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PART 2 Foyer Essentials
ACCOMODATION

Aberdeen Foyer, Marywell Training Centre.
http://grampianpropertynetwork.org.uk/about-us/our-venue/

ONE of the key considerations in establishing a Foyer is deciding what kind of accommodation will be provided: a fixed site with multiple rooms and a common area: a dispersed housing model with individual apartments, or small clusters of rooms with shared space? There are many options, and these carry different considerations in terms of capital and operating expenses. In addition, the built form of the Foyer has implications for the delivery of services and supports.

The good news is that in developing a new Foyer, one has the unique opportunity to build on what has clearly been demonstrated to be an effective model, and to adapt what has been more broadly learned about the full range of housing options for youth. There is no single type of facility associated with the Foyer; they come in all shapes and sizes.

But accommodation is about much more than shape and size. The *quality* of accommodation is also really important to consider. Often, there is an attitude on the part of funders and the public that 'beggars can't be choosers', and that young people who are homelessness should be satisfied with the bare minimum of accommodation. This goes against a core belief that underlies the Foyer model and more progressive approaches to youth development. The Foyer should be more than a bare bones shelter; it should be a safe and a decent place to live.

"Go smaller, fight for the money, make them nice places to be. Don't make them austere. Don't have a bare mattress. Make it look nice. Invest in living space, good quality furniture, nice flooring, everything that makes it nice. These poor kids are coming from horrible places often, so make it nice for them." (Narelle Clay, Chairperson, Homelessness Australia[1]).

In this section, we will review a range of potential options for accommodation that respect the principles of the Foyer.

What forms of housing are most appropriate?

International research identifies that there is much flexibility in terms of the physical form that Foyers can take. In fact, the Foyer can be adapted to incorporate different forms of housing, including a dedicated youth housing facility on one hand, or dispersed housing (potentially including scattered site approaches) on the other. There are benefits to both models, and in thinking about establishing a Foyer, they should not be considered mutually exclusive.

Dedicated youth housing facility

Dedicated facilities, also known as 'stand-alone' or congregate living environments (though not to be confused with congregate shelter environments, where many people sleep in the same room) may be more appropriate for youth who are younger, less independent, have higher needs for support and / or need help with social interaction. Dedicated facilities have the advantage of centralizing staff and program resources, easily accessible program space, and the ability to nurture and support community building. For high needs clients where security and access to around the clock supports is important, this may be a preferable option.

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Reports on the implementation of Foyers in Australia concluded that "good design is essential for the building to be attractive, practical, secure, and cost and environmentally efficient to operate" and that successful Foyer buildings include "well-planned offices for support staff, training rooms and space for tenant partners"[2]. Innovative Canadian transitional housing projects for youth, such as Eva's Phoenix in Toronto and the Lilly Building run by Choices for Youth in St. John's demonstrate how to combine innovative living accommodations with common spaces, services and training space in renovated settings. Jeff Karabanow, a leading Canadian scholar on youth homelessness, suggests that transitions out of homelessness may be facilitated by having such housing facilities at a distance from mainstream youth services as this may make it easier for street involved youth to disconnect from the lifestyle.[3]

Blended model: Hub and Spoke

Some interesting innovations have resulted from blending the two models of accommodation. A blended model might include a main or central dedicated facility with multiple residential units, communal space, and administrative space. Residents who are young, inexperienced or have higher needs would be better suited for this centralized facility. At the same time, this central facility could be augmented with a number of dispersed units, allowing older youth who are more independent or who are averse to the more institutional context the opportunity to live in smaller units that are integrated into the community.

Dispersed Housing

Dispersed housing has been used in transitional housing models as an alternative to the dedicated youth housing facility, and is seen as more advantageous for young people who are older and / or who are able to live more independently. Dispersed and scattered site housing* provides a great deal of flexibility in terms of differentiated accommodation, more so than fixed site models. Single room or multiple room apartments can be used, as well as houses.

While dispersed housing models have become common, particularly in the wake of the success of Housing First, there is no reason to believe that this approach cannot also work with Foyers. In fact, the Foyer model has been adapted to include dispersed accommodation in both the UK[4] and Australia[5].

There are many advantages to the dispersed Foyer model. First, because it is not associated with a single facility, it can feel less like a 'program' or an institutional setting for residents. This may be par-

ticularly attractive to young people leaving group homes or juvenile detention facilities. Second, support for sub-populations (young women, LGBTQ youth) can be more easily accommodated with a decentralized housing model. Third, the number of youth who can be accommodated is much more elastic, and is not limited by the number of rooms in a dedicated housing facility. Fourth, in the case of a scattered site approach, costs for capital, administration and maintenance may be reduced and shifted to the private sector, making the model more cost effective (though support costs may be higher because clients are dispersed).

Finally, and this is perhaps the key benefit, length of tenure becomes much more flexible. With a scattered site model that houses people in private market housing, lease conversion is then possible, making the transition to independent living much more fluid. Long-term tenancy is therefore possible through the Foyer and young people are supported to live independently in permanent housing.

One complicating feature of this approach, however, is that it means adapting the model to ensure that some of the key supports and program components, such as communal space, life skills, educational supports and the nurturing of positive relationships, are still implemented and supported in an effective manner.

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* Dispersed housing is often distinguished from scattered site models because while in both cases the units are smaller (housing fewer residents in one place) and located over a wider area, the units are owned by the provider. Scattered site housing typically refers to units rented from the private sector, which can allow greater flexibility and lowers capital investment.

The importance of Communal Space

Whether the Foyer uses a dedicated housing facility or a scattered site approach, it is considered important for youth to have safe spaces to gather, talk, and engage in activities together. Without communal spaces, youth can often feel isolated. By providing space, youth can gather to exchange information and experiences, get support from peers, and essentially learn effective ways of communicating.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS:

1) What model best suits your target population? Based on age or other demographic factors, and the developmental assets of residents, what model makes sense?

2) How will an inclusive and safe environment be supported by the model you choose? How will the dignity, safety and security of women, LGBTQ and racial minority youth be respected within the housing model you choose? What is the range of ages that can be supported?

3) How will the model you choose assist with community engagement, building healthy social relationships, and involvement in education, training and / or employment?

4) A dedicated site model (and even dispersed site model where the organization owns the units) carries with it capital and operational cost considerations. How can these be met?

5) A dispersed model has its strengths. In going down that road, you will need to consider:

- The need for a system of roving supports, and 24 hour on call care.

- Is there adequate and affordable supply of rental housing to enable a 'scattered site' approach?

- What are the challenges of recruiting, negotiating and supporting landlords?

- What kind of plan do you need to have in place in case of eviction, so that young people do not return to homelessness?
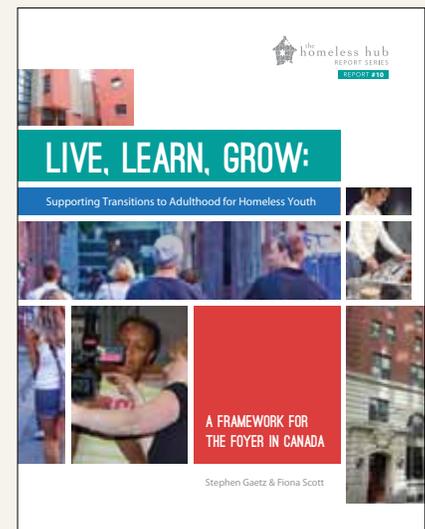
TOOLKITS

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

References

1. Quotation from a conference presentation at the CHRA Congress, St. Johns Newfoundland, May 4, 2012

2. Malycha, W. (n.d.). Foyers – International learning and relevance to Australia. Presentation at the Anglicare WA Youth Homelessness Forum. Retrieved from www.stjohnsyouthservices. org.au/documents/FOYERWAPresentation-WendyMalycha.pdf

3. Karabanow, J. (2004). Being young and homeless: Understanding how youth enter and exit street life. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Karabanow, J. (2008). Getting off the Street: Exploring the Processes of Young People's Street Exits. American Behavioural Scientist, 51(6), 773-789.

4. Quilgars, D. (2001) Dispersed Foyers: A New Approach? An Evaluation of the Shortlife Plus Project. University of York: Centre for Housing Policy

Smith, J. (2004) Dispersed Foyers: A Research Study. Foyer Federation

5. National Youth Commission (2008) Australia's Homeless Youth: a report of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness. Australia: National Youth Commission