are made to support the young person to move into age-appropriate accommodation in a safe and planned way.

How Does It Work

In a Host Homes program, young people who run away or are kicked out and who cannot find alternative accommodation are immediately connected with a host individual or family in their community. They are escorted to the home, introduced to the family, and provided with food and toiletries. The young person may want to be alone, or they may want to engage with the host. The next day, case management begins. Young people undergo an assessment to determine risks and assets, and the factors that led to their homelessness. As a youth-centered intervention, Host Homes offer a range of supports, which may include family reconnection/mediation, and/or or help finding suitable accommodation in their community.

Host Homes is a great way to get community members involved in solutions to youth homelessness. Individuals and families that have a spare room are recruited into the Host Homes program. They are carefully screened, then provided



Dino. First experience of homelessness at 23 years old, Montréal, Québec — *No title*, 2019

with training and resources to support the young people who will be staying with them. Information about youth homelessness and the Host Homes program is provided to schools, community centers, health care providers, and others who are in contact with young people who may be at risk of homelessness. While providing encouragement and support, the 'hosts' are not responsible for case management and therapeutic support.

Host Homes in Practice

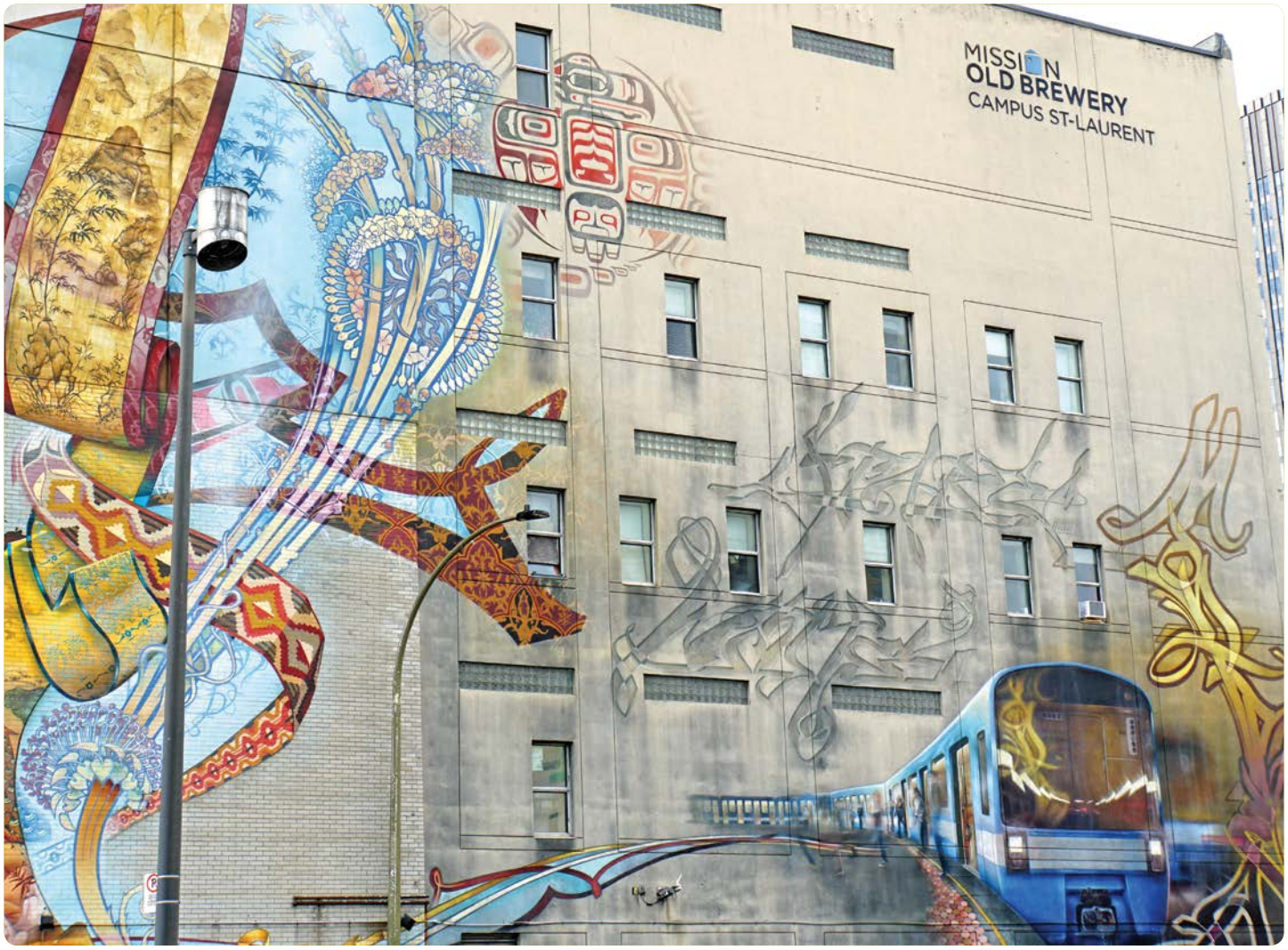
Nightstop[1] is perhaps the most extensive and well-known Host Homes program and operates in 40 communities with over 500 volunteers in the United Kingdom. Young people between the ages of 16 and 25 who are able to stay with an adult or family for up to three weeks are connected with community-based supports. In 2014, 13,500 bed nights were provided to young people. Breakfast and dinner are provided, along with toiletries and a private bedroom. In a recent evaluation of Nightstop, data indicated that 'after staying at Nightstop, 21 per cent returned to their families, 36 per cent moved into supported housing, 14 per cent obtained private accommodation, 11 per cent moved into social housing and 14 per cent moved in with a friend.'[2]

In Canada, Host Homes programs have been implemented in a number of communities, including Calgary, Alberta, and Halton Region and York Region in Ontario. 360° Kids, an organization in York Region, is planning to take the Nightstop Host Homes model across Canada, and to adapt it further to provide long term accommodation for young people.

In recent years, there has been an expansion of host homes programs for youth in the United States. Point Source Youth[3] has played an important role in developing and implementing a range of Host Homes programs, as well as programs to enhance Family and Natural supports, and Rapid Rehousing, which are designed to support LGBTQ2S youth. Point Source Youth recently released its *Host Homes Handbook*,[4] which includes information on how to set up a Host Homes program, the host and youth application process, training, and a budget template.[5]

Endnotes

1. For more information, visit: *<https://uk.depaulcharity.org/NightstopUK>*
2. Insley E 2010, *Staying safe: An evaluation of Nightstop Services <http://www.serio.ac.uk/resources/files/An per cent20Evaluation per cent20of per cent20Nightstop per cent20Devon per cent20Final per cent20Report per cent20- per cent20PDF.pdf>*
3. For more information, visit: *<https://www.pointsourceyouth.org/>*
4. For more information, visit: *<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/553bd8dfe4b06d949518334e/t/5b9018d68a922d130c0cfa5b/1536170201241/Host_Home_Handbook_ per cent28free+download per cent29.pdf>*
5. Much of the content of this Prevention Intervention Profile has been drawn from *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*: *<https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/roadmap-prevention-youth-homelessness>*



Old Brewery Mission

Photo by Dennis Jarvis

Changing Our Definition of Success

Jessica Day, Director of Program Innovation, Youth Empowerment and Support Services (YESS)
with Camiel Friend, Nexus Shelter Team Lead, YESS

Change is hard. Youth Empowerment and Support Services (YESS) has been operating with this difficult reality for almost 40 years; working to motivate young people to change their lives, working to change the mindset of the community we work in and working to change the landscape of social services practices. Over this time, we have been evolving and adapting our practices and philosophies to find the right foundation for successful change for young people, staff and the community. It wasn't always an easy and it was often times, a fight between the systemic outcomes and the capacities of the front line.

Success for the youth was measured in simplistic boxes of 'Education, Employment or Independent Living' and within those boxes, success was further defined as 'sustainable housing for two+ years;' an outcome we had no idea how to measure nor capacity to follow up to ensure housing was sustained. How does an organization continue to support and motivate young people towards independence when re-entry into homelessness was a reality and deemed as a 'failure?'

In 2017, YESS underwent a deep organizational shift and began the process of revisioning how we could better serve the youth stuck in a housing instability cycle and still align with larger systemic goals. We knew we had a lot of internal work to do and began the process by moving into a youth-and-trauma-focused approach. As we vulnerably completed an agency audit on how trauma-focused we were, several gaps and realities came to light; our agency was ready to change but it would require a lot of vulnerability, transparency and focused work to align all our departments in a trauma-informed way.

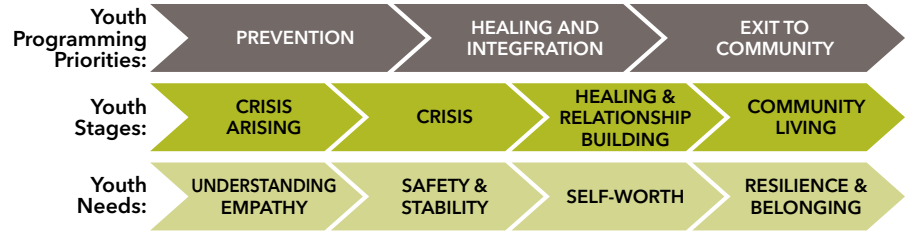
All of the youth that walk through our doors have experience deep developmental trauma and are suffering from various degrees of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Our intention became bringing this trauma awareness, language and focus to the forefront of our front-line work, as well as city-wide strategic planning. We came to understand that our case planning model needed to allow for a spectrum of progress that would help us identify priority work, tailored to the individual needs of each young person.

The YESS Transition Through Trauma Model (below) then expanded our internal understanding of 'success' and with youth and staff feedback, we were able to identify trauma-informed definitions that captured progress for youth and were something they could use as stepping stones to larger goals. Our definition of success had been, for so many years, focused (internally and externally) on our ability to provide basic shelter and needs, housing, life skills, education, and employment opportunities. We could see that while we are providing these things, the youth did not feel successful, nor were they able to meet their goals. When the young people were unable to achieve these small goals, or became re-traumatized in the process, it was no longer a 'failure' for them; their progress was seen as fluid transition and never a linear outcome.

In 2019, with the release of the *Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*, we were inspired by the definition of success for preventing youth homelessness:

- Reducing the likelihood that a young person will experience homelessness, or
- Providing youth experiencing homelessness with the necessary supports to stabilize their housing, improve their wellbeing, reintegrate into the community, and avoid re-entry into homelessness.[1]

This definition and framework allowed for the complexity of each young persons' story, and specifically spoke to the elimination of those barriers and factors leading to homelessness or re-entry. It challenged us to align our localized definition of success that would match the complex, individual needs of each youth and fit within the larger systemic structure *The Roadmap* provides. This definition also allowed us to see that there were several principles we needed to pay attention to in our prevention work. That, along with being *Trauma* focused, we need to (and can be) *Housing First* focused, *Family and Natural Supports* focused and *Prevention and Diversion* focused.



YESS Transition Through Trauma Model

The work to design the programs and the organizational logic models was natural; our *Transition Through Trauma* model allowed us to individually define each youth's journey; finding the necessary supports to stabilize their housing, increase their wellbeing, reintegrate into their community, and avoid re-entry into homelessness. The communication between agencies in our community also improved as we were all able to define our agency work within a larger, unified language base. It all aligned so well.

We also needed to understand that the same level of care and attention we put into changing programs for the betterment of our young people, needed to be put into our staff when we planned and implemented the organizational change.

Camiel Friend has a unique perspective on the changes that have happened both within YESS and the industry as a whole. Camiel has been working at YESS for three years and is currently a team lead at our overnight shelter, however her journey with YESS began when she was a teenager and accessed our services due to her own traumatic home life. When asked about the effects of the new Roadmap structure and change process on both staff and the youth, Camiel shared:

> *'The purpose of YESS* [before] *was to have youth housed with an undefined idea of success. In the community, youth issues were hidden and we were all treated like criminals, even if we were not criminals or were simply surviving. I remember stealing a shirt from a store to go to a job interview* [a goal requirement to success within YESS and Children's Services]*; I got the job, but in the eyes of the community I was a criminal. We were expected to carry the weight of trauma, mental health, addictions, stigma and injustice on top of regular teenage development and hormones, with no real understanding and without being heard.'*

Camiel agrees that The Roadmap and our Transition Through Trauma model can give a higher purpose and logic to the work being done on the front line when it implemented meaningfully:

> *'I truly believe in understanding the 'why' behind the work we do. This new prevention model allowed for flexibility and more understanding of how to navigate the grey areas that youth exist within. Every step of this vision process was explained to us and broken down for us and it all tied together so well. It just made sense! I could understand the logic and it made me feel more empowered to speak up and to do the work.'*

When asked if it was important to be that frontline staff were involved in the development of the Transition Through Trauma model and re-envisioning, she agreed:

> *'It's nice to know that our thoughts on the work we do with our youth, here in our city, was reflected in the national roadmap. It was also great to know that the national framework helped give us a more progressive idea of success for the youth.'*

She went on to say that,

> *'It was difficult at first, to really understand what 'Prevention' or 'Diversion' meant for our work and it wasn't always clear how the national language applied to our daily tasks. It really helped having someone to breakdown those national phrases into our language so we could better relate to it and help us understand that our work fit within these definitions. Prevention, to me, meant stopping new youth from experiencing homelessness. It helped to have the definition broadened to include those who re-experience homelessness after moving into independence.'*

Camiel also validated that:

> *'It was good to be transparent with the youth that their stories are feeding into a bigger purpose and this allows them an environment where their information is heard and necessary to help develop safety, understanding and education for the people trying to help them. They aren't just another number, our work isn't taken for granted and the youth and staff are now humanized.'*

In two short years, our focus at YESS has shifted from a simplistic basic needs and rapid re-housing approach to a more educated understanding of true prevention success. Understanding and applying the *Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*, helped us re-evaluate what was needed in order to help our youth successfully reintegrate into communities. YESS, and the partners and community around us must provide safety and stability, help build self-worth, help build the tools for resilience, and help to establish a sense of belonging within the community. We know this is the right direction because our youth feel safer, more motivated and are now able to self-identify their own successes.

Change may be hard… but it's worth it.

Jazmine H., age 17, Calgary, Alberta — *Untitled*

Endnote

1. Gaetz S, Schwan K, Redman M, French D and Dej E 2018, *The roadmap for the prevention of youth homelessness*, A Buchnea (Ed.), Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, Toronto, ON.

'It's Better When You're Not Alone': Connections to Family and Natural Supports as Part of the Solution to Youth Homelessness

Justin Sage-Passant RP, Family and Natural Supports Project Coordinator, Covenant House Toronto

In 2018, Covenant House Toronto implemented the Family and Natural Support (FNS) Program, a part of the Making the Shift Demonstration Project (MtS DEMS). MtS DEMS is a national initiative led by A Way Home Canada and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness with the intention of supporting a shift away from responding to youth homelessness after-the-fact, and towards a system that values prevention and moving young people out of homelessness quickly, with all of the supports necessary for wellness and a healthy transition to adulthood.

The FNS Program helps youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness, to find and/or strengthen connections with family and chosen supports. The goal is for all youth to have supportive relationships that are separate from and will continue after their homelessness and service provision experiences. FNS workers provide hands-on support to both youth and their family members to mediate conflicts, reconcile or strengthen relationships, and help youth and families access resources they might need.

In this article the rationale for FNS work will be provided, followed by an overview of Covenant House Toronto's FNS Program. Comments from youth and family members who participated in consultations that informed the program design are included to highlight some key components of our FNS approach.

> *'You don't know how desperate it is. It's lonely being homeless. You want to have friends, but no one trusts each other. You want someone who's there for you all the time, no matter what.'*
>
> — Youth consultant to the Toronto FNS Program

Why a Focus on Family?

It is well recognized that a main cause of youth homelessness is breakdown in close relationships or conflict within the home,[1] and traditionally the homeless sector in Toronto has viewed family almost exclusively as a problematic part of a young persons' past. This has resulted in a view that family is something young people should be encouraged to separate from, with programs and services that focus on young people building skills so that they can be self-sufficient and independent.[2]

However, we know that despite challenging experiences, young people often maintain contact with family during their homeless experience. In our most recent survey of 134 young people accessing Covenant House Toronto's programs, 71.6 per cent of youth reported that they had contact with family within the last six months. 53.7 per cent indicated that they remained close with at least one family member and 35.8 per cent said they would return to live with their family if things improved. Recognizing this reality, we want to support opportunities, when appropriate, to resolve conflicts and reconcile relationships. We also want to help young people navigate challenging relationships in safe and healthy ways, or find and connect with other family members and chosen supports to strengthen their network of supportive people.

> *'People put things off, wait a week, then a month, then longer. If you wait too long it becomes too difficult. Everyone will regret not connecting with family if they do nothing.'*
>
> — Youth consultant to the Toronto FNS Program

The Importance of Relationships

The belief that relationships are important is at the core of our FNS work. Research has shown us that young people with strong community ties and family support are more likely to successfully navigate the transition from youth to adulthood than young people with limited or negative social connections.[3] We also know that non-professional supports can promote positive self-identity and well-being in young people.[4] Supportive family and social connections are also associated with increased resilience.[5,6]

> *'Having someone who is positive about you makes a big difference. It can motivate you, lift you out of it. In the harder times, you remember the positive things people have said about you.'*
>
> — Youth consultant to the Toronto FNS Program

This understanding informs the purpose of our FNS work; helping youth strengthen connections with family and natural supports can result in their homeless experience being brief, with fewer negative effects, and a reduction in the likelihood of returning to homelessness. Perhaps most importantly, we see belonging and connection as a basic human need that provides a platform for success in other areas of a young persons' life.

> *'I can't do school if my mental health is not good. My mental health is not good if my relationships aren't good.'*
>
> — Youth consultant to the Toronto FNS Program

Broadening the Context

Understanding the importance and need for young people to have healthy, supportive non-professional relationships, we have a broad view of who the client is. Our FNS approach is equally responsive to the need for inclusion, education, guidance, and support for the family members and chosen supports.

> *'I want to be recognized as part of the team and solution.'*
> — Family member consultant to the Toronto FNS Program

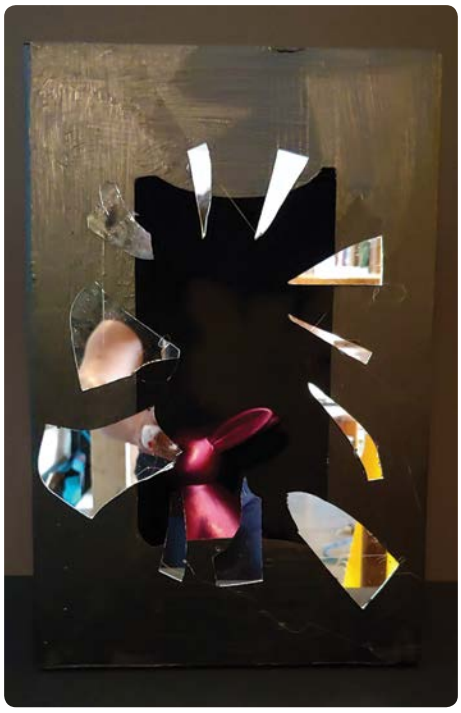
We recognize that the root causes of issues for many families are highly influenced by societal and structural-systemic factors.[7] Rather than seeing the individual as the unit of care and measurement, the individual, within the context of family and community, is our focus. As a result, we strive to provide a Trauma-Informed and culturally safe response that considers multiple systems and the ecological realities not only for the young person, but also for their family and chosen supports.

> *'Sometimes you need to start with the adults. We are a product of them.'*
> — Youth consultant to the Toronto FNS Program

The Toronto FNS Program Model

Our FNS Program is a voluntary, low-barrier service where the young person and their family works collaboratively with their FNS worker to identify goals and create an individualized service plan. FNS workers provide integrated services that include individual and family therapy, coaching and skill building, as well as systems navigation support. The team works in a mobile capacity meeting clients at shelters, family homes, and other convenient locations throughout the community.

The program operates in partnership with other service providers across the city. Currently, seven agencies are program partners and our FNS workers are integrated at eleven different sites (seven emergency shelters, three transitional housing programs and one drop-in program). Each FNS worker has scheduled hours at partner sites



Abril F. Montréal, Québec — *Sans tire*, 2019

to engage with young people and staff, deliver activities, and be available for appointments.

Supporting this model has been the work of the FNS Advisory group and the FNS Champions group. The Advisory is comprised of representatives from each of the partnering organizations who help inform decision making. The Champions are staff members from each of the sites where the FNS workers are integrated. Champions help with the coordination and implementation of the FNS Program at their site.

This approach has resulted in FNS services being accessible to more young people than if the program were integrated into one organization. The model also ensures that workers are able to provide consistent and ongoing support to young people as they move between and in and out of shelters.

> *'I don't want to open up, tell all my stuff, and then it just gets dropped.'*
> — Youth consultant to the Toronto FNS Program

Part of the Solution to Youth Homelessness

In the first year of implementation (August 1, 2018 – July 31, 2019), 109 young people and 60 family members received services from the FNS Program. During this time 29 per cent of the young people exited shelter for stable housing, with half returning to family homes. 71 per cent of clients identified that they have strengthened their family and natural support relationships as a result of receiving FNS services. These initial findings tell us there is an interest and need for FNS work among young people experiencing homelessness. In addition, we can see that FNS work is not solely about supporting young people to return to family homes. The opportunity to reconcile relationships and strengthen connections, even when this does not involve living with family, is an achievable outcome.

In order to recover from homelessness, young people need relationships which can act as buffers and safety nets for the future. They also need relationships to build happy lives that are full of the joy we may be lucky enough to have. It would be ridiculous to suggest that a job and a home are not important, because they absolutely are, but we must not forget the true cost of homelessness is often the loss of each other.

> *'It feels good to know that you are part of a family. It's better when you are not alone.'*
> — Youth consultant to the Toronto FNS Program.

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2. Winland D, Gaetz S and Patton T 2011, *Family matters — Homeless youth and Eva's Initiatives 'Family Reconnect' Program*, The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press, Toronto, ON.
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Investing in Youth by Investing in their Families and Natural Supports: Shelter Diversion Using a Family and Natural Supports Approach

Kat Main, Director of Evaluation and Research and
Kim Ledene, Director of Youth Housing and Shelter, Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary

Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary (BGCC) operates the only emergency shelter for young people aged 13 to 17 in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Due to major sectoral shifts over the last decade and the unintended consequences that followed, we were forced to re-evaluate how we work with vulnerable young people to prevent and end their experiences of homelessness in Calgary. This is the story of that shift, its challenges, and our journey to implement a Family and Natural Supports Approach in our Avenue 15 shelter program.

If a young person walked into Avenue 15 today, their experience would be drastically different than it was only a few years ago. Previously, on any given day you would see up to 25 young people (the program's capacity), whose stay lasted up to six-months or even a year. The interpretation of 'youth-led services' at that time was understood to mean that all power rested in the young persons' hands. When young people were ready, they would decide when they wanted to re-engage in mainstream life and end their experience of homelessness.

Parents were typically viewed as the bad guy and staff didn't always press the young person to reconnect with their family if they did not want to. After all, some parents had called and asked for their child to be placed in the shelter to 'teach them a lesson'. Staff primarily saw their role as the young persons' advocate and welcomed youth into Avenue 15 with open and loving arms.

Today, young people have an entirely different experience at Avenue 15. First of all, it is unlikely that they would even step foot inside the shelter after a parent's first phone call. Instead, they receive a follow-up from our Family and Natural Supports Worker the next day to help the family resolve the conflict that is threatening the young persons' stability in the home. Instead of up to 25 young people accessing the shelter, there might be only six or eight young people on any given day.

Today, you can see parents sitting inside the Family Room, meeting with staff and their child to create a plan for the young person to return home. You might even see a staff head out of the shelter to the movies with a young person and their parent so they can experience quality time together and work on repairing bonds. Whereas previously the young person might stay in the shelter for months, now it is rare to see a youth last up to three weeks before they return home or are connected with another natural support that can provide them with a stable living environment.

To understand this drastic shift in practice and the decrease in the number of young people accessing Avenue 15, we need to go back eight years to 2011 when Calgary launched a strategic plan to end youth homelessness — the first of its kind in Canada. The Calgary Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness created a massive sectoral shift in the city with significant impact on youth homelessness, including unintended consequences that led to many young people with less complex needs being 'stuck' for months at a time in shelter due to a lack of housing options.

A major strategy of the Youth Homelessness Plan was to enhance coordinated service delivery with an emphasis on addressing the needs of the most vulnerable and chronically homeless youth. To achieve this, Calgary adopted a coordinated access and assessment (CAA) table using an assessment tool designed to determine which youth clients were eligible for placement into Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) programs based on their level of need. Young people with the highest acuity scores (having the greatest risk and severity of needs) were prioritized for housing placements. While rapidly housing high acuity young people was wildly successful in Calgary, this created a completely different consequence for another group of young people — those who were experiencing their first episodes of homelessness.

Low acuity young people did not qualify for housing according to the assessment tool, and ended up in shelter longer, until they eventually accumulated enough risk and acuity to qualify for a housing referral if they could not or did not want to return home. Hence, we ended up with young people staying at Avenue 15 for up to six-months or a year. In 2017, a Refresh document was released by the Calgary Plan which captured some of the frustration these underserved young people were experiencing: *'I wasn't bad enough. I didn't screw up enough to get them to help me.'*[1]

With no other options for them, many young people who remained at Avenue 15 became more street-entrenched, increase their substance use, and experience sexual exploitation. We know that young people who stay longer at shelter begin to accumulate risks that will impact their future housing stability. Recent research from Chapin Hall confirms this and found that every additional day waiting for services was associated with a two per cent decrease in the likelihood of a young person being stably housed.[2] We realized that we had to get better at diverting youth from ever staying at Avenue 15 or minimize their length of time at the shelter considerably.

MR, DM, AO, JM, NT, AM, ages 14 to 17, Calgary, Alberta — *Avenue 15*

We needed to completely redesign the way we were working with these young people from the first point of contact using diversion as an early intervention strategy.

The 2017 Refresh released by the Calgary Plan also emphasized prevention as a priority and the need for a Family and Natural Supports (FNS) approach in addressing youth homelessness. Reconnecting to family and natural supports is a critical need for young people experiencing homelessness as the loss of a home is also the loss of relationships of dependence. The FNS approach works to support youth in identifying and connecting with natural support networks through both biological and natural support work to enhance or maintain housing stability.

We began our transition to a Family and Natural Supports focused shelter in June 2018 with a 'kick off' presentation to the staff team at Avenue 15. We transitioned 'keyworkers' to case managers and took them off the schedule so they could be in the community supporting young people and their natural supports in improving relationships and accessing resources. We also added two Family and Natural Support Workers to provide diversion services to youth and families who tried to access the shelter following family break-down.

Since implementing the FNS approach at Avenue 15, we have seen significant results in both diverting young people from the shelter and decreasing the length of their stays if they access the shelter. Within the first nine months of hiring our Family and Natural Supports workers, the occupancy rate at Avenue 15 has decreased from 61 per cent to 49 per cent. Of the 173 young people we served during that time, 78 of them were diverted from ever staying in the shelter. This means that by using the FNS approach we reduced possible shelter stays by 45 per cent in less than a year. Today, we are working with more young people and their natural supports who are not accessing a shelter bed than youth who are staying at the shelter.

This success has not come without trials. Some of our challenges during implementation included managing staff assumptions about natural supports, staff turnover and conflicting personal values, and identifying conflicting agency policy and procedures and system barriers. We expected some staff turnover as we knew it would disrupt the status quo of how we traditionally worked with families and natural supports and that some staff would struggle to see natural supports as an asset to the young people. In reality, we saw higher turnover than expected when we began the implementation. Some staff were frustrated and expressed concerns about what was best for young people — they found it difficult to let go of their role as young persons' 'best and only advocate'.

This raised a further challenge and learning: What if a young persons' natural support is a gang member that the young person is associated with, or someone that the young person uses harmful and illegal substances with? There are myriad issues with potentially dangerous and harmful activities, as well as challenging conversations with young people, natural supports, and other professionals around the best way to keep the youth safe. While challenging, we have learned that staff must learn to set aside their biases and seek out the most harm reductive approaches to support a young person to build healthy relationships with those natural supports that may not be the healthiest. When we view relationships through a harm reduction lens, we create space for social-emotional learning for young people to talk about these relationships and prevent them from taking these relationships underground.

Our biggest lesson has been that the FNS approach is an ongoing learning, one that requires staff use a contextually sensitive approach to be able to adapt their methods to the strengths, needs and circumstances of each young person and their natural supports. A recent quote from a former front-line staff who returned to Avenue 15 describes the shift like this:

> *'Previously we only saw Natural Supports as a barrier, but under this approach I see that we created that barrier. We now invest just as much into a youth's family as we do into them and now there are more options for youth to exit the shelter.'*

Keeping young people connected to their family and natural supports is the first and best line of defense for preventing youth homelessness.

Endnotes

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Preventing Youth Homelessness through Rights Education and Promotion: CERA's Model of Youth Engagement on Eviction Prevention and Housing Rights

Alyssa Brierley, Executive Director, Center for Equality Rights in Accommodation

Introduction

Attempts to address youth homelessness have historically focused on emergency responses, rather than working upstream to prevent homelessness.[1] However, since 2011, the Center for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA)[2] has assisted young people in overcoming barriers to housing through creatively engaging with their rights and the law.[3] A key component of preventing youth homelessness is evictions prevention,[4] which can take several forms, including providing information and advice for young people and their families, and accessing legal supports, advice and representation.[5]

One of the main barriers young people face when accessing housing is discrimination from housing providers. Landlords deny young people housing for various intersectional reasons, including being sole-support parents or students; receiving social assistance; having a lack of credit or rental history; or not satisfying minimum income requirements. More young people would secure and maintain housing if they had access to the knowledge and resources needed to advocate for their rights and stand up to discrimination. This paper provides a brief overview of CERA's interventions in this area.

Youth-Specific Barriers to Housing Rights

To address youth-specific barriers to housing rights, it is critical that the voices of young people are at the center of our work. In 2017 and 2018, CERA held workshops with 101 young people who know homelessness and 78 workers in five Ontario communities. An additional 66 young people responded to informational surveys, dozens of young people participated in a consultation held in Ottawa in January 2018, and over 150 youth accessed informational or advocacy supports at CERA. CERA was also involved in direct engagement and education of over 250 private residential landlords across the province.[6]

The survey asked young people to share their experiences of barriers to housing and accessing justice, and results showed that:

- 36 per cent of young people had been denied an apartment for reasons related to their age.
- 56 per cent said their rental application had been refused because of their source of income.
- 74 per cent said they believe they are treated differently by landlords because of stereotypically negative perceptions about young people.
- 64 per cent have faced serious maintenance problems. In particular, 44 per cent have had no access to vital services (for example, heat, hot water) at some point during a tenancy, and 37 per cent have faced eviction.

Young people identified other barriers to housing:

- Many hydro providers do not allow young people under 18 to sign contracts, creating problems for leaseholders who are 16 or 17.
- Significant power imbalances with landlords and fears of creating conflict by enforcing

Anne A-R. First experience of homelessness at 15 years old, St-Jerôme, Québec — *Cartoon night*, 2019

their rights, result in a reluctance to connect with legal support services available to them.

- Some landlords assume young people do not know their rights, and take advantage of this by, for example, requiring youth to sign new leases and raise rents above the legal maximum increase permitted by law.

These barriers can cause marginalized young people to experience trauma when they are repeatedly refused rental units.

CERA's Arts-Based Model for Rights Education

Youth homelessness is both a human rights violation and is a problem that a human rights approach can help to solve. Therefore, a comprehensive focus on rights and corresponding responsibilities, is at the center of our model. Our underlying philosophy is that people who know and are confident in asserting their rights are more likely to do so, and that doing so is more likely to result in fewer evictions.

In our educational work, CERA provides an in-depth overview of the rental housing and support system, so that youth are better equipped to navigate the complex and often overwhelming system. CERA's model engages youth who have experienced homelessness or housing precarity and trains them as peer facilitators. Once trained, the peer facilitators hold workshops with CERA staff at youth homeless shelters and drop-in centers across Toronto, educating their peers on housing rights using an arts-based model. Arts-based and creative programs help to create safe spaces, allowing participants to build connections between systemic failings and personal experiences, which can improve learning. To date, CERA has trained four peer facilitators and has held 18 workshops, educating over 200 young people.

Surveys of participants indicated that this intervention has been successful:

- 88 per cent of youth workshop participants reported that the training gave them a substantially better understanding of their rights in rental housing.
- Over 93 per cent of youth workshop participants indicated that the content learned during the session would enhance their ability to self-advocate when facing future housing-related issues.
- 77 per cent of youth workshop participants indicated that the combination of creative activities throughout the session improved their learning experience.

During our arts-based workshops, young people made the following recommendations for improving the rental housing system so that it supports access to housing and human rights:

1. Formal educational workshops about housing rights (and responsibilities) should be provided for everyone — both tenants and landlords.
2. Landlords should be trained and held accountable, by providing tenants stronger and simplified enforcement mechanisms.
3. Youth-led, rights-based housing education should be readily available to all young people, especially those who face intersecting discriminatory barriers in the rental housing system.
4. Adaptive and youth-friendly housing support services need to be mainstream, and efforts to improve access to housing justice must include young people in leadership roles.

Overall, young people would like to increase awareness of their rights and obligations through comprehensive and accessible education for themselves, landlords, and the community.

Conclusion

CERA continues to implement and develop legal education methods in cooperation with young people who have lived experiences of homelessness. The educational method is constantly improving based on the ongoing feedback received from youth participants. Notably, artistic methods continue to facilitate stress relief and make legal content more accessible. CERA's model contributes to the protection and promotion of human rights by encouraging Ontario youth to develop expectations and hold landlords and the housing system accountable through building individual and community capacity by educating workers and the young people that they serve.

By providing opportunities for young people to learn about their housing rights and be confident in asserting them, programs such as this play a crucial role in eviction prevention and youth homelessness prevention more broadly. Moreover, providing youth-focused, accessible resources and safe environments for people with lived experience of homelessness to learn is crucial in providing supports in an effective, responsive, and responsible manner. Such programs should be supported and expanded, and CERA's current programming and the key learnings presented in this brief article can provide a basis for doing so.

Endnotes

1. Gaetz S, Schwan K, Redman M, French D and Dej E 2018, *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness — Executive Summary*, A Buchnea (Ed.), Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, Toronto, ON.
2. Founded in 1987, CERA (the Center for Equality Rights in Accommodation) is a not-for-profit charitable organization that works to advance housing security and protect human rights in housing for tenants. CERA is the only organization in Canada that specifically focuses on fighting discrimination in housing and using human rights legislation to challenge housing insecurity and homelessness. CERA defends housing rights and human rights by assisting marginalized renters in Ontario facing eviction and human rights violations in their housing. CERA educates individuals and communities about their housing rights while advocating for progressive and inclusive housing law and policy
3. CERA has received funding to support its youth initiatives from Employment and Skills Development Canada, the United Way of Greater Toronto and York Region and the P and L Odette Foundation.
4. Ibid.
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Access to Justice Through Street Youth Legal Services

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Julia Huys, Street Youth Legal Services Lawyer at Justice for Children and Youth

Street Youth Legal Services ('SYLS'), is a unique legal outreach program in Toronto, Canada that connects with 16 to 24-year-old street-involved young people where they spend their time — at drop-ins, shelters and health clinics. The program was developed by Justice for Children and Youth (JFCY), a children's rights legal aid clinic. The SYLS model was designed to increase access to justice by providing legal education, advice, and representation to Toronto's most vulnerable young people. Much of the work by SYLS addresses a variety of legal issues that affect a young person's housing stability by preventing homelessness from occurring, or assisting with a successful transition out of homelessness.

SYLS celebrated its 20th anniversary this year. Prior to the start of SYLS, staff at JFCY[1] held focus groups with young people experiencing homelessness to develop a legal program that was truly accessible to them. JFCY quickly learned that the traditional lawyer-client model was going to be ineffective. Young people experiencing homelessness were rarely going to attend at a lawyer's office, and were even hesitant to access their local community legal aid clinic. The young people needed simple, direct access without wait times or lengthy intake processes. This resulted in the establishment of the Street Youth Legal Services program and the 'SYLS lawyer' role — a lawyer dedicated to meet young people where they spend their time, be a familiar, trusting face, dress informally and be accessible to young people by cell phone. At the same time, the SYLS lawyer is held to the same professional standards of any lawyer — fully informing clients of their options, respectfully taking instructions, and showing utmost care to their matter.

Through 20 years of experience of service, JFCY has learnt that there are numerous legal issues — including eviction, involvement in child protection, discrimination (in housing, education, healthcare, or employment), income insecurity, and the consequences of youth criminal justice involvement — that affect a young person's housing stability. For example, when a young person is denied social assistance because of their age, they lack the income security necessary to pay their rent and stay in school; when a young person is discriminated against on the basis of their race or sexual orientation by a potential landlord or employer, they cannot find or afford housing and spend more time in the shelter; or, when a young person is expelled from school and not informed of their right to appeal the expulsion, their schooling is disrupted and they fall behind or quit entirely. Homelessness, as we have learned, is as much the result of rights violations as it is about inequality or housing affordability. All of these legal problems have a legal solution.

In addition to the legal solutions, if there is legal intervention at an earlier stage it is often possible to prevent homelessness caused by legal issues. We would also argue that in every story of a person who has found themselves experiencing homelessness there has been an injustice that contributed to their situation. This is the crux of the work by the SYLS program. Yet the rights of young people, particularly those who are homeless, are habitually overlooked. By the time the SYLS lawyer learns of the legal problem, it is often too late to avoid the consequences — sometimes years too late.

The need to recognize street involved young people as rights-holders was addressed by the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of

Mahar A., age 16, Calgary, Alberta — *Untitled*

the Child in their *2017 General Comment 21* on Children in Street Situation[2] that placed an obligation on State actors and agencies to enhance access to justice by protecting and promoting the rights of street involved young people and set out guiding principles on what a young person's rights are and what they should look like. JFCY made submissions to the UN in the process of developing General Comment 21,[3] and we believe that changes are needed in Canada in order to implement it to enhance access to justice and effectively prevent young people from experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

First, legal services must be designed to be accessible to street involved youth. This is addressed through the SYLS model, which should be replicated everywhere. It is simply not possible to meaningfully offer legal services to young people experiencing homelessness if lawyers do not go directly to them and provide their services in a manner that accommodates the young person's needs. Specialized legal services need to be fully funded and widely available to ensure access to justice. From an economic perspective, recent studies have shown that every dollar that is spent on legal aid, it saves $6 in other services.[4]

Second, young people must know their rights exist, because oftentimes they do not. The SYLS lawyer facilitates know-your-rights workshops and legal advice drop-ins for young people in shelters and street youth serving agencies. Throughout the years, we have regularly heard 'I wish I had known that earlier.' In each situation a young person's rights were violated and the stability of their housing compromised. If they had known earlier, they may have been able to seek legal assistance and thereby protect their housing. Having rights is not enough; a young person must also know about them.

All youth serving agencies can play a role ensuring young people have access to legal information and assistance. We have been told by young people in shelters that they at one point told a shelter worker or trusted adult about their legal problem and nothing was done. Most likely, that person — a social worker, foster parent, or teacher — did not realize that there was a legal problem, or did not know what steps to take next or who to contact. This is why part of JFCY's work is to provide legal education workshops to train staff at youth-serving agencies so service providers are able to identify the legal issues that affect a young person's housing and get in touch with their local legal aid clinic or an appropriate lawyer. To do this requires an active effort to learn about legal issues that can affect a young person's housing stability and to seek out the appropriate legal information and services.

Finally, young people must understand that justice is something that is attainable and worth fighting for. The young people we meet at youth shelters and drop-in centers may give up on their rights because they do not understand what it looks like to have rights, they do not believe their rights are attainable to them, or they have been influenced by years of a negative culture that has taught them that young people who stand up for themselves are difficult or problematic or that their voice is not worth hearing. As a result, they are discouraged from taking action. Preventing homelessness requires a shift to a culture of services that are rights-centered and rights-respecting.

What does a rights-centered approach look like? What is a culture of rights? On a more theoretical level, it is about putting the human dignity of the young person at the center of all services provided to them. In practice, this requires the approach that JFCY lawyers take in all interactions with their clients: providing information that includes options; being transparent about what each option entails; informing young people about their rights at all times — even when seemingly inconvenient to do so; and respecting the opinions and choices of the young person. As a lawyer, it involves taking their instructions. As a trusted adult, it includes being accountable to do what we say we are going to do. As an agency, it means having clear processes for young people to seek assistance, make complaints, appeal decisions made about them, and have their opinions respected and assessed by an unbiased decision-maker in a manner that is accessible and useful to the young person. This should occur in all agencies servicing young people, at every level.

Engaging with one's rights takes knowledge and practice. Young people need practice to be encouraged and empowered to engage with their rights — whether it is to file a human rights complaint against their employer for discrimination, or take action against their landlord for an illegal eviction. For example, they can get practice from the shelter, where they should be able to contest a discharge that felt unfair and have the process be fair to them (no matter the outcome), or appeal an expulsion from school and be meaningfully heard throughout the appeal process. They must be given the knowledge to understand their rights and the processes that exist, and they must also be provided with legal assistance.

The SYLS program was designed to educate young people about their legal rights and to empower our most vulnerable citizens. Our goal at JFCY is to enhance the living situations of young people experiencing homelessness and engaging them in a rights-centered approach to build trust and citizenship. We encourage community service providers and policymakers to seek out legal resources, make connections and ensure access to justice for all young people.

Endnotes

1. The research and program was spearheaded and developed by Mary Birdsell, JFCY's current Executive Director. Visit the following link for more information: *<http://jfcy.org/en/community-partnerships/street-youth-legal-services/>*
2. Committee on the Rights of the Child 2017, *General Comment No. 21 on children in street situations*. Retrieved from: *<https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/GC/21&Lang=en>*
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Condemned to Poverty: The Reality of Homelessness and Cyclical Poverty in A Small Town

Leigh Bursey

My name is Leigh Bursey. I am a 32-year-old municipal councillor in the beautiful city of Brockville, Ontario, Canada. Currently in my third term of governance, I have had the privilege of representing this incredible city for the last nine years of my life and have been able to parlay my public profile into a tremendous lifetime of experiences.

I am an activist.

Some look at me and they see a spunky punk rocker, covered in tattoos, who probably uses too many expletives to make a point. I still wear slip-on skater shoes, and I hate neckties. In my public life, I have been consistently bombastic, colorful, and (generally) unapologetic. This outgoing exterior does not mean that I'm unaware of the world around me or the challenges many others face. To ignore these challenges would be to ignore everything that inspires me to battle through my own depression, my family's poverty cycles, and my own shortcomings as an adult still finding his place. If I plan on effectively advocating for people who are struggling like I have, and make incremental changes that can have direct impacts on the quality of life for others who are caught in a vortex of self-abuse, addiction, precarious housing, episodic and chronic homelessness, and societal disregard, I need to know what I am talking about and stand behind it.

…I didn't start out this way.

There was a time in my adolescence where my mother and I pitched a tent in a provincial campsite, fleeing a domestic situation that stripped us of our belongings, our finances, and our dignity. Hope was all we had. That and a killer playlist of songs that would become the soundtrack to our misfortunes, as well as our personal triumphs. What is interesting about this particular footnote of my story is that it went undisclosed for many years and was often intentionally overlooked when exploring the narrative of my adolescence. I think a lot of that was in part personal shame, part not understanding the complexities of the issue that I had personally faced, and part a desire to protect my family and myself from scrutiny and tokenism. It took me years to put a name on this interim chapter of my life, and much research to understand how our situation was not unlike many others' collective struggles. Calling it 'homelessness' never seemed appropriate to me when comparing it to other more urgent and chronic examples.

Even while living in a tent, I didn't know I was poor. My mother, who often struggled with her own litany of bad decisions, coping mechanisms and misguided trusts, did her best to provide for me and do what she thought was right, even though she was sometimes wrong. In fact, identifying as homeless was never something I was comfortable with until I came to better understand what that term meant. You see, like many, I often pictured homelessness as a traditional stereotype that fostered a large urban narrative. Syringes, squeegees, and panhandling…little did I realize how wrong I was. Brief intervals of homelessness or precarious housing went undocumented, and we never interpreted homelessness as an issue tied specifically to domestic uncertainty.

Jesse Dekel — *Inovaiting*, 2019

That said, I was a small part of the 40.1 per cent of young people who were under the age of 16 when they first experienced homelessness, the 76 per cent who had multiple experiences of homelessness, and the 85.4 per cent who experienced a mental health crisis (part circumstantial and part ongoing self-care). I was one of 42 per cent of the young people reporting at least one suicide attempt (and again circumstance played a role, and this struggle would actually thrust me to the forefront much later in my young life), and I was also part of the 57.8 per cent who had involvement with child welfare (based entirely on this tumultuous circumstance).[1] I now know how to interpret this data and relate it to my own situation because now a roadmap to youth homelessness prevention exists.

The truth is, I don't hate the person who hurt my mother. I wish no one related to our situation any pain, including those who made our circumstances worse (even when they were trying to help). The proper toolbox to prevent these scenarios was not yet formalized, and many resources were not widely available. What I also realize is that even your adversaries are human and deserve compassion and understanding. In his later years, my late stepfather became an ally, but only once his authority had been removed and the balance of power could be restored in favor of my mother and I.

Jesse Dekel — *stagnancy*, 2018

The purpose of this article is to do my very best to articulate that homelessness and precarious housing (specifically in many young people and young families), is not confined to large urban centers. In fact, not only does it exist today in my small city, but it exists just a few hundred feet from my own front door.

Regardless of political affiliation, many times budgets are balanced on the backs of the poor, and even the most seemingly sympathetic to those wedged between the cracks of social institutions, may only have a limited grasp of the realities that so many others are facing. As a city councillor, I've noticed that people see me as an ally and are comfortable sharing with me the fears they have of losing stable housing in our city. Many people reach out to me when they feel they have nowhere else to go and see no one who is accessible to them. It is my opinion that if youth in need of support feel that the system continues to fail them, how can we as a community ever expect a young person to do anything but fail themselves in their adulthood?

In creating government responses to preventing youth homelessness, an understanding that cyclical poverty, social disconnection, and chronic addictions are not problems in need of quick fixes but instead must be our central focus. These cycles of poverty are present even in rural Ontario.

We must return to understanding the purpose of housing and homelessness support services for youth, as opposed to getting caught in the weeds of a particular program's name or political agenda. Along with a deep investment in affordable housing, we must better understand the realities of poverty that lead young people into homelessness and how we can work to support them before they lose stable housing. When this system fails, others become overburdened — the criminal justice system has become an expensive housing system. Children's Services is plagued by people unable to provide for their children based on a lack of affordable housing for their families, which speaks directly to the cyclical nature of homelessness.

A friend recently brought me to a homelessness encampment he had stumbled upon in the woods. I went to speak and learn from the occupants, and I came to realize that one of them was someone who once lived at a local non-profit housing complex that I work with. How did this young adult go from stable, adequate housing and okay, to a point of crisis? I was able to reach out to some local connections and get them some necessary survival items to help ease their burdens. I also got to know them and their situation, which has only highlighted the injustice that plagues trajectories into housing instability. Trouble with the law, a mistrust of institutions, lost identification, and the absence of basic needs make it easy to fall into and hard to exit homelessness.

This encampment, like others, is full of individuals experiencing complex and intersecting issues relating to precarity and poverty. This is certainly not however, a unique instance, and if we continue to choose to regard homelessness as an urban-specific issue we will certainly be seeing more of them.

I am a survivor of long-term poverty. And I am one of the lucky ones that was able to overcome my obstacles in my formative years of development. I had people believe in me when I didn't believe in myself, and I was encouraged to learn how to use my voice for something larger than my individual needs as I grew into adulthood. Others aren't so lucky!

According to *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*, *'Youth homelessness prevention refers to policies, practices, and interventions that either reduce the likelihood that a young person will experience homelessness, or provide youth experiencing homelessness with the necessary supports to stabilize their housing, improve their wellbeing, connect with community, and avoid re-entry into homelessness.'*[2] Recognizing this, I think it is important that this definition not only be adopted but implemented with full faith. I was lucky in that supports existed for me which shortened my youth homelessness experience, and which have since assisted my family in avoiding falling into similar patterns of displacement. Some of these very stories might ultimately be different now if this toolbox had been in place to prevent the cycle of youth homelessness from beginning in the first place.

Let's not condemn those in need to poverty any longer, and let's not pretend that this issue is not in our own backyards. In my city (like many others), that couldn't be further from the truth.

Endnotes

1. Gaetz S, O'Grady B, Kidd S and Schwan K 2016, *Without a home: The national youth homelessness survey*, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, Toronto
2. Gaetz S, Schwan K, Redman M, French, D and Dej, E 2018, *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness — Executive Summary*, A Buchnea (Ed), Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, Toronto

Prevention Intervention Profile: Housing First for Youth

Dr. Stephen Gaetz, Professor, Faculty of Education, York University;
President of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness;
Scientific Director of the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab

What Is Housing First for Youth?

'Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is a rights-based intervention for young people (aged 13 to 24) who experience homelessness, or who are at risk. It is designed to address the needs of developing adolescents and young adults by providing them with immediate access to housing that is safe, affordable and appropriate, and the necessary and age-appropriate supports that focus on health, well-being, life skills, engagement in education and employment, and social inclusion. The goal of HF4Y is not simply to provide housing stability, but to support young people as youth and facilitate a healthy transition to adulthood.'[1]

Housing First exists as one of the few homelessness interventions for which the accumulated evidence justifies calling it a 'best practice.' The HF4Y approach adapts this model to the unique needs of young people. A comprehensive framework identifying the range and kinds of supports that can contribute to housing stabilization has been described as part of the Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) program model.

THIS is Housing First for Youth: A Program Model Guide[2] outlines a broader range of supports than is typically associated with Housing First targeting adults, because it is designed to address the needs of developing adolescents and young adults. In addition, a key goal of HF4Y is not simply to help young people become independently housed, but to be supported though a successful transition into adulthood, independence, and well-being.

How Does HF4Y Prevent Homelessness?

Housing First for Youth is a program model that fits under the umbrella of 'housing stabilization' — one of the five key types of homelessness prevention outlined in *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*.[3] Housing stabilization involves *'assisting young people who have already experienced homelessness and housing precarity to exit that situation as quickly as possible, with the necessary supports in place to ensure they do not cycle back into homelessness again'*. This is a particularly important preventive intervention because research tells us that many youth who exit homelessness do not do well — they are not recovering, they are living in poverty, they are not re-engaging in education or employment, they are not overcoming social exclusion.[4]

The Housing First for Youth model is designed to enhance housing stabilization for this vulnerable group of young people.

Jesse Dekel — *Print shop*, 2019

Core Principles

1. A right to housing with no preconditions

   All young people have the human right to housing that is safe, affordable, and appropriate. This housing should reflect the needs and abilities of developing adolescents and young adults. Housing is not conditional on housing 'readiness,' sobriety, or abstinence.

2. Youth choice, youth voice and self-determination

   HF4Y emphasizes youth choice regarding housing and supports, as well as provides a framework for young people to bring their ideas, opinions, and knowledge to bear on the services and housing they access.

3. Positive youth development and wellness orientation

   HF4Y is not simply focused on providing housing and meeting basic needs, but on supporting recovery and wellness. Through

HF4Y, young people have access to a range of supports that enable them to nurture and maintain social, recreational, educational, occupational, and vocational activities. The HF4Y model employs a 'positive youth development' orientation — a strengths-based approach that focuses not just on risk and vulnerability, but also youth's assets. This orientation means focusing on building assets, confidence, health, and resilience.

4. Individualized, client-driven supports with no time limits

   Supports are client-driven and individually-tailored to young people and their expressed needs. The central philosophy of Housing First is that people have access to the supports they need as they choose, and these supports should be flexible and adaptable with respect to timeframes.

5. Social inclusion and community integration

   HF4Y promotes social inclusion through helping young people build strengths, skills, and relationships that will enable them to fully integrate into and participate in their community, in education, and employment. This requires socially supportive engagement and the opportunity to participate in meaningful activities.[5]

Service Delivery Model

As with the core principles, the service delivery model for HF4Y must consider the needs of developing adolescents and young adults. In other words, the approach to service delivery guiding Housing First work with adults may not be appropriate for young people. Key differences can be found in the areas of prioritization, case management, recommended caseloads, and importantly, program outcomes.

Models of Housing

In a community, there may be a range of housing options that support young people at risk of, or who experience homelessness. These different program interventions offer different kinds of housing and supports, as well as distinct terms of conditions. Some have strict time limits and or other conditions. On their own, disconnected from a HF4Y program, these models cannot be considered as HF4Y programs simply by virtue of offering housing and supports. This is because they are not consistent with the HF4Y core principles. The following diagram outlines a range of housing options for young people.

Models of Supports

The HF4Y model offers a broader range of supports than what is typically associated with Housing First targeting adults. Without providing young people with a broader range of supports that are both comprehensive and developmentally appropriate, we risk condemning young people to a life of extreme poverty, social exclusion, and potentially a return to homelessness. In other words, if we don't support young people well at this crucial juncture in their lives, we may be unwittingly creating the chronically homeless adults of tomorrow.

Figure 1. Models of Accommodation within HF4Y

1. **Housing supports**, including:
   a) Help in obtaining housing;
   b) Housing retention support;
   c) Rent Supplements;
   d) Access to start-up home furnishings and appliances;
   e) Support when things go wrong;
   f) Evictions prevention; and
   g) Aftercare.

2. **Supports for Health and Well-Being**, through:
   a) Enabling access to health care;
   b) Providing mental health supports;
   c) Trauma informed care;
   d) Harm reduction support;
   e) Enhancing personal safety;
   f) Food security; and
   g) Promoting healthy sexuality.

3. **Access to Income and Education**, including supports for:
   a) Educational engagement and achievement;
   b) Employment training; and
   c) Income and employment.

4. **Complementary supports**, including:
   a) Life skills;
   b) Advocacy support;
   c) System navigation support;
   d) Peer support;
   e) Parenting support; and
   f) Legal advice and representation.

5. **Enhancing Social Inclusion**, through:
   a) Developing and strengthening healthy social relationships and connections;
   b) Enhancing family and natural supports;
   c) Community engagement and social integration;
   d) Cultural connection; and
   e) Engagement in meaningful activities.

HF4Y in Practice

HF4Y programs that follow this model are now found in communities around the world. The first versions include *The Infinity Project* and *Home Fire (for Indigenous youth)* and are operated by The Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary (BGCC), an organization providing a range of services to adolescents and youth in Calgary, Alberta. In Europe, the HF4Y model has been implemented in several communities in Ireland, in Scotland and the Netherlands, for instance.

The need to develop a strong evidence base and to further refine the program model has led to the development and implementation of three demonstration projects by Making the Shift — A Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab. In each case, there is a strong research and evaluation agenda to identify individual and program outcomes (including Randomized Control Trials), and to contribute to the continuous improvement of the program model. The three demonstration projects include:

HF4Y — Ottawa.

This HF4Y program involves collaboration between three organizations, including Youth Services Bureau (YSB) of Ottawa, Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), and John Howard Society (JHS). Their focus is on supporting high needs youth who are currently experiencing homelessness, including supporting youth transitioning from prison. All of the Demonstration Projects have a strong emphasis on reconnection with education and employment, and 7 out of 30 youth registered for post-secondary school this fall.

Free 2 Be Housing First for Youth Leaving Care — Toronto.

This HF4Y program is run by Woodgreen Community Services. This program focuses on prevention by targeting youth who are transitioning from child protection services. Project leader Eric Wexler suggests: *'The lens on homelessness prevention within Free 2 Be is also unique, as most youth either in or from care are not street homeless, but housed in temporary, inadequate or precarious shelter with friends, relatives or the family members of intimate partners. Unfortunately, we have seen that these options are often accompanied by emotional and physical abuses akin to those our participants experienced in childhood, or new forms of abuse and instability as a result of domestic violence, sex trade work, human trafficking and/or the need to rotate through their housing options for a variety of interpersonal or systemic reasons.'*[6]

Endaayaang HF4Y — Hamilton.

Endaayaang, which means 'our home' in Ojibway, is a program designed to meet the needs of Indigenous youth. It is an Indigenous-led project run by the Hamilton Regional Indian Center, and is a hybrid model combining the HF4Y framework and core principles with Indigenous ways of knowing and a strong emphasis on cultural reconnection. In addition, the research and evaluation is Indigenous-led.

> *'So many of our Indigenous young people have been impacted by various systems creating self doubt, low self-esteem, insecurity, and a sense of worthlessness. Making the Shift has enabled us to focus on these areas to create a sense of community, an understanding of Indigenous Culture and identity, and empowerment to know and feel they are not what the systems have dictated them to be.'*
>
> *— Sheryl Green, Coordinator of Endaayaang.*

Endnotes

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Amanda M., age 17, Calgary, Alberta — *Mountains*

'Some Homeless Programs Treat You Like Helpless Dogs': The Importance of Identity in Socio-economic Inclusion and Homelessness Prevention

Dr. Naomi S Thulien, Assistant Professor, School of Nursing, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario
and Andrea Wang, Research Assistant, St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto, Ontario

In *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness* social inclusion is identified as a key feature of housing stabilization.[1] But what does meaningful social inclusion look like and how can we help facilitate this for young people exiting homelessness? This article provides a brief report of select preliminary findings from a six-week intervention designed to foster social and economic inclusion for young people who have exited homelessness. We extend our sincere appreciation to the nineteen young people who participated in this study and draw on their wisdom for prevention-focused solutions.

Field Notes: Naomi Thulien

May 2, 2018. Today is the first day of a six-week leadership and career development program for young people who have exited homelessness. The program is taking place in a trendy 'up-and-coming' neighborhood of Toronto, Canada. As I make my way on foot from the bustling subway station, I feel a wave of nervous anticipation hit my stomach. What if no one comes?

As the building comes into view, my uneasiness begins to ease. Although the program does not begin for another 20 minutes, there is already one young person waiting patiently outside for the doors to open. We engage in idle chit chat, enjoying being outside on a beautiful sunny spring morning. Five minutes later, seven more people arrive, the doors open, and we all head upstairs.

Our meeting space reminds me of a New York loft — exposed worn brick on the walls, old ceiling beams painted white, dark-framed windows, hardwood floors, and crystal chandeliers. There is upbeat music playing and the place feels welcoming. At each of the long dark tables, there is a plexiglass holder containing names of the participants who are to sit at that table. The names are typed in an elegant font.

We are greeted warmly by an uber enthusiastic Dr. Karyn Gordon and her assistant Kay. They offer the young people a selection of teas from an attractive wooden box. Coffee is served from a beautiful silver urn. I briefly worry that some participants may feel uncomfortable being in such a 'fancy' space; however, as I glance around, I see several beaming smiles. A few are taking selfies. I chuckle to myself and take a seat at the table. Dr. Gordon begins.

Background

The idea for this intervention began after the lead author (N.T.) conducted a ten-month ethnographic study in Toronto with nine young people who had exited homelessness.[2,3] Despite appearing 'successfully housed' in market rent accommodation, socioeconomic inequities such as inadequate income, underemployment, and limited social networks meant the study participants lived a precarious existence, one misstep away from returning to homelessness. Moreover, they faced less visible inequities related to their identity (self-concept). These identity-based inequities both contributed to and reinforced their low socioeconomic position.[4] As a consequence, the young people experienced an eroding sense of purpose and control, and diminishing self-efficacy and self-esteem. In other words, the crucial internal resources we all require to press on in the face of adversity — known as identity capital[5] — were underdeveloped and inadequately nurtured.

The study also highlighted that current supports for young people transitioning away from homelessness can be well-meaning but stigmatizing in terms of location (for example, homeless shelters) and emphasis (for example, housing-focused), with limited attention paid to the relationship between identity and meaningful socioeconomic inclusion. One important conclusion was that, in addition to providing more equitable socioeconomic resources (for example, living wage jobs), interventions targeting identity could play a pivotal role in socioeconomic inclusion and homelessness prevention.[6] The study discussed in this article was designed to explore whether and how an intervention targeting identity capital and delivered outside the social service sector might impact the socioeconomic inclusion of young people who have experienced homelessness.

Intervention Overview

Nineteen young people (aged 18 to 26) who had transitioned out of homelessness within the past three years were provided scholarships to participate in a six-week intervention focused on building identity capital and providing career direction. The intervention was designed and carried out by DK Leadership — an established leadership and 'coaching' (the organization prefers this term over 'counseling') center in Toronto. Participants attended weekly sessions, which included two full-day workshops and four half-day group coaching sessions.

The overarching theme of these sessions was building skills such as self-awareness and internal motivation, which was fostered through discussions around topics ranging from time management and organizational skills to goal setting and strategic career choices.

Importantly, DK Leadership did not adapt their programing for 'homeless youth'. The young people received the same education DK Leadership provides to their routine clientele, including executives from Fortune 500 companies and business leaders in over 15 countries.[7]

Methods

We enrolled two groups of young people in the study. Group One (8 participants) took the six-week program first, followed by Group Two (11 participants) three months after the first group had finished. We participated in the program with both groups of young people so we could better understand how they were 'taking up' the program.

Each time we met with participants, we used questionnaires to capture what we believe are important indicators of socio-economic inclusion: hope,[8] physical community integration (for example, attending a community event),[9] psychological community integration (for example, interacting with local residents),[10] social connectedness (for example, feeling like one belongs),[11] and self-esteem.[12] We also asked about education, employment, and income. These assessments were done at baseline (pre-intervention), one week after the intervention, and then every three months for nine-months post-intervention. After participants completed the DK Leadership program, we began conducting focus groups with them each time they completed the questionnaires.

Questionnaires were analyzed using two statistical tests: a t-test for statistical significance and a Cohen's d test for substantive significance (effect size). The latter is important because, especially in a small study, a finding might not appear statistically significant but the change in effect size shows us there might still be something relevant happening.[13] We explored common themes in the focus group discussions using a social integration framework developed from the aforementioned ethnographic study,[14] as our theoretical 'lens'. Here, we share select preliminary findings from pre-intervention to three-months post-intervention.

Figure 1 — Questionnaire Scores: Baseline to Three Months Post-Intervention

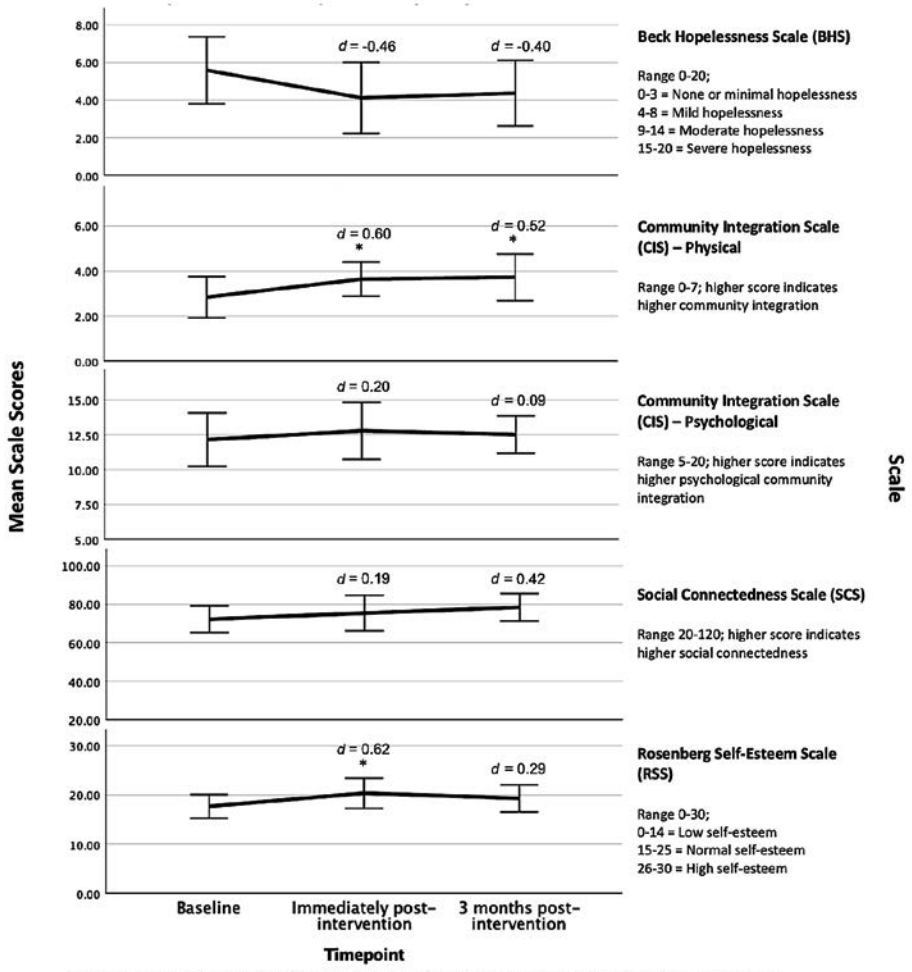

Figure 1. Scale scores of participants over time. *p < 0.05. Error bars: 95% Confidence Interval. Cohen's d: 0.2 = small, 0.5 = medium, 0.8 = large.

Preliminary Quantitative Results

Immediately after taking the DK Leadership program, Group One had better scores in all socioeconomic inclusion indicators compared to Group Two who had not yet taken the program. In particular, there were statistically significant improvements ($P < .05$) and large to very large positive effect sizes in self-esteem ($d = 1.2$) and physical community integration ($d = 1.8$) compared to Group Two. When the immediate post-intervention scores from Group One and Group Two were combined (Figure 1), we still saw improvements in all areas, with statistically significant improvements and moderate positive effect sizes in self-esteem and physical community integration compared to baseline (pre-intervention). There were also small positive effects seen in hopelessness and psychological community integration compared to baseline. At three-months post-intervention, the combined scores from Group One and Group Two remained better than baseline in all areas, with statistically significant improvement and moderate positive effect in physical community integration, and small positive effects in hopelessness, social connectedness, and self-esteem.

Preliminary Qualitative Results

Three intersecting themes emerged from the preliminary analysis of focus group discussions conducted immediately and three-months post-intervention:

1. reconstructing identity;
2. regaining control; and
3. (re)affirming potential.

Participants expressed satisfaction that the program was not located in an area associated with homelessness or aimed at 'homeless youth'. Several spoke of anticipating inferior services or services solely targeting mental health:

> *'I didn't want it to be a homeless program because in some*

homeless programs they treat you like helpless dogs, so that is why it was important for me not to be in a program like that.'

— Bob, Group One

'I thought it would be a mental health thing because that's what people give you when they think you need help. Like, 'Is there something wrong with his mental health?'

— Summer, Group Two

On the first day of the program, Dr. Gordon encouraged participants to examine where they were located in their 'car of life'. She came back to this idea several times over the six-week program and challenged participants to move to the driver's seat and take control:

'Every time we went Dr. Karyn was like, "You're in the driver's seat, step on the gas. Once you know your way, you go for it, but watch who's in your car." I will always remember that.'

— Sofia, Group Two

'The program gave me hope and forced me to push myself further because I was at a point where I felt burned out in my life. I was in the driver's seat, but I felt like I was getting distracted and letting go of the gas pedal, driving under the speed limit. The program made me speed again.'

— Jasmin, Group One

The DK Leadership program appeared to (re)affirm to participants that they were capable of succeeding in their transition away from homelessness. Indeed, Dr. Gordon reinforced that, because of their histories of homelessness, they were 'gritty' and tenacious — qualities in short supply and highly desired in the workforce. This (re)affirmation seemed to give participants confidence to move forward and make challenging but necessary changes:

'This program helped me kind of re-evaluate my life. Basically, I cut off all the people that I felt were negative and weren't driven enough. You need to be a bit selfish in order to better yourself. It kind of gave me the green light to do that.'

— Dominic, Group One

Jesse Dekel — *Building*, 2019

Conclusion

Our preliminary findings suggest this identity capital intervention had a positive impact. The non-stigmatizing atmosphere and coaching-styled learning seemed to resonate with participants, inspiring self-motivation, a renewed sense of purpose, and the confidence to be in control. Moreover, the program was framed as life skills everyone — even 'successful' business folks — need rather than skills only required by the marginalized. Incorporating the concept of identity capital into the way we think about young people's transition off the streets may hold potential as a way of understanding and assisting them toward meaningful socioeconomic inclusion and preventing homelessness from reoccurring. We look forward to a more fulsome discussion of our findings along with sharing our six-month and nine-month post-intervention data in a forthcoming publication.

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Phoenix Homes for Independence: Helping Youth Move Forward

Kelly Adamson, Manager, Phoenix Supportive Housing Program [1]

Introduction

Addressing youth homelessness typically relies on emergency and crisis responses, while insufficient effort has been placed on preventing youth homelessness and supporting quick and permanent exits from homelessness.[2] However, inventive models like Phoenix Youth Programs'[3] Homes for Independence (PHI)[4] in Halifax, Nova Scotia are proving effective in preventing and reducing young people's experiences of homelessness.

PHI seeks to address youth homelessness by providing long-term transitional housing and supports to help young people avoid re-entry into homelessness or housing instability. According to the definition and typology of Prevention outlined in Gaetz et al.'s *Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*, housing stabilization programs are a key form of tertiary prevention when they focus on recovery, well-being, and inclusion in order to reduce the risk of a return to homelessness. In alignment with this thinking, PHI is a good example of an intervention designed to stabilize housing, improve well-being, and foster community connection and belonging by providing transitional housing support to young people on their journeys to independence.

PHI began in 1992 with one residence and has since expanded to three homes (Oxford, Henry and Willow) to help support growing demand for the program. In each home there are three to four young people between the ages of 16 and 24 and a live-in support worker. The PHI staff also includes a team lead who provides case management support and a manager who oversees the program. In 2018, the average age of the young people within the PHI program was 20, and the average length of stay was 15 months.

Life in PHI

Each PHI home takes on the personalities and interests of the people living within them. Roommates at the Oxford house gather in the living room after returning home from school or work. They sit on comfortable couches to chat after cooking their own meals, surrounded by plants and Carter, the house cat.

One live-in support worker resides in each PHI home alongside the young people as a 'supportive roommate' and mentor as they pursue their unique goals. The live-in facilitates the day-to-day running of the household and monthly programs/outings and provides a listening ear to youth. As Jen, a young person living at PHI says, *'[Hallie] doesn't mind me talking her ear off if I'm heated.'* The balance between being an authority figure and roommate is constantly being negotiated, so having a supportive team and taking breaks between work and home throughout the day is critical for self-care.

Fostering community connection and belonging is a key part of youth homelessness prevention. A lot of this happens casually — when you live with people you naturally build community as you share time in the kitchen or exchange stories in the living room. Regular house meetings and programming foster a sense of community and shared ownership is promoted — chores are shared amongst housemates, everyone contributes to common household goods, and house programming is driven by the young people. Opportunities to gather together and celebrate, such as pizza dinners or cakes for birthdays, reduce the awkwardness when a new housemate moves in.

How PHI Supports Youth

Jen and Frankie reflected on what brought them into PHI, the dysfunctional home situations they left behind, and the decisions they made to survive and get by. For them, PHI is about healing, stabilizing, understanding, and processing and has given them an opportunity to see the world from a different lens, gain a new perspective, and help them to understand the path that brought them to where they are now. Taylor says, *'It is harder to eat, to get a job, to function when you are homeless. PHI provides an address you can put on a resume, a place to shower, a roof.'* Jen and Frankie feel the help they receive is about support and growth, and while the physical supports are not permanent, their impact is lasting: when you leave you take what you have learned.

PHI has made the young people more ambitious. In their previous situations, Jen and Frankie rarely thought of the future, and when they did it seemed bleak; something that 'didn't feel possible'. Before PHI, they felt that thinking about the future was setting themselves up to fail. Now, they feel like their work is paying off, stating that *'Your work here is actually moving you forward.'* PHI is a steppingstone, a place to prepare yourself to be successful.

A primary objective of PHI is to remove the financial barrier of housing faced by young people while they work towards educational and/or employment goals. Phoenix operates under the belief that safe, secure, and affordable housing is a human right. Lack of housing is a form of structural violence,[5] and homelessness is a structural issue, grown from

neoliberal government policies and the dismantling of the welfare system.[6]

Residents do not pay rent or utilities at PHI. Providing free transitional housing reduces a significant structural barrier faced by young people who are at-risk of or experiencing homelessness. This allows the young people at PHI the time and space to develop — to finish high school, pursue post-secondary education, and/or enter the workforce — while not having to worry about the roof over their heads. '[PHI] *puts into perspective what you deserve,' says Frankie. She is right: everyone deserves a safe and stable place to call home.'*

When the young people are ready to exit the PHI program, they work collaboratively with staff to secure the next stage in their housing journey. They decide what is next and best for their lives and staff are there with support to get them to where they want to go. Part of the goal of PHI is to become independent, and by the time the young person leaves, they may not need Phoenix anymore. However, if they do, Phoenix continues to provide support, including but not limited to ongoing case management, help with independent housing, financial management, parenting support, education supports, and employment services.

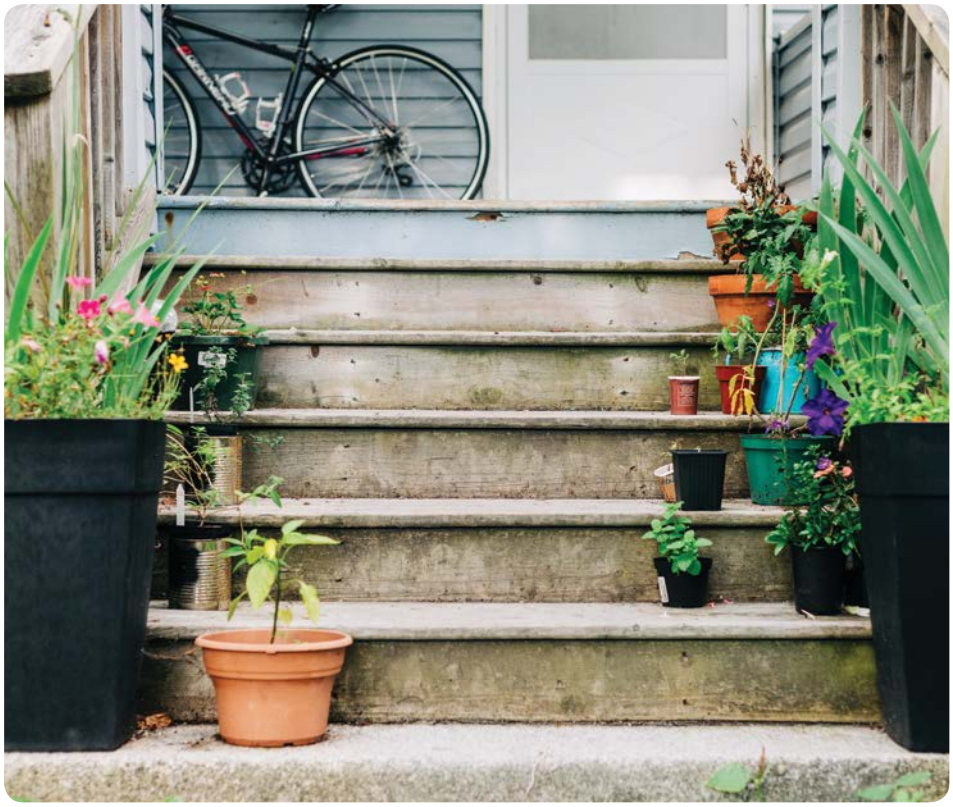
From April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2019, 25 young people moved out of PHI. Of these young people, 21 moved into independent housing. If you ask them how PHI has helped, there are many answers. Common threads are mental health, having a safe space, financial support, and skills and confidence building. Jen and Frankie highlight the important impact that PHI has had on their mental health. Frankie is unsure how far she would have made it without PHI. She says she would be alive, but she would not have a high quality of life. In the 2019 Phoenix youth survey, all PHI young people responded that PHI helps increase their sense of stability in life and helps improve their overall sense of well-being.

Conclusion

Phoenix works with incredibly resilient young people and all note that they have learned a lot about themselves since living at PHI. Jen and Frankie learned that their situation was not okay before PHI. They have learned to be thankful for a lot of things; they know they had it tough, and feel fortunate for the opportunities they have had, knowing not everyone gets them. Frankie says, *'I never thought about postsecondary before I moved here.'* Jen realized she likes art. One has discovered a love of plants; another has found time to work on relationships. They comment on how much easier it is to discover your interests when you are less worried about what is going on around you.

Through a process of stigmatization, youth with experiences of homelessness are often labeled as 'different', which has the effect of narrowing their opportunities.[7] The young people reflect that what has happened to them is in the past and recognize they are not at fault for their early experiences. Jen's resiliency shows in her comment that, 'If you are looking down on me, you are wasting your time.' PHI is not a hand-out, but a platform.

Hallie the Live-In notes, *'Young people do so much work and put so much effort into their goals and ambitions. Every person, and especially every young person, deserves to have the space to put energy on what they want to put it on, and not on the things so many of us take for granted, like housing.'*



Front Steps *Photo by Kinnon Job*

Endnotes

1. This piece was written with the support of three PHI youth, Hallie Burt, Live-In Support Worker, and Kate Walsh, Team Lead. The names of the youth who contributed have been changed by request so that they may remain anonymous. This piece, and this program would not be possible without their willingness to share their stories and allow us to witness their journeys.
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Beyond Housing: Towards Improved Exits from Homelessness for Women-Identifying Youth

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In many countries around the world, our responses to homelessness are changing. Communities and nations are shifting from an emergency-focused response, to prevention and supports for rapid exits from homelessness.[1] The youth homelessness sector in Canada is increasingly adopting programs such as rapid rehousing and Housing First for Youth,[2] with research focused on housing retention and wellness after a young person leaves the streets.[3,4] Yet what's missing from much of the literature is a focus on how gender impacts young peoples' exits from homelessness. In particular, limited research exists on the challenges and opportunities women-identifying persons face when exiting homelessness.

In this article we explore some of the evidence available on young women's exits from homelessness, inclusive of cis-gender young women, young transwomen, and other young people who identify as women. We explore the challenges these groups face when trying to get off the streets, highlighting some strategies for supporting young women-identifying people to transition into safe, affordable, appropriate, and permanent housing.

Barriers to Young Women's Exits from Homelessness

While research consistently demonstrates unique causes and conditions of homelessness and housing needs for women-identifying persons, there is limited research examining young women's exits from homelessness. Available research tells us that the intersecting issues that contribute to homelessness for young women are also some of the barriers they face upon exiting.[5] These barriers include, but are not limited to:

- gender-based and intimate partner violence[6,7]
- disproportionate rates of poverty compared to men (that is, 'the feminization of poverty')
- gender-based discrimination and exclusion in accessing housing, employment, and public systems[8,9]heightened levels of vulnerability to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse,[10] including incidences occurring within state-run facilities (for example, child welfare agencies, youth prisons)[11]

Many of these challenges are felt more acutely by particular groups of young women, including LGBTQ2S+ youth, Indigenous young women, as well as newcomer and racialized youth. Young women in these groups are reported to have their first experience of homelessness at a younger age than other homeless youth, either alongside their family or independently.[12] The particular marginalization of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA persons in Canada — both historically and contemporarily — contributes to additional housing and homelessness vulnerabilities for these young people.

Supporting Young Women's Exits from Homelessness

Building on research evidence and excellent reports created in partnership with young women themselves, we propose four strategies to support young women's exits from homelessness. While far from comprehensive, these highlight the need for gender-responsive services and supports.

1. Expand supports and services that help prevent intimate partner violence and sexual exploitation following young women's exits from homelessness.

'I thought it was the way life was. Because in the neighborhood I grew up in, it was nothing to see a woman dragged, knocked down, stomped, and beat. And there was no safe house, there was no shelter that a wife or women could run to and be protected. So, many women, including my mother — they stood there and they took it. But I saw a lot of women die as a result of being abused. I would tell my mother, "He's killing her over there, Ma." And she'd say, "Leave it alone." And I took on that generational trait. You were just supposed to take it.'[13]

Vulnerability to intimate partner violence (IPV) is of particular concern for young women experiencing homelessness who transition into housing with a partner. While such relationships can provide a pathway off the streets and financial/material supports, they can also leave young women vulnerable to situations of violence by exploitative partners. As Czapska et al. point out, *'when governments fail to provide safe accessible housing for homeless girls, older exploitive men step in.'*[14]

Risk of exploitation is not only gendered, but also classed and racialized, where education, employment, and housing discrimination leave young women of color and Indigenous youth highly vulnerable to exploitation.[15] Watson's research indicates that young women experiencing homelessness may feel safer in violent relationships than they

Jesse Dekel — *Durkhein*, 2016

do on their own, remarking that their male partners offered physical safety from other men.[16] Young women need to be able to access safe, affordable, and permanent housing that is not dependent on an abusive partner.

Strategies to prevent IPV following exits from homelessness for young women include:

- Invest in programming and services that increase young women's knowledge of their tenancy rights, including knowledge of what protection provincial/territorial tenancy laws may provide to young women experiencing IPV.
- Increase the availability of transitional and supportive housing for young women fleeing IPV,[17] and remove the time limits for remaining in this housing
- Increase financial supports for young women and their children escaping violence.[18]
- Provide information on interpersonal violence and existing supports and services to young women exiting homelessness.[19]
- Create opportunities for young women to connect with support services for survivors of violence, including dedicated services for younger survivors of violence.

2. Invest in trauma-informed services and housing that are responsive to the gendered and sexualized violence that have been commonly experienced by young women transitioning from homelessness.

Many young women face tremendous violence and abuse prior to, during, and after exiting homelessness. Risk of violence, including sexual harassment and assault, are part of the everyday lives of young women experiencing homelessness, and is often a continuation of the violence they experienced at home. O'Grady and Gaetz found that young women commonly identified physical abuse (45 per cent) and sexual abuse (35 per cent) as causes of their homelessness. Studies consistently indicate that young women experiencing homelessness are more likely to experience violence, including sexual violence, than young women who are housed.[20] According to the National Youth Homelessness Survey,[21] 37 per cent of young women and 41 per cent of transgender and gender non-binary youth who were homeless reported being a victim of sexual assault in the last 12 months. Housing plays an important role in structuring women's safety.

Strategies for fostering trauma-informed supports for young women exiting homelessness include:

- Prioritize the voice and choice of young women in the services they access after exiting homelessness, ensuring that young women are supported to make autonomous decisions.[22]
- Ensure that supports and safe housing for young women exiting homelessness are trauma-informed,[23] with specific housing and supports for transwomen.
- Prioritize the safety of young women in all transitional and supportive housing.[24] For instance, housing plans ought to include safety planning, access to crisis supports, and access to violence recovery supports.

3. Ensure young mothers exiting homelessness have the supports and services they need to care for their children.

Studies indicate that young women who are homeless have children at a younger age,[25] and that young women and single mothers experience intersecting forms of discrimination when seeking rental housing.[26] Once off the streets, many young women with children face deep poverty and may lack the support of family or peers. Having children impacts every aspect of young women's lives, including finding appropriate housing for their family, accessing services, and accessing affordable childcare in order to participate in educational/employment pursuits.[27]

Ensuring young mothers exiting homelessness have the supports and services they need to care for their children requires:

- Providing young women with housing options that are linked to childcare and transportation.
- Reducing or removing the cost of childcare for women who have experienced homelessness and/or IPV.[28]
- Removing citizenship requirements for access to prenatal and maternal healthcare services, ensuring services are culturally sensitive and accessible to newcomer and refugee women.[29]

- Improving the financial supports for single mothers within social assistance programs, and revising these programs to be less punitive.[30]

4. Provide supports and services to prevent the apprehension of young mothers' children by child protective services, thereby reducing the risk of homelessness for future generations.

Many young mothers experiencing homelessness or housing precarity report being constantly fearful that their children will be apprehended by child protective services. This is particularly pronounced for young Indigenous mothers, given the extensive apprehension of Indigenous children as a function of historical and ongoing forms of colonization.

The effect of child apprehension is cyclical, with studies indicating that adolescent mothers in the care of child protective services are at an increased risk of having their children taken into care,[31] and young people with child welfare involvement being at greater risk of becoming homeless. Remarkably, the National Youth Homelessness Survey found that youth experiencing homelessness are 193 times more likely to have had histories of child welfare involvement compared to the general public.[32]

Strategies to prevent the apprehension of children from young women who have recently exited homelessness include:

- Increase the availability, accessibility, and confidentiality of parental support and guidance,[33] including supports for mothers who use substances.

- Invest in interdisciplinary home visitation teams to support young mothers who have exited homelessness.[34]

- Create dedicated systems or services that help young mothers who have been homeless to rebuild relationships, make social connections, and build a community for their family.[35]

Conclusion

The gendered nature of homelessness means that we need to address the unique challenges that young women-identifying people face when exiting homelessness, not simply duplicating policies and programs that are designed with young men in mind. We must also recognize that young women are not a homogenous group: young women who are Indigenous, young women of color, young women living with (dis) abilities, LGBTQ2S+ youth, newcomer youth and young mothers may have additional, specific needs that must be considered in service planning and policy development. If our goal is to end youth homelessness, it is paramount we ensure that transitions to housing mean transitions to safety, security, and belonging for young women-identifying people.

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Why Not Whistler? A Ski Town's 22-Year Journey to Combat Youth Homelessness

Jill Patrick, Zero Ceiling

Whistler, British Columbia, a popular mountain resort north of Vancouver along the Sea to Sky Highway, sits on the shared, unceded territories of the Squamish and Líl'wat First Nations. The community attracts millions of visitors to the slopes and vibrant village pubs and shops. Many come on temporary work permits from around the world — others come for one winter season and never leave.

Whistler is not immune to the affordable housing challenges facing cities such as London or Sydney. Homelessness and surrounding issues — poverty, addictions, racism, etc. — touch every community. With vacancy rates in Whistler just above 0 per cent, you can pay an exorbitant rent for a shoebox, commute from another community, or come up with creative solutions, like converting a passenger van into a studio apartment.

Dakota at work

Among the influx of visitors to Whistler are a handful of diverse youth, aged 19 to 24, that have experienced homelessness and have come to take part in Zero Ceiling's[1] 12-month supportive housing and employment program called Work 2 Live.

On the surface, Whistler seems like an odd choice to bring a group of vulnerable youth. Not only does it lack the breadth of services and programs found in urban centers, but the community is facing its own crises in housing, substance misuse, transportation, infrastructure, and affordability. However, through agile programming and the support from partners, Work 2 Live has been able to help nearly 100 young adults experiencing homelessness.

The Work 2 Live Program

Work 2 Live grew out of the demand for a substantive program to combat youth homelessness. A critical component of preventing youth homelessness is ensuring that young people that have exited or are at-risk of homelessness receive the housing and supports to achieve stability and well-being, and keeping them from returning to the streets. Employment and training, coupled with immediate access to housing can give stability to youth, and prepare them for independence in the future.

The Work 2 Live approach centers around flexible, wrap-around care that is customized to each individual's evolving needs. Intake happens in the fall and spring, with a total of 12 participants per year. Youth entering the program are usually referred to us through youth agencies in Vancouver, the surrounding Lower Mainland of British Columbia, or the region along the Sea to Sky highway.

Many of them attended one of our day visits and became interested in applying.

The first few weeks in Whistler are dedicated to orientation. Starting October 2019, participants will complete pre-employment sessions with WorkBC. From there, WorkBC will continue to work with individuals on an as-needed basis.

For at least one year, each participant gets a job with our primary partner, Whistler Blackcomb. The Squamish Líl'wat Cultural Center offers spaces in their 12-week Indigenous Youth Ambassadors program to our Indigenous participants.

Zero Ceiling staff ensure the transition into full-time work is successful. They arrange and take part in monthly meetings between the participants and managers; help participants pick up their uniforms, fill in onboarding documents, and get to know their commute; drop participants off for their first shift; and advocate for their welfare with their manager. Sometimes this looks like coaching around communication and conflict management, other times this looks like celebrating promotions and hitting goals.

Participants are required to take part in weekly Work 2 Live programming, which includes individual case management meetings where they will set goals, and discuss successes and areas for improvement. Ride Days are spent engaging in outdoor recreation, which enables the participants to engage in the wider Whistler community, while instilling confidence and modeling healthy habits. Participants also take turns planning, buying, and cooking a family dinner for the others each week.

In an ongoing study on the impact of Work 2 Live, Royal Roads University researchers have interviewed participants on what this support means to them. One participant said, 'I think it is great when we have ride day and family dinner. I like it when everyone comes together, we are like a family. Not everyone has family and we support each other like a family, and I like that.'

Zero Ceiling staff are interested in dismantling the barriers youth face in sustaining a successful exit from homelessness, whether those are self-motivated or systemic — employment, mental health, community, motivation, family — we've got it covered. Staff connect with the participants as needed to help them navigate tricky topics from dental emergencies and lost phones, or just to chat and catch up. Staff will also connect with

community partners who offer participants subsidized, low-cost, or free support. This ensures youth can access professional services they need, such as mental health, healthcare, addictions, settlement, and legal supports. The purpose of all these supports is to create a family environment, where the participants feel cared for.

Zero Ceiling's case management approach considers how youth will exit our services from the earliest stages of the Work 2 Live program. Upon program commencement, our case workers complete a Strength-Based Needs Assessment Plan (SNAP), which informs the individualized goals of the participants. These goals — related to housing, employment, life-skill development, and social inclusion — drive the support our case workers offer and are continually updated to ensure our participants are prepared for life after they graduate.

In addition, our policy of not 'aging out' allows participants to continue to access services to ensure they complete their goals as well as experience a soft transition as opposed to a stark cut-off. They have helped participants find new jobs, move into new apartments, go back to school, or reconnect with their families, well beyond their 12-month window.

Kristi, a Work 2 Live graduate and member of our Board of Directors, said the program taught her a lot, *'Mainly how to find a lot of balance* […]. *But they also taught me how to connect with resources within the community such as how to find housing and how to look for work. During the program we learned how to cook healthy dinners, and this is the time where we would catch up with others in the program and reflect on our weeks.'*

Housing Youth in the Midst of a Housing Crisis

Just like other young people in Whistler, Work 2 Live participants face the challenges of limited housing. During the program, they live in a shared apartment in Whistler Blackcomb's staff accommodations. After the program, many choose to remain in Whistler, staying in staff housing, or renting with housemates.

In an effort to help participants and graduates overcome these challenges, a substantial housing education component has been added to the Work 2 Live program. Informational sessions on budgeting, conflict management, tenant rights, debt management, and more are organized. Zero Ceiling is also partnering with RentSmart and the Friendly Landlord Network — two organizations helping young people in British Columbia find and maintain healthy housing.

Work 2 Live is a cost-effective program. As Chris Wrightson, Co-Executive Director (and Aussie ex-pat) says, *'Current research on ending youth homelessness recommends a focus on prevention and individualized support. That's what we do. The program costs $20,000 CAD per young person, per year. To put it in context, it costs $40–50,000 CAD per year to fund a bed in a shelter.'*

The combination of programming, graduate support, and the help of our partners provided 92 participants over 14,000 nights of housing, over 68,000 hours of work, and over 18,000 hours of professional support. Our current data collection is in its infancy. However, we can say that since 2015 we have had 67 per cent of our participants fully graduate, all of whom have sustained exits from homelessness.

Work 2 Live has had impact that extends beyond its participants. Before Work 2 Live, Kehew McCallum, a young Métis mother from Vancouver, lived in a shelter for two months. She had no job, no support network, and no meaningful relationship with her young son or her family. In the program, she worked full-time as a lift operator for Whistler Blackcomb. Upon graduation, she stayed in Whistler, working as a zipline guide at The Adventure Group. The stability and support provided by Work 2 Live empowered her to reconnect with her family and share custody of her young son. She is now living independently in the Lower Mainland. As Kehew said of her son: *'I want him to have the most beautiful life. By me doing this, I can show him that there's more to life — be active, enjoy yourself and do things that make you feel alive.'*

Conclusion: Agents of Change

Everything we do at Zero Ceiling starts and ends with the young people we work with. Family dinners, Ride Days, education, outreach services, and Work 2 Live all came about because we listened to what the participants told us they needed to thrive, and having since added more meaningful supports for graduates, it is impossible to age out of Work 2 Live.

Zero Ceiling used the resources at its disposal: Mother Nature, the eccentricities of an isolated mountain town, the wealth of good people willing to lend a hand, and partners who walk with us while we do the work. Whistler is a giving community, fueled by a population of ski-bums-turned-entrepreneurs looking to pay it forward. The Work 2 Live program also relies on partner organizations for program and support services, such as The Adventure Group, Wedge Rafting, Whistler Community Services Society, Howe Sound Women's Center, and the Squamish Líl'wat Cultural Center.

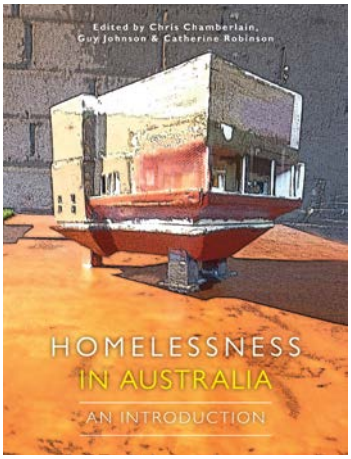
'[Whistler residents] *have a passion and there is something running in them that is keeping them going beyond reasonable doubt, and that is why they are here,'* said a Work 2 Live graduate. *'When you are constantly surrounded by that inspiration, you cannot help but feel it and respect that beauty, that nature, and it really brings that balance to your life that you don't get when you are just living in the city.'*

This spirit mirrors the determination we see in the Work 2 Live crew, and it is perhaps why so many local champions are willing to take on this fight with us — they recognize the same guts and under-dogged persistence that brought them to Whistler in the first place.

Endnote

1. Zero Ceiling is a charitable organization founded by Chris Winter when he sought to bring vulnerable young people from Vancouver's impoverished Downtown East Side to Whistler for a day of snowboarding. He hustled for donations of passes, instructors, and equipment from local businesses, and brought in the first group of young people in 1997. Zero Ceiling continues to host groups for day visits and has since added summer activities and the Work 2 Live program.

Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction



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Leading researchers and advocates from across Australia have come together to contribute their expertize and experience to produce a foundational resource that will set the benchmark for the future analysis of homelessness. Editors, Chris Chamberlain, Guy Johnson and Catherine Robinson are all recognized experts in the field.

Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction is published by New South Press in association with the Victorian Council to Homeless Persons, one of Australia's leading peak homelessness advocacy bodies.

Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction contains 14 chapters.

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Part 3 includes a piece on the 'failure of the housing system' and a chapter on 'reforming the service system'.

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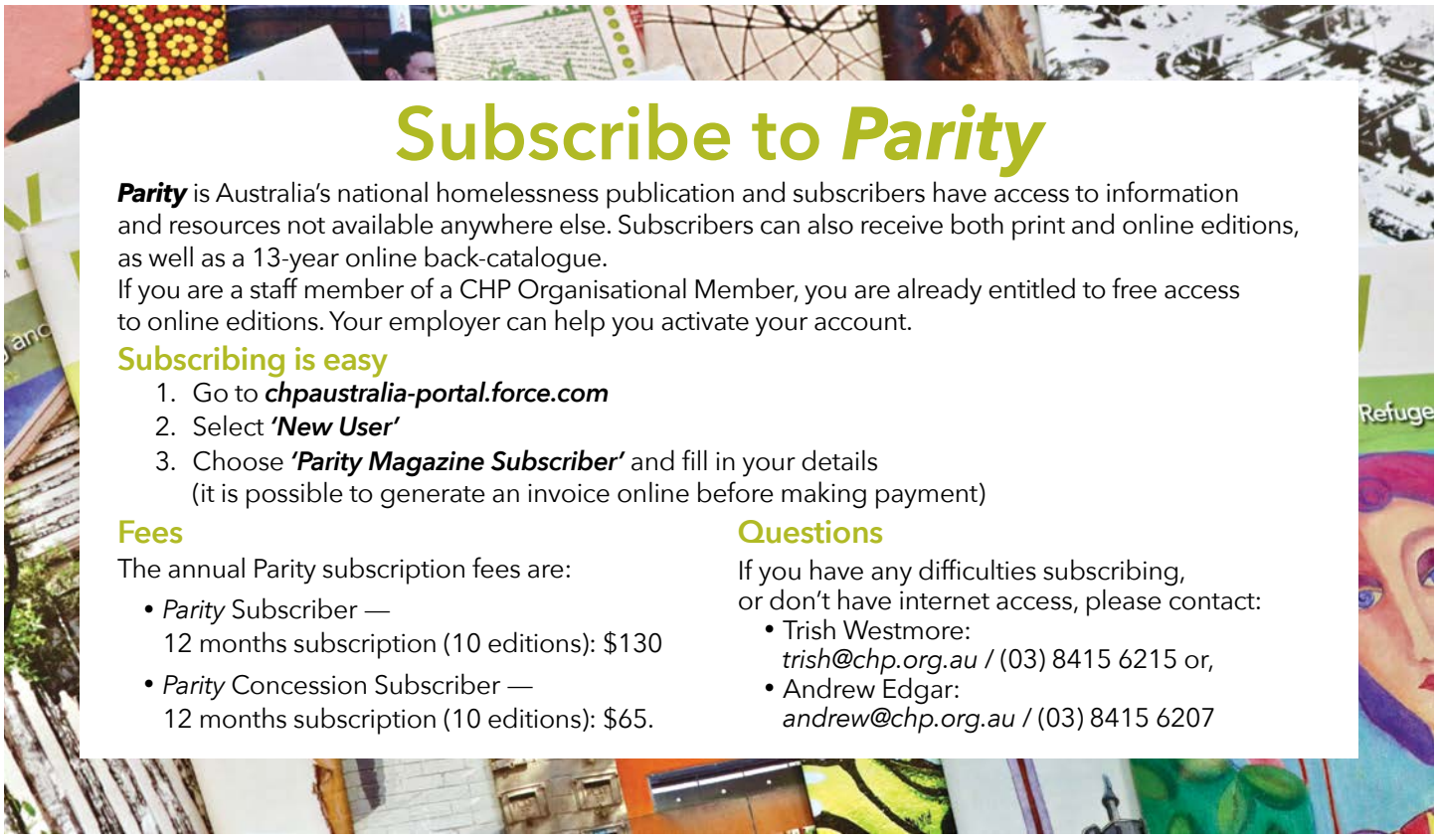

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