the homeless hub
www.homelesshub.ca

What is a Foyer?

In adapting the Foyer model to your community, the best place to begin is with a brief overview of what a Foyer is.

In this section, you will learn:

- *A brief history of the Foyer;*

- *What a Foyer is and why it is deemed an effective model of accommodation and support for homeless youth; and*

- *How the Foyer fits in with other housing options for young people.*

THEFOYER

is a well-established model of transitional housing for youth that has been growing in popularity around the world over the past two decades. The term Foyer was coined in France, where a network of *"Foyers pour jeunes travailleurs"* (hostels for young workers) was created to support a large number of young people who, in search of work, moved to towns and cities following World War II. In the early 1990s, the British government introduced the Foyer model in response to high youth unemployment, and the model's success led to replication throughout the country. The growth and development of the Foyer model in the UK has been supported by the Foyer Federation , which has created a range of resources including guides for those developing foyers, staff support, a quality assurance scheme and accreditation program. Today, Foyers have been adapted and implemented in Europe, Australia and the US to include not only housing and links to employment, but also access to education, training, life skills development and on-going case management support.

The Chelsea Foyer, New York City, NY

Focus E15 Foyer London (UK).

Aberdeen Foyer music
www.aberdeenfoyer.com/music.html

For resources from the Foyer Federation, see **Toolkit #8.**

When thinking about Foyers, a key question to consider is whether this form of accommodation and supports really makes sense for youth. While transitional housing models have largely fallen out of favour in the wake of the success of Housing First, it is argued that when properly configured, the Foyer effectively addresses the needs of adolescents and young adults, and therefore should be considered as one of the key housing options for young people who are homeless. While there is not a huge body of research on the effectiveness of homelessness interventions in general, there have been a number of evaluations of Foyers in the UK and Australia, which demonstrate positive outcomes. These evaluations show that through the Foyer model, young people enhance their education, social relationships and engagement, and have better employment and housing outcomes. In addition, the Foyer model has been adapted in large communities and small, in both urban and rural areas. This is a housing and support model for young people that works!

What makes the Foyer model unique is not just the client-driven approach to case management, life skills support and programming, but the emphasis on an assets-based approach to youth development. This philosophical orientation to the Foyer is important, because often our response to youth homelessness does not really take the developmental needs of this age group into account.

For more about the Foyer philosophy, see **Toolkit #3.**

By responding to youth homelessness largely through emergency shelters and day programs, are we really meeting the needs of young people, or merely providing a crisis response that was developed with adults in mind? And in helping young people move on in their lives, the focus should be successful transitions to adulthood, not merely independence and an exit from the system.

For more on adolescent development, see **Toolkit #2.**

Aberdeen Foyer, Scotland C/o Wendy Malycha, St. John's
Youth Services, Adelaide, Australia.Powerpoint: ANGLICARE
WA YOUTH HOMELESSNESS FORUM PRESENTATION
Foyers – International learning and relevance to Australia.

What makes the Foyer so good?

For information on different models of accommodation for Foyers, see **Toolkit #5.**

For examples of Foyers from around the world, see **Toolkit #7.**

The Foyer is an effective response to youth homelessness because the philosophy, structure and activities of this model of accommodation– if properly implemented – acknowledge and support healthy youth development.

For essential program elements, see **Toolkits #4, 5 and 6**

ONE KEY FEATURE is the heavy emphasis on education, in recognition that this will pay longer-term dividends for the individual, their families and society as a whole. Other important features include not only development of life skills (for independence), but also an effort to help young people engage in meaningful relationships and activities.   Finally, the fact that most Foyers allow young people to stay for extended periods of time is a key feature, and an acknowledgement that for any young person – housed or not - the transition to adulthood takes time. The Foyer model we propose actually extends the length of stay, based on the

assets, needs and development of the young person in question.

This final point is important. The key elements of the Foyer that we propose are based on the evolution of the model, and the variable ways it has been adapted in communities large and small to date. The real possibilities for community adaptation emerge when one considers how the model may be modified based on advancements in our thinking about housing and support developed in Canada and elsewhere, including Housing First, dispersed housing models with mobile supports, and the notion of convertible leases.

Options for Accommodation and Support
Where does the Foyer fit in?

Young people are not a homogeneous group. There are important differences based on age, maturity, development, resilience and levels of independence. These differences are further complicated by the experiences of sexism, racism and homophobia that many young people endure.

The uniqueness of individual adolescents' experiences of homelessness suggests we need to carefully consider the kinds of accommodation and support that are appropriate for this population. The range of accommodation options for young people in Canada who

are without the support of parents or guardians typically includes emergency shelters, transitional housing, group homes, supported housing and independent living, depending on the community in question. Many other models are hybrids of the above options.
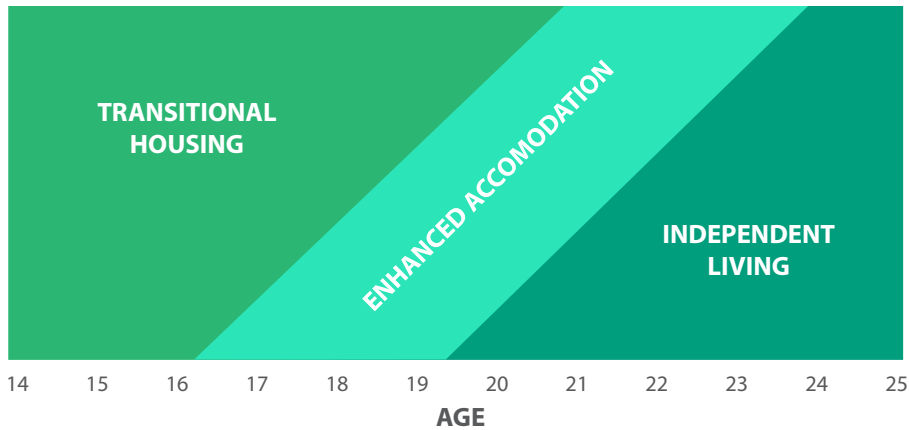
The challenge for service providers and policy makers is in considering exactly what kind of housing and supports are effective, and appropriate given the diverse circumstances and needs of young people. Do younger teens need different solutions than older teens? Do those who are multiply marginalized by

Aberdeen Foyer, learning education & training
www.aberdeenfoyer.com/education.html

sexism, racism and homophobia need targeted solutions?   In other words, what works and for whom? Given the dynamic relationship between adolescence and homelessness, it is worth considering whether there continues to be a role for transitional or interim housing and / or supports.

Diagram 1 **Housing Options for Homeless Youth**

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

ENHANCED ACCOMODATION

INDEPENDENT LIVING

| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 |

AGE

Chelsea foyer common ground
www.housingpolicy.org/gallery/entries/The_Christopher.html

Step Ahead, Melbourne Citymission
www.melbournecitymission.org.au/What-We-Do/
Our-Programs-Services/Homelessness-Services/
Homelessness-Homeless-Support/Foyer-Plus

An effective response to youth homelessness should give young people choices and options based on their age, maturity, experience and need. The diagram below establishes a range of options for accommodation and supports for young people who are – or are at risk of becoming – homeless. This model is not conceived as a continuum – for instance, it is not necessary for young people to pass through the various stages on the road to independence. Rather it is designed in recognition that different young people will need different solutions, and that needs may shift and change over time.

THE FIRST HOUSING OPTION identified is transitional housing, which "is meant to provide a safe, supportive environment where residents can overcome trauma, begin to address the issues that led to homelessness or kept them homeless, and begin to rebuild their support network" . It should be considered part of a range of housing options for youth , but should be configured to more directly address the needs of the developing adolescent and young adult. This is what makes the Foyer a strong model. Because the experience of adolescence is inherently transitional, this form of housing

may be most appropriate for many young people who require the longer-term supports we generally consider necessary in helping them transition to adulthood, while building life skills that enhance their capacity to become economically self-sufficient and socially integrated community members.

There are a range of transitional housing models characterized by differences in size, scale, program and length of residency. Fixed site, congregate living environments with intensive supports may be important for some youth (and in particular, younger teens), who will benefit from the companionship, and a higher level of day-to-day support. This is where the Foyer best fits.

A SECOND OPTION – enhanced accommodation – moves towards a less institutionalized environment by offering smaller settings and in some cases uses dispersed housing in the community or a scattered site approach. This means that young people experience greater independence by living alone or in small groups, and still have access to supports that are portable. The key advantage here is that young people are supported in their transition from homelessness in a way that reduces stigma and offers

more opportunities to integrate into the community, provides greater control over tenure, and is an alternative to an institutional living environment . At the same time, residents are not yet fully responsible for their leases, or required to earn sufficient income to live in these more independent settings. In the case of young people leaving care (group homes) or juvenile detention, in particular, and who may react negatively to a more institutional environment, this may be a more suitable option. In both Australia and the United Kingdom, there have been successful adaptations of the Foyer model to include dispersed housing with portable supports .

THE THIRD OPTION is independent living, where young people move into housing of their own. This is the Housing First option. The successful Infinity Project in Calgary confirms that some young people will require intensive case management (which may be longer lasting, depending on need), while others will need minimal supports
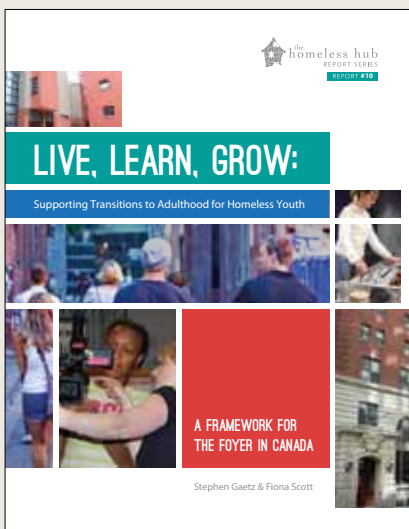
(which may be in the community and not part of their housing) and eventually progress to full independence. This is the end goal of any transitional housing model.

The three categories should not be considered entirely independent and discrete, and it is worth pointing out that some transitional housing models (including some Foyers) are able to bridge all these options. As the diagram suggests, the age at which young people can live independently is variable. That is, depending on their age, needs and level of independence, young people leaving homelessness (or institutional care) may need different housing options. This approach creates a pathway from higher levels of supports to independent living. Young individuals with little independent living experience may prefer a housing option where they are not responsible for the lease, but in time, as they obtain greater independence, the lease is transferred to their name. In this context, and

depending on their need, some level of supports may continue.

So, while transitional models of housing and support such as the Foyer should definitely be part of the range of housing options for homeless youth, there are some recommended modifications that should be considered when adapting the model. For instance, rather than limit the length of residency (most transitional housing models for youth in Canada limit stays to one year, and in some cases 18 months), the Foyer should be more flexible and ideally not be time limited. Length of stay should be based on the age at which a young person enters a program, their needs, assets and level of independence. Finally, successful Foyers should be tightly integrated into other supports, as part of a 'system of care'. As we will see, a modified and enhanced version of the Foyer may offer Canadian communities a way of rethinking transitional housing and supports for homeless and at-risk youth.

READ MORE

LIVE, LEARN, GROW:

Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Homeless Youth

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE FOYER IN CANADA

Stephen Gaetz & Fiona Scott

READ THE FULL REPORT

TOOLKITS

#2   The Foyer and Transitions to Adulthood
#3   The Philosophy and Principles of the Foyer
#4   Foyer Essentials   Part 1: The Program
#5   Foyer Essentials   Part 2: Accommodation
#6   Foyer Essentials   Part 3: Organizational Framework
#7   Foyer Case Studies
#8   Resources from the Foyer Federation (UK)

Evaluation Research on Foyers

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