

# THIS is Housing First for Youth

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## PART 2

### Operations Manual →

A practitioner's guide for how to implement  
the Housing First for Youth Program Model

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Edited by Chad Story

Housing First  
*4 Youth*





## **This is Housing First for Youth - Part 2 - Operations Manual**

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# Moving forward with Housing First for Youth

The needs of young people, particularly young people with lived and living expertise of homelessness, are distinct from adults. And so, the supports and interventions that are made available to young people must reflect these realities. Imagine for a moment, the pressures a young person who, for the first time, finds themselves with no place to go: “How will I pay rent?” “Where do I start?” “Who can I rely on for advice?” All the while you are juggling school, a part time job, staying connected to your friends, and navigating the trials and tribulations of teenage life. This is an impossible situation. But one that many young people in Canada and around the world find themselves in.

The response to youth homelessness demands coordination across systems and between local service providers. It starts by recognizing that housing alone will not end homelessness. Young people need to feel connected to community, have access to cultural and spiritual guidance, rent supplements, assistance with employment, and ongoing clinical support. Providing these services in combination with safe, appropriate, and affordable housing is key to meaningfully preventing and ending youth homelessness.

The Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) program model – a youth-focused adaption of the successful Housing First intervention – is a promising example of how to do this work effectively. The *THIS is Housing First for Youth* (Gaetz, 2021) program model guide provides a detailed account of the model, its origins, global adaptations, philosophy, and core principles. It is a must read for those who are new to the HF4Y approach or who would like to learn more about its core elements.

This manual was created in response to community feedback that there needed to be more detailed guidance on how to do HF4Y successfully. The knowledge shared here was produced through active engagement with practitioners from across Canada and in Europe who have practice experience in providing supports to young people and their families within the HF4Y framework.

The operations manual is a companion to the HF4Y program model guide and [training](#). It is intended for executive directors, program managers and supervisors, community planners, and other leaders who are interested in adapting the HF4Y program in their community, service delivery professionals and frontline workers, case counsellors, and registered professionals working with young people who are marginalized or at-risk of or experiencing homelessness. It includes information relevant to planning and operating a HF4Y program and resources to make the process smoother, such as sample outreach materials, an operations budget, landlord engagement materials, job descriptions and postings, staff supervision and case management forms, and evaluation tools.






# HF4Y: What You Need to Know

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First things first, let's take a moment to review the core elements of HF4Y and how the program model differs from other housing-led interventions. For a more in-depth discussion about the model, be sure to download the [\*THIS is Housing First for Youth\*](#) program model, which can be found on the Homeless Hub.

## What is Housing First for Youth?

HF4Y is designed to meet the needs of developing adolescents and young adults (ages 13–24) who are at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness. It focuses on providing safe, affordable, and appropriate housing, as well as offering support in a number of areas, including: engaging employment and/or education, strengthening family and natural supports, improving connection to culture and community, and accessing clinical supports to address mental health challenges. As a holistic model, HF4Y considers all facets of well-being (physical, emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual) to promote positive youth development. To be clear, simply providing young people with housing does not constitute fidelity with the HF4Y program model. Housing must be offered – without preconditions, such as time limits – alongside other necessary supports. The HF4Y model is based on the understanding that housing is a human right, which means if a young person loses their housing every effort must be taken to rehouse them as quickly as possible, without withdrawing other services they may also be accessing.



## Housing First vs. Housing First for Youth

Housing First for Youth is an adaptation of the well-established Housing First approach to addressing homelessness. Housing First programs – including the [Pathways model](#) (Tsemberis, 2015) and the [At Home/Chez Soi project](#) – have shown great success in addressing the needs of adults who experience homelessness by specifically prioritizing chronically homeless persons with significant mental health and addictions issues. The adaptation of HF4Y is based on the understanding that the causes and conditions of youth homelessness are distinct from adults, and therefore the solutions must be distinct as well. Just as Housing First addresses homelessness for adults, HF4Y addresses youth homelessness through a youth lens.

There are other approaches to providing Housing First for young people, but these are generally not consistent with the approach advocated here, nor are they in alignment with the core principles of Housing First.

## Core Principles of Housing First for Youth

The HF4Y model is designed to address questions of risk and vulnerability and the appropriateness of services and supports based on a young person's age and level of cognitive, social, and physical development. These services should be delivered in a manner that supports youth choice and reflects the diversity of the population being served.

The core principles of HF4Y<sup>1</sup> are designed to meet the distinct needs of developing adolescents and young adults, which include:

### 1. A RIGHT TO HOUSING WITH NO PRECONDITIONS:

All young people have a 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 a list of criteria used to determine if someone is “ready” to be housed, such as sobriety or abstinence. Put simply, if someone needs housing; they will get housing.

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1. To find a more detailed elaboration of the core principles of HF4Y, see the Housing First for Youth Program Model Guide at [www.homelesshub.ca/HF4Y](http://www.homelesshub.ca/HF4Y)

## ● 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 in a timeframe that works for young people. 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 must be 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 by 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.

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 prioritizing risk and vulnerability, case management, recommended caseloads, and importantly, program outcomes.





# Community Planning




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**HF4Y is much more than a single program intervention. The philosophy underpinning the model can be used to support community planning efforts as well. In fact, communities that have embedded Housing First principles in their local and regional community plans, such as Medicine Hat and Calgary, have seen promising results.**

For communities considering adapting the HF4Y philosophy as part of their local community plan, there are several key issues that will need to be considered, including: assessing a community's readiness to move forward; how to effectively incorporate the philosophy and corresponding principles within an integrated systems response; adopting a youth-focused system planning approach; addressing questions related to coordinated access; and defining meaningful community and program level outcomes.

## **Assessing Community Readiness**

An important step in the early stages of planning is to assess a community and host organization's readiness to implement HF4Y. At a minimum, this means communities must demonstrate an understanding of the resources required to support the planning, management, and delivery of youth-focused services that are aligned with the principles of HF4Y. In other words, there must be a shared resolve and commitment to implementation of HF4Y in a way that demonstrates fidelity to the program model, including an assessment of the collective capacity of staff and management to carry out the work associated with the model.



There are several factors that are used to determine a community's readiness to move forward, including: assessing a community's understanding of the core principles and philosophy; inventorying a list of organizations whose service models align with the tenets of HF4Y; and determining if a community has the capacity to achieve the goals associated with the model. Any assessment must consider the local context (e.g., the specific needs of priority populations) and the long-standing relationships between service providers, agencies, local funding bodies, and municipal governments. A readiness assessment that communities can use to assess their level of readiness and determine what investments need to be made in order to adopt the HF4Y model is available for download at [homelesshub.ca/HF4Y](https://homelesshub.ca/HF4Y).

## Embedding HF4Y Within an Integrated Systems Response

In any community, there is likely a range of public, non-profit, for-profit, and charitable programs and services designed to support youth and families. Unfortunately, these programs and services often lack coordination and can be difficult to navigate.

In a HF4Y context, efforts should be made to support an integrated "system of care" that is youth-focused and is designed to ensure that needs are met in a timely and respectful way. Originating in children's mental health and addictions sectors, the concept of a "system of care" is defined as: "An adaptive network of structures, processes, and relationships grounded in system of care values and principles that provides children and youth with serious emotional disturbance and their families with access to and availability of necessary services and supports across administrative and funding jurisdictions" (Hodges et al., 2006:3).

A system of care is based on strategic partnerships between community organizations who work together to delineate roles and responsibilities to prevent duplications and ensure services are made in a coordinated manner.

The homelessness sector cannot be solely responsible for delivering services to young people in need. An integrated system response that builds on the work of organizations across sectors and operating in adjacent systems (e.g., the education and justice systems) is the only way to achieve enhanced outcomes for young people.

## Community Systems Planning and HF4Y

Youth homelessness is a “fusion policy” issue, which means that it intersects with a number of other public policy domains (e.g., education, child protection, justice, and health). In an effort to improve service integration, organizations must take steps to define the role they play in the continuum of support offered to young people to prevent and sustain exits from homelessness. A systems response can be facilitated through an effective outcomes-based, integrated systems planning approach that brings together the various players and decision-makers that are directly and indirectly involved in addressing youth homelessness.

Deepening connections between “unusual suspects” – community partners who may not traditionally collaborate – is an effective way to create new models for outreach and support for the HF4Y model. For instance, the YMCA in Edmonton has been working closely with Edmonton Police Services to provide diversion support for young people who have had interactions with the justice system.

Communities often have local plans to address housing and/or homelessness that are developed and updated every five to 10 years. These plans outline the community’s priorities, target outcomes, activities, and performance measures and are typically coordinated and implemented by the municipality or a lead service organization. A steering committee usually provides leadership to the overall plan direction and feasibility, and broader community consultations capture the opportunities, needs, and perspectives of various stakeholders. Because the causes, conditions, and solutions to youth homelessness differ from adult homelessness, it is essential that the needs of youth are embedded within these planning processes to advocate for housing and supports specific to young people.

*“One of the greatest advantages of collaboration, especially in the early stages, and is important throughout, is that those at the table and part of the discussion now have a vested interest, when they feel like they are part of something bigger than they are and have influence they become supporters instead of antagonists. But I would suggest even involving the naysayers. Most of the time they are the way they are because they care about their community. Get them involved in a way that shows that their opinions and ideas matter to you.”*

Wally Czech (as quoted in Gaetz et al., 2013).

In addition to guiding program design and organizational philosophy for working with young people, the core principles of HF4Y can be applied to community and systems level planning and service delivery. The following are examples of how the **Core Principles of HF4Y** might be implemented within a systems planning context:

- **Right to housing with no preconditions:** Ensuring there are representatives from the youth sector at the table to elevate rights-based, youth-focused housing and supports. Intake and matching processes (e.g., Coordinated Access) as well as assessments ought to be geared towards young people's unique experiences and needs.
- **Youth choice, youth voice, and self-determination:** Establishing a youth advisory committee or table to take the lead on youth consultations and recommendations that will inform decision-making and incorporating youth feedback (e.g., surveys, focus groups) into the program design. This group may also support implementation and evaluation in the long-term.
- **Positive youth development and wellness orientation:** Implementing strengths-based assessments and approaches and ensuring systems, policies, and practices are trauma-informed and recovery-oriented. Planning efforts must also ensure systems improve outcomes for youth beyond their housing status.
- **Individualized client-driven supports with no time limits:** Creating opportunities for young people to provide insight and guidance on how best to plan and deliver services that meet their needs (e.g., one-on-one meetings, focus groups, and participatory workshops).
- **Social inclusion and community integration:** Working with other systems and sectors that should support young people to ensure they do not enter and/or return to homelessness after exiting a housing program.

There are a number of resources currently available for communities interested in systems planning to address youth homelessness, including the [Youth Homelessness Community Planning Toolkit](#). The [Systems Planning Collective](#) (a partnership between A Way Home Canada, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and HelpSeeker) is working to increase community and government capacity to integrate systems and services through community planning efforts by offering [open source resources and training](#) as well as fee-for-service support to people/communities interested or working in systems planning.

# Determining Priority Populations and Who Gets Access to HF4Y Supports First

In a context where resources are scarce, communities and service providers are tasked with determining who gets access to supports first. There are different parts to this process that are worth reflecting on, and we should begin with an acknowledgement that systems designed for adults may not work as well for youth unless they are adapted to their specific needs and circumstances. Community planners must ensure that priorities reflect the specific demographics of youth experiencing homelessness in their community, which is likely very different than the general population.

## Intake and Coordinated Access

When a young person engages a homeless-serving organization, there is usually some sort of intake process to understand their background, their presenting issues and their needs. Replace with: Within a HF4Y program it is necessary to not only assess their needs, but also to support decision-making in order to efficiently allocate scarce housing resources and supports.

In Canada, because of a Federal government mandate, most communities are moving to implement **Coordinated Access** systems designed to streamline access to necessary supports, including housing and rent supplements. This means that within a given community all organizations providing Housing First supports must collaborate on intake, assessment and prioritization, supported by a common and shared data infrastructure. Through Coordinated Access systems all people identified as experiencing homelessness in a given jurisdiction are expected to be assessed using standardized procedures to determine their mental health, medical, and social vulnerabilities. Given what we now know about the inadequacy

of many of the most commonly used assessment tools that may be discriminatory (exhibiting bias, systemic racism and lack of efficacy) it is important that communities use evidence-based and validated assessment (and screening) tools. Because of this, communities may also choose to move away from singular standardized procedures to develop processes designed to meet the needs of key sub-populations, such as Indigenous Peoples, women and youth.

Coordinated Access is organized to provide common points of entry where individuals in need of support can be assessed to determine their level of need, such as community hubs, a dedicated assessment facility, phone lines, web-based platforms, or in-person at emergency shelters. Rather than having to go through an intake process every time a person accesses a service, a common intake process facilitates the direction of individuals experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness to the community services where people can access supports.

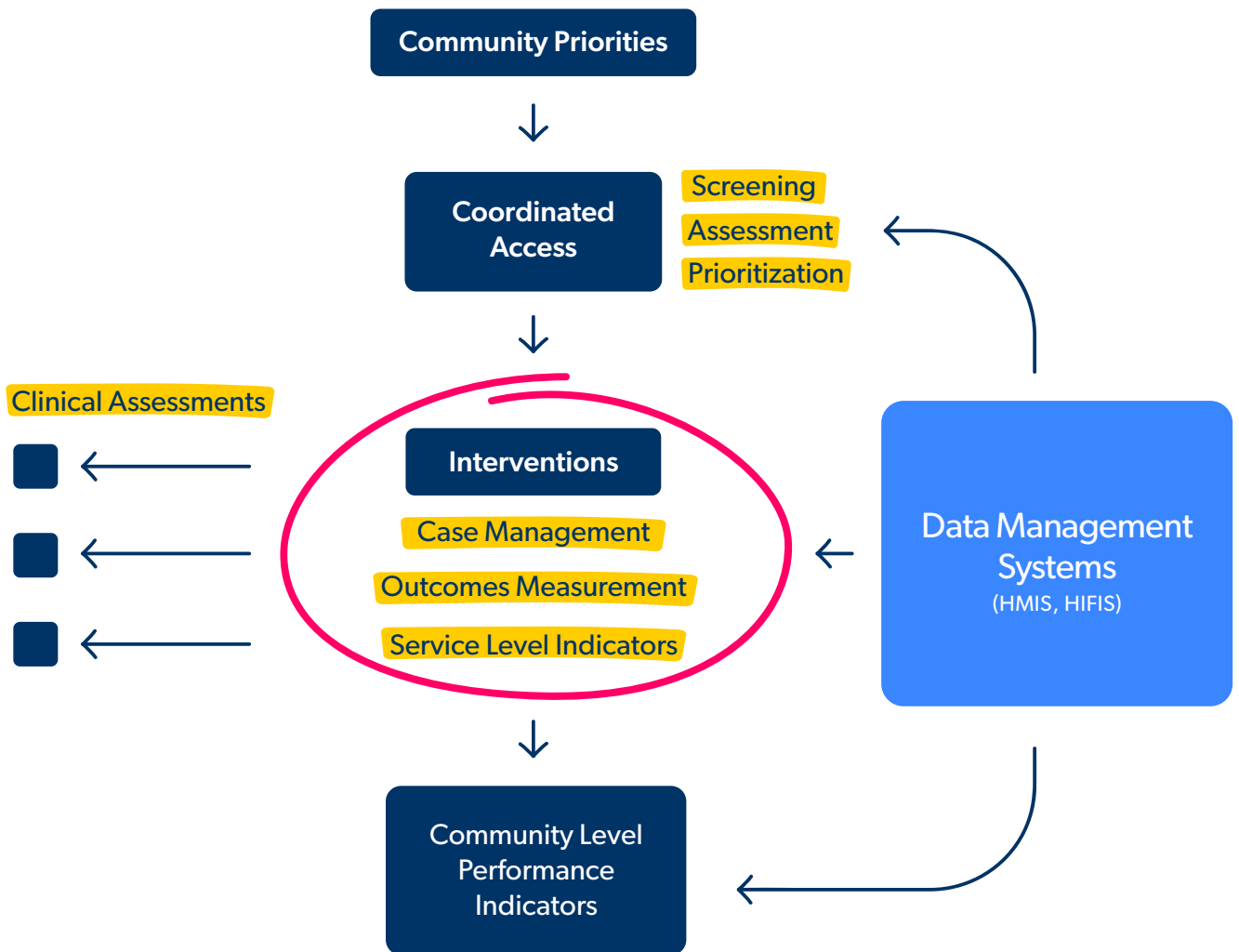
In the context of HF4Y, Coordinated Access should enable trained workers to assess people and prioritize those in greatest need for housing and supports. Based on the results of the intake assessment, the individual is referred to relevant housing-related supports and services that align with their needs.

Coordinated Access is being implemented widely because of the Government of Canada's Reaching Home policy. However, most Coordinated Access programs are designed to address broader populations experiencing homelessness, meaning that they are not necessarily well-designed to take into account the specific needs of young people. In communities that implement some form of coordinated assessment, it is important that it be designed and implemented with the special needs of youth in mind. It is recommended that communities:

1. Develop a youth-specific coordinated access strategy
2. Ensure that there is no age limit that precludes young people 16 or under from accessing supports
3. Have a distinct decision-making table to prioritize youth
4. Ensure the coordinated access strategy is designed to support a focus on prevention, not just the needs of high complexity, chronically homeless persons
5. Introduce a unified and assets-based youth assessment and prioritization tool
6. Monitor and refine implementation of Coordinated Access through data sharing and evaluation measures

For detailed information on how to adapt Coordinated Access systems properly for youth, see [Youth-focused Coordinated Access Systems](#).

Figure 1: Typical Coordinated Access Model



## Prioritization in the context of HF4Y

A well designed and resourced HF4Y approach should take a rights-based approach and address the housing and supports needs of ALL youth who come for help. Unfortunately, in the context of scarce resources and often because of the demands of funders, communities and organizations often seek ways to prioritize who gets housing and supports first based on risk and vulnerability. This requires that communities first agree on what factors or characteristics determine who is in greatest need. Housing First for adults typically prioritizes chronically homeless individuals with complex and high acuity mental health and addictions challenges.

In implementing HF4Y, communities set priorities for who is eligible for the program based on risk and vulnerability and which youth get access first. If young people are simply placed in the same prioritization pool as adults – especially if chronic homelessness with high levels of complexities such as mental health and addictions guide prioritization – young people may not adequately receive the supports they need.

**Prioritization for HF4Y can be understood in three related ways:**

1. First, at the community level, the community must decide which youth are in greatest need and are to be prioritized for HF4Y programs. It is important that communities establish separate priorities for youth and have a separate decision-making table. If young people are simply placed in the same prioritization pool as adults, the risks facing young people may not be properly identified and assessed, and they may not adequately receive the supports they need.
2. Second, rather than simply prioritize chronically homeless youth with acute mental health and addictions problems, communities should take into account other important characteristics of sub-populations based on their unique vulnerability (Indigenous youth, LGBTQ2S youth, Black youth, young teens, women, youth who are or are at risk of being trafficked, or a combination of such factors). Communities may also employ HF4Y as a preventive strategy (youth leaving care, justice-involved youth).
3. Third, when prioritizing those in greatest need, communities may consider other factors beyond the narrower prioritization criteria associated with the adult Housing First model. Focusing only on chronicity combined with high complexity (mental health and addictions) can mean forcing young people to wait while they are exposed to the rigors of life on the streets. Prolonged exposure to homelessness has a negative impact on health, mental health, well-being, and personal safety at a particularly crucial time in young people's lives.



As a result, there is a need to consider the vulnerability of those young people who may have no history of homelessness (or have just become homeless) and don't demonstrate high complexity according to the scoring of traditional assessment tools, but who are deemed to be vulnerable because of a single or group of factors, including:

- Their family and natural supports are particularly weak or absent.
- They are vulnerable to being trafficked.
- Their personal safety may be at risk.
- They are experiencing serious mental health and/or addictions problems.
- They are forced to work in unsafe conditions.
- They may have disabling conditions that affect decision-making and judgment, such as FASD, brain injury, or a developmental delay. They may also be unaware of this.
- They have experienced high levels of adverse and traumatic experiences, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect.
- They have been released from institutional care (child protection, corrections/juvenile justice, inpatient mental health care) without a plan, housing, or supports.
- They are pregnant and/or have children.
- Their young age.

Finally, it is worth remembering that HF4Y is based in a human rights perspective that insists on the right of all young people to be housed. Canada has signed a number of international human rights agreements that spell out human rights obligations in addressing the situation of youth who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.<sup>2</sup> More recently, the Government of Canada passed legislation making housing a human right. Prioritization should therefore be implemented within a complete continuum of services for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including early intervention and prevention programs. Policies, laws, and strategies aimed at addressing youth homelessness must be grounded in human rights at all stages of development, implementation, and evaluation.

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2. Four core United Nations documents are the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#), the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#), the [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#) and the [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination \(ICERD\)](#).

## Assessment

If prioritization is a process for determining who first gets access to HF4Y supports, assessment is a process to:

1. **Assist in and inform the prioritization decision-making process at the community or organizational level, and**
2. **Determine the services and supports an individual needs.**

There are two levels of assessment that can be used:

- First, a short “screener” can be used for the purposes of determining if the youth is eligible for supports and can assist in prioritization.
- The second, a full assessment, can also inform prioritization but more generally is used for service planning and coordination.

It needs to be acknowledged that given the complexity of youth homelessness, determining a young person’s vulnerability through assessment is not necessarily straightforward or can be objectively measured (Brown, Cummings, Lyons, Carrión, & Watson, 2018). One should be wary of the claims made for some of the more popular assessment tools that are offered in the homelessness sector, particularly ones that have not been validated through scientific research. “There is currently very limited evidence to support the psychometric properties of instruments available for coordinated assessment” (Brown et al., 2018). Another weakness of some assessment tools is that they try to “do it all” – assess vulnerability, determine prioritization, and support case management.

All of this suggests that if assessment tools are to be used for HF4Y, they need to be designed specifically for youth and need rigorous scientific research to validate their efficacy. Effective assessment tools for HF4Y, in addition to being validated and based on the needs of developing adolescents and young adults, need to be strengths-based and not simply focus on what is “wrong” with the individual. A youth-focused assessment should include the young person’s self-assessment as well as staff observations. Assessment tools that rely too much on self-assessment and/or produce numerical scores for the purpose of ranking and decision-making should be avoided. Moreover, they should not rely on closed-ended questions as people generally can figure out what the “right” answer is that will get them access to supports. It is important to remember that assessment tools are meant to assist in decision-making, not to make decisions for people. Moreover, a good assessment tool should support recommendations that are reviewed and approved by the youth themselves.

Finally, assessment tools should be developed with a lens to equity. Some of the most popular assessment tools, such as the VI-SPDAT, have been shown to have a systemic bias against Black women, for instance (Cronley, 2020).

While no tool is perfect, an example of a strengths-based approach to assessment is the Youth Assessment and Prioritization (YAP) tool (which includes both a “screener” and a more extensive assessment tool) and can be helpful in facilitating decision-making regarding prioritization. Designed for youth who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, the YAP is an assessment tool 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 the youth’s risk and vulnerability factors as well as the youth’s strengths and goals. The administration of the tool relies on an open dialogue between the youth and the service provider, allowing the young person to feel part of the decision making, and allows the youth to reflect on their goals and progress.

This suggests that the YAP can be used not only for assessment but case management. The strengths-based and participatory approach can lend focus to required and ongoing developmental supports as well as opportunities that promote success, rather than those that just eliminate or ignore failures. Assessment information, combined with the judgment of the caseworker, may call out for deeper assessments using established tools to identify conditions such as brain injury, developmental delays, FASD, or other disabling conditions.

The YAP tool underwent a validation process led by Dr. Tim Aubry, Professor of Psychology at the University of Ottawa in October, 2019. It is still undergoing further development and refinement.

Training is required to administer the YAP tool. In order to gain access to the assessment tool and database, organizations must complete the mandatory two-day training. At the end of the training, organizations will be given their organizational account to use the site to upload completed assessments. For more information, email [info@awayhome.ca](mailto:info@awayhome.ca).



# Data Management

**Effective data management begins with clarity about organizational goals and objectives: what is the problem the program intervention is trying to solve? What are the desired outcomes?**

**Underlying our approach to data management at the program and organization level are shared measurement and data management systems, which are key to supporting individual case management as well as the broader social change we are looking for. Having agencies and services use common assessment, case management, and outcomes measures requires not only agreement within the sector but cooperation from funders.**

## Data Management Systems

Common platforms such as HIFIS and HMIS are used by agencies and communities across Canada to capture data about individuals who are accessing local services. Because this information is contained within a single database, it is possible to monitor how individuals are progressing through program interventions or transitioning between service providers.

There are many benefits associated with a coordinated data management strategy. First, it can support the alignment of program philosophies, activities, and outcomes across the sector. Second, it can contribute to enhanced collaboration, systems integration, and a rethinking of how to collectively respond to the problem of youth homelessness through Collective Impact. Third and most importantly, it can potentially lead to better outcomes for youth if it enables young people to get access to the services that are most appropriate, facilitates a more effective flow through the system, and holds the sector accountable for better outcomes for youth.

## Program Performance and Individual Level Outcomes

Clear program-level outcomes are essential for measuring the performance and effectiveness of local adaptations of the HF4Y program model. Because we know from research that many young people struggle when they exit homelessness and wind up living in extreme poverty, have difficulty recovering from trauma, are disengaged from education and employment, lack personal safety, and experience social exclusion (Karabanow et al., 2018; Mayock et al., 2014; Gaetz et al., 2019), it is imperative that we focus on outcomes beyond simply whether they are housed or not. In support of enhancing housing stabilization, outcomes measures must also assess other factors that contribute to well-being, such as connections to family, friends, and other natural supports, engagement with school and/or the labour market, involvement with cultural and spiritual practices, personal safety and security, and participation in leisure and recreational activities that lead to growth. This broad range of outcomes is useful for helping young people identify meaning in their lives, give them a sense of belonging and, in the end, will help them achieve their potential (Gaetz et al., 2019).

At the level of the individual, tracking outcomes is useful for understanding how a young person is progressing through the intervention. In addition to guiding case management activities, participant level outcomes pinpoint how an intervention may have to be adjusted to respond to a young person's changing circumstance and/or needs.

Together program and participant outcome measures contribute to the continuous quality improvement of the HF4Y program and practice.

The outcomes listed below are tied to program objectives of the HF4Y model of supports, and should be used to guide service delivery and case management. These provide a good starting point for considering program objectives and outcomes.

### 1. Housing stability

Young people have:

- ✓ Obtained housing
- ✓ Maintained housing
- ✓ Enhanced knowledge and skills regarding housing and independent living
- ✓ Reduced stays in emergency shelters

## 2. Health and well-being

Young people have:

- ✓ Enhanced access to services and supports
- ✓ Improved health
- ✓ Food security
- ✓ Improved mental health
- ✓ Reduced harms related to substance use
- ✓ Enhanced personal safety
- ✓ Improved self-esteem
- ✓ Healthier sexual health practices
- ✓ Enhanced resilience

## 3. Education and employment

Young people have:

- ✓ Established goals for education and employment
- ✓ Enhanced participation in education
- ✓ Enhanced educational achievement
- ✓ Enhanced participation in training
- ✓ Enhanced labour force participation
- ✓ Improved financial security

## 4. Complementary supports

Young people have:

- ✓ Established personal goals
- ✓ Improved life skills
- ✓ Increased access to necessary non-medical services
- ✓ Addressed legal and justice issues

## 5. Social inclusion

Young people have:

- ✓ Built and/or reconnected to natural supports
- ✓ Enhanced family connections
- ✓ Enhanced connections to communities of young person's choice
- ✓ Strengthened cultural engagement and participation
- ✓ Engaged and participated in meaningful activities

## Standardized data collection and reporting

It is the responsibility of the program manager to make sure that individual-level outcomes data is kept up to date and inputted into the appropriate agency and/or community standardized reporting platform. The timing of reporting will vary from community-to-community and according to funder requirements. In cases where organizations are not using an inter-agency data collection platform such as HMIS, alternative third-party case management and reporting software should be used to safely secure youth data.

Individual-level data can come from a number of sources, including case notes, standardized 90-day assessments, critical incident reports, team meetings, and case consultations. Programs may opt to have front line staff provide the program manager with a monthly report that details how each young person on their case load is progressing according to the agreed upon program outcome areas (e.g., number of young people on caseload who have returned to school or secured employment).

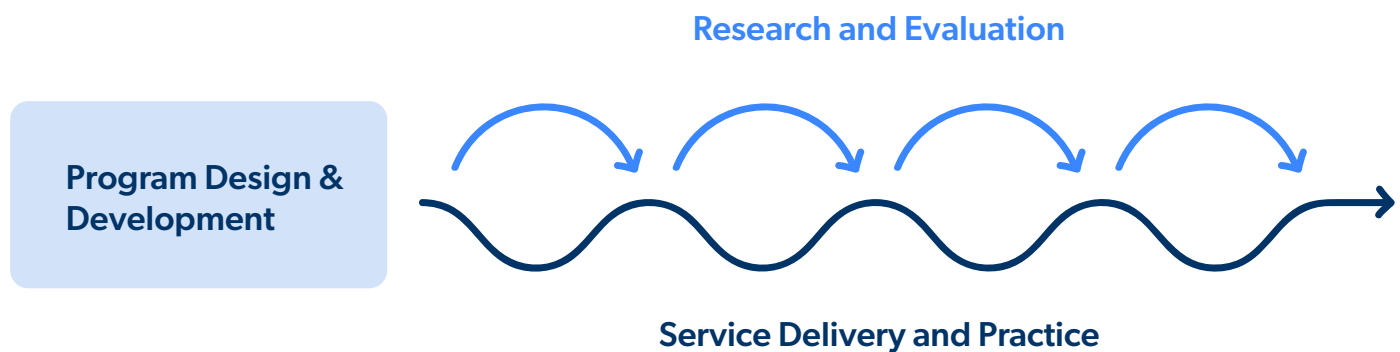


# Evaluation

Evaluating your Housing First for Youth program is important not only to ensure that your program actually works and is achieving the outcomes you are looking for, but it also can contribute to the continuous quality improvement (CQI) of your service delivery. Additionally, evaluation can help build the evidence base for HF4Y. Because there is not a strong track record of program evaluation research in the homelessness sector (this is in part because of a lack of funding and support) organizations may not have familiarity with evaluation methods or see the value of this kind of work. Done well, evaluation can make a big contribution to the quality of your HF4Y program.

**Developmental evaluation** supports the implementation of program models and fosters innovation in dynamic environments. As part of the research to action cycle (Figure 2), knowledge and learning gained through the analysis of data should routinely be used to ensure program fidelity and CQI of the service delivery model.

Figure 2: Iterative Research to Action cycle





**Outcomes evaluation** allows you to determine how effective your program is, and whether it is achieving its desired objectives. Outcomes gathered at the individual level provide case managers with information on what is working well, and where there are areas for improvement. By aggregating all youth-level data, an organization can assess the overall effectiveness of its program and identify areas of improvement. In both cases, outcomes evaluation can contribute to the continuous quality improvement of the HF4Y program.

In the coming year, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, working in partnership with other researchers and organizations in Canada and Europe will release a standardized HF4Y Outcomes Evaluation framework.



# Staffing and Operations

Successful rollout of HF4Y depends largely on recruiting the right people to deliver services making sure that they have competency in each area of the program model. There is a lot that goes into building a high-functioning team, which is beyond the scope of this manual. There are, however, several key staffing and operations-related decisions that all communities will need to make in the early stages of program design.

## Assembling a team and deciding on the size

There is no “one size fits all” approach to assembling the right program team. Deciding on the right composition and size of team comes down to the needs of the community and the local resources that are available. There is one guideline, however, that must be adhered to regardless of the size of the team: case management staff should have caseloads that range between 7–10 young people at any given time, with a mix of complexities.

Below is an overview of a typical HF4Y staffing model. There will be variations in job titles, roles, and responsibilities depending on community and program adaptations.

- **Program manager/program coordinator/team lead:** This individual supervises and supports the case team and oversees administrative tasks, landlord engagement, reporting and evaluation, financial management of the program, and continuous quality improvement. This individual is also responsible for ensuring that the program achieves fidelity, which means that the program is operating according to the principles of HF4Y.

- **Case manager/worker/navigator/counsellor staff:** This individual is responsible for finding and coordinating services and supports for the youth who are part of their caseload, such as completing forms to access government income supports, finding housing, setting up and attending medical appointments, and referring to clinical supports. They must maintain an active caseload of 7–10 young people at any given time. This individual also takes part in regular case consultations with other program staff including the program manager and clinician (where resources allow). The essence of this role is to walk alongside the youth, provide opportunities, build a relationship, and give them space to heal and grow.
- **Peer support staff:** These are dedicated positions for people with lived experience of youth homelessness. Peer staff provide additional guidance, advice, and support to youth in the program. Peer support staff are important because their lived experience and expertise can be useful in supporting HF4Y clients. Because they have 'been there', young people may feel that the peer staff are more understanding of the struggles they have.
- **Housing locator:** If your agency has the resources for this position, it can be designed to support the work of case managers. In this role, the housing locator is the main point of contact within the program when it comes to locating housing and building relationships with landlords. This can be a full- or part-time position, depending on community and organizational needs. They assist in all things housing related, including scheduling moves, evictions support and prevention, and creating formal partnerships with community resources, such as the food and furniture banks. This person also works closely with the case manager and young people to define housing needs, establish a realistic monthly budget, teach young people about the rights and responsibilities associated with renting, among others.

## Hiring staff with the right qualities

At a minimum, all staff should come with an understanding of adolescent development and the benefits of a positive youth development approach to case management. This must be underpinned by a genuine commitment to and understanding of the causes and solutions to youth homelessness, along with persistence and patience, which is best summed up as a “do whatever it takes” mindset.

In terms of recruitment, the education, personality traits, skills, and work experience of job candidates will vary. This variation is a desirable characteristic of a successful program team because this pool of life experiences is a resource young people can draw upon when exploring different areas of their life and setting goals for the future. The following are a list of desirable attributes that any program staff member should possess or be working towards:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| → Action-oriented                                   | → A creative problem-solver                                 |
| → Comfortable with ambiguity                        | → Lived experience (not mandatory)                          |
| → A good listener                                   | → Non-judgmental  |
| → Able to establish healthy professional boundaries | → Comfort with and ability to use anti-oppression practices |
| → Calm in high pressure situations                  | → Patience  |
| → Compassionate                                     | → Resilient   |

Some HF4Y service providers will ask job candidates to rate their level of agreement with a list of the core principles of HF4Y. This exercise gives both the candidate and the employer a chance to assess their suitability for the position and to be as transparent as possible about the type of organization and work they are considering.

A more interactive strategy could include scenario-based questions to help assess the way a candidate would react to a situation as well as identify any inherent biases they hold. For Indigenous-specific programs, ask the person being interviewed if they would like to have an Elder or Knowledge Keeper present during the interview or to speak with after the interview and have traditional medicines available. Ensure that local Indigenous cultural protocols are followed.

When hiring people with lived experience of homelessness, ensure that the organization is set up to properly support them. A good guide for supporting staff with lived experience in a peer role is [Creating, Managing and Supporting Spaces for Young Adult Experts and Peers](#) (Daley & Egag, 2019).



## A note on equity, inclusion, and diversity

Given that youth experiencing homelessness in Canada are disproportionately Indigenous, LGBTQ2S+, and Black, it's essential that leadership and program staff reflect these identities.

Established recruiting requirements such as a certain level of education, native English fluency, belonging in the same social network, etc. can unintentionally reinforce systemic racism and inequitable practices. Funders and organizations should review their practices to ensure that requirements are not barriers for BIPOC individuals. Additionally, if a HF4Y program has chosen to prioritize Indigenous, Black, and/or LGBTQ2S+ youth, the program should be staffed by people who reflect these identities.



## The importance of self-care

Delivering services to young people who have experienced trauma can have an effect on one's mental, physical, and emotional health. Therefore, organizational leadership must commit to fostering and building a positive work culture – one designed to support program staff in times of need, as well as celebrate successes along the way. To support these efforts, the program manager should remind and support staff to lean on a healthy support system outside of work. Staff should be provided access to free mental health supports, as their work involves exposure to histories of trauma, abuse, neglect, etc.

Building and nurturing relationships with young people is at the core of the HF4Y case management approach. This is only possible through ongoing engagement, open communication, and active listening. Without these foundations, young people will be likely to disengage from the program, diminishing the relationship required for effective case management.

Agencies looking to hire case managers must be transparent about the nature of the work and ask about a person's emotional supports and strategies for self-care. Staff will be exposed to a variety of situations that range from witnessing a youth actively using to potential overdoses and sometimes death. Case managers may encounter situations of physical and emotional violence. This is an unfortunate reality that prevention and early intervention programs like HF4Y are working to change. However, informing employees at the beginning about this possibility is not only a good strategy for retaining employees but also an ethical duty. Similarly, program supervisors should monitor the outlook, mood, and energy of staff members to identify the signs of burnout, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and compassion fatigue. In cases where burnout does occur, the program manager along with agency leaders should take immediate action to assist them in accessing support.

# EXAMPLES

## An example of compassion fatigue

Sid appeared to have less energy for work and mentioned that he wasn't sleeping well. His supervisor, Ananth, noticed that he was getting overwhelmed by small tasks and didn't seem motivated when he arrived at the office in the mornings. Ananth also noticed that Sid became very defensive when asked about the status of his cases. Something was definitely wrong: Sid was more irritable than usual and seemed "checked out" all the time. Understanding the warning signs of burnout and compassion fatigue, Ananth decided to talk to Sid about what was going on. Approaching him with genuine concern for his well-being, Ananth told Sid what he had observed about his mood and energy levels and asked him if that felt true to him—some therapists refer to this gesture as a "reality check." After Sid acknowledged that he had felt less energetic and motivated, they discussed what kind of support might help him, such as paid time off, counselling, a lower caseload, flexible work days, etc. There are a number of ways that staff can be supported to overcome compassion fatigue. Here are a few suggestions:

- ✓ Inform leadership/upper management about needs.
- ✓ Take time off to reflect and acknowledge feelings within high-stress and high-stakes environments.
- ✓ Take time to physically and mentally rest from work.
- ✓ Connect with a counsellor to identify needs and/or triggers (if any) and learn strategies to cope with and address them.
- ✓ Find a community or connect with coworkers who understand the work, allowing a safe space to "let off steam" and experience empathy.
- ✓ Learn not to carry or take responsibilities for things outside one's responsibility or control.
- ✓ In some cases, it can be helpful to take a leave of absence to reflect and evaluate the position.

## Participation in a Community of Practice

Because providing support to young people in a HF4Y program can present many challenges, the opportunity to discuss and consult with others doing similar work is important. Program staff and senior leaders need to feel confident that they can rely on the advice, mentorship, and support of like-minded professionals in order to effectively deliver the HF4Y model. A Community of Practice (CoP) is defined as a group of people “who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2011: 1). For organizations and communities delivering programming associated with the HF4Y program model, a CoP is necessary for establishing a common language, set of tools, and knowledge base to draw from when case consulting, earmarking resources, and evaluating program outcomes. Without a CoP, organizations may end up creating duplicate resources and information. CoP activities may include hosting regular conference calls or video chats, sharing case management tools, research, and where possible, convening in-person gatherings.

## Staff training and competencies

While all program staff should come to this work with a general understanding of the needs of young people and competency in the core skills and attributes required to excel in a highly ambiguous work environment, the program manager is ultimately responsible for ensuring that team members receive training in areas key to the successful implementation of the HF4Y program model.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| ✓ HF4Y training  | ✓ Peer Support                                  |
| ✓ Positive youth development and strengths/asset-based case management | ✓ Assertive Engagement                          |
| ✓ Case management best practices                                       | ✓ Anti-Oppressive Practice                      |
| ✓ Healing-centred engagement   | ✓ Understanding the needs of Black young people |
| ✓ Harm reduction   | ✓ Supporting LGBTQ2S+ youth                     |
| ✓ Youth Assessment and Prioritization (YAP) Tool                       | ✓ Indigenous Cultural Competency                |
| ✓ Motivational Interviewing  | ✓ Refugee and newcomer young people             |
| ✓ Family and Natural Supports Training                                 | ✓ Landlord and Tenant Legislation and Policy    |

Ongoing training in all of these areas is required to ensure program staff remain up to date on emerging best practices, evidence, and research to do their work effectively and maintain program fidelity.

The Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab, co-led by A Way Home Canada and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, offers training and technical support in a number of these areas.<sup>3</sup>

## Staff Supervision

Because HF4Y staff spend the majority of their time in the community meeting youth, conducting home visits, and coordinating services, program supervisors do not see their staff throughout the day. For this reason, program managers should start the day with a brief team meeting. This check-in with program staff is a chance to review the day's priorities and goals (e.g., moving a youth or doubling staff on a home visit) and if there are any concerns or supports that need to be addressed. Guided by a simple agenda, these meetings are an opportunity for the program supervisor to model the kinds of safe and inclusive work environments they expect of staff.

Staff meetings should be weekly and structured in a way that gives space for team building, a chance to explore youth and staff successes as well challenges. Asking intentional questions, such as, "How are you working with a young person to set a reasonable housing budget?" or "How are you engaging with family and natural supports in your work?" is another strategy program managers can use to prompt staff engagement. A strength-based approach to feedback is advised.

There are no simple truths when it comes to case management. Program staff will often be called upon to navigate ambiguous situations and make decisions where the answer to a problem is not apparent. To that end, situational feedback (i.e. informal supervision) is an effective method for providing guidance, advice, and direction to program staff to assist them in navigating uncertain situations. For instance, a parent may ask a case manager to discipline their child on their behalf. This may result in the case manager feeling conflicted: "Should I respect the wishes of parents?" "What about the rights of the young person?" Rather than providing a solution to problems, it is important to ask staff questions about the problem at hand to help them learn to build the kind of problem-solving skills that case

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3. For more information, email [info@awayhome.ca](mailto:info@awayhome.ca). Visit the [Homelessness Learning Hub](#) for free resources and self-directed training tailored to meet the needs of practitioners.



managers require. This will allow staff to feel confident solving problems as they arise out in the community, when they do not have immediate access to their supervisor.

Case notes and other youth-related files should be reviewed regularly by the program supervisor. At a minimum, file review should occur monthly so that the supervisor is able to verify that program staff are delivering services in accordance with the principles of HF4Y and ensuring fidelity. File review is also a great way to identify coaching opportunities with youth. If, for instance, after reviewing a young person's 90-day assessment it becomes clear that they are struggling to find a job, the program manager may want to use reflective practice techniques to ask program staff to come up with new strategies to assist with the job search.

# Case Management

Case management is a well-established approach to supporting youth with complex needs and/or who are in crisis (Milaney, 2011). In the context of delivering HF4Y, case management should be youth-centred and conducted from a strengths-based, positive youth development orientation – strengths-based case management – that focuses on building life skills. For more information on positive youth development, see part one of this guide, *THIS is Housing First for Youth: Program Model Guide*.

Many young people can best be supported through a case management approach where the caseworker has overall responsibility for care and support but also acts as a broker to help young people access necessary services and supports. An effective approach to case management necessarily works best with a system of care, where links are made to necessary services and supports, based on identified youth's needs.

Each youth will have a primary worker, and this person should stay as consistent as possible. In cases where the primary case worker is struggling with a particular issue or challenge, another member of the team may be brought in to support the case work, particularly if they are skilled in a relevant area.

*"The entire team should be familiar with all cases so that given the inability of the primary worker to address a need of the participant, another member of the team can. Another worker may be particularly skilled in a particular area."*

Wally Czech, Director of Training,  
Canadian Alliance to End  
Homelessness

## The role of the case manager

The HF4Y case manager works directly with the young person to identify needs, provide support, and contribute to their ongoing development. They develop a supportive and trusting relationship with the young person and use a range of strategies to stabilize their living situation, build life skills, enhance their engagement with family and friends, education and/or employment, and connect them with communities of their choice. In practice, HF4Y workers will employ a range of strategies and interventions with young people to help ensure that they transition to adulthood in a way that reduces the risk that they will ever experience homelessness again. These strategies and approaches include:

- ✓ Assessment
- ✓ Goal setting
- ✓ Referrals and accompanying youth to appointments
- ✓ Coordinating peer and group work
- ✓ Building life skills
- ✓ Troubleshooting and practical support
- ✓ Mediation
- ✓ Providing opportunity
- ✓ Advocacy
- ✓ Supporting collaboration and engagement
- ✓ Systems navigation

Providing effective supports for young people necessarily involves helping connect the young person to a range of supports. As such, a case manager will need to develop over time a solid network of supports in the areas of health and therapy, employment and training, and education. A team approach to case management helps build this network.

## Case management models

The At Home/Chez Soi project has identified that for many clients the first three months can be most challenging. Providing appropriate levels of support during this time is crucial for recovery and retention of housing. Therefore, many HF4Y programs employ an **Intensive Case Management (ICM)** model in supporting youth ranging from high to low complex mental health and/or addictions needs and time to build and practice life skills. The objective is to help youth maintain their housing and achieve an optimum quality of life through developing plans, enhancing life skills, and addressing health and mental health needs. In practice, case management can be short-term or long-term and ongoing depending on the specific needs of the individual. For young people who are experiencing difficulty due to crises or transitions in their lives they are experiencing as disruptive, an appropriate

approach is **Critical Time Intervention (CTI)**, which is a time-limited and strengths-based case management intervention meant to provide supports to help people through difficult times and strengthen their network of support in the community. While CTI is a time-limited model, it cannot be used to replace the standard case management services that are offered through a HF4Y program because there are no time limits. In other words, even if your HF4Y program uses CTI, **all youth should continue to receive case management services for as long as they want.**

For those young people with very complex needs, the case management models associated with the *Pathways* model of HF4Y may be adapted for the needs of developing adolescents and young adults. For instance, some young people with complex health and addictions challenges may require team-based approaches such as **Assertive Community Treatment (ACT)**. In the ACT model, a multidisciplinary team that provides case management is present in the same building or complex where the youth resides, rather than in offices or institutions. The team includes psychiatrists, family physicians, social workers, nurses, occupational therapists, vocational specialists, and peer support workers and is available to the person 24 hours a day, seven days a week. However, not all HF4Y programs will have the resources to offer ACT as a case management model.

## Considerations for Case Management

### PRACTICING EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

Because discrimination contributes to youth homelessness, Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQ2S+ youth are overrepresented in the youth homelessness population (Springer, Lum, & Roswell, 2013; Gaetz et al., 2016; Abramovich, 2012; Ecker, 2016). HF4Y program delivery and case management should not perpetuate discrimination. It must embody the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and have a strong understanding of Anti-Oppressive Practice.



**“Homelessness doesn’t pick and choose. We have to be educated, culturally sensitive, and aware of microaggressions. If we don’t create a safe space, those folks won’t reach out to us and the services we’re providing.” – Kristin Johnston, Life Stream Coaching**

Guidelines for practicing equity, diversity, and inclusion in HF4Y case management:

- ✓ Design programs and services with input from potential service users and follow their lead and recommendations
- ✓ Be respectful and approach program clients as equals
- ✓ Empower the person's decision-making in case management and ensure that their voice is in everything
- ✓ Reflect the diversity of clientele in the HF4Y program, from organizational policies and forms to signage and the physical environment to the staff and leadership
- ✓ Take responsibility to learn on one's own about a particular community and do not expect the person to educate
- ✓ Check judgment and assumptions
- ✓ Be humble: mistakes will occur and are great learning opportunities

With regard to specific identities and their intersections, case managers should possess understanding of and empathy with the following forms of discrimination: homophobia, transphobia, racism, colonialism, sexism, ableism, discrimination against immigrants, and ageism. Case managers should always validate experiences of discrimination when they are disclosed using a trauma-informed approach and ensure that youth are supported to address trauma if they so choose through referral to a mental health or other service.

Keep in mind that past, historical, and ongoing experiences of discrimination have an impact on young people's access to housing, education, and employment and can affect whether young people agree to accept certain kinds of supports. For instance, cultural experiences of discrimination in the health care system may lead young people to avoid accessing those services.

In addition to extending support to youth experiencing discrimination, it is important that case managers offer positive resources and referrals related to the young person's identity such as a particular community centre (e.g., a church, cultural centre, artistic space, etc.). It is impossible to become an expert in everything. But it is possible to establish relationships with other experts and draw on these resources for young people. Finally, if young people do not want to connect with these particular resources or explore an aspect of their identity, it is their right and should be respected. Youth should never be shamed or judged for making decisions about what is best for them.

## CASELOADS

Where HF4Y has been delivered consistent with this program model guide, caseloads have been established in the range of 7–10 per caseworker, with seven being the ideal in order to produce the most optimal outcomes for youth. Case ratios should be balanced according to complexity of need.

Given the broad range of supports that any young person needs to transition to adulthood and out of homelessness – and these are identified as central to the support model of HF4Y – smaller caseloads are necessary if we want to see desired outcomes.

If the program is supporting youth of the highest complexity, case managers should not be supporting more than seven youth at a time. That being said, caseloads may increase temporarily to cover staff absences, such as sick days and vacation. Ideally, there should be a range of complexity on every case manager's caseload.

Given the unique needs of developing adolescents and young adults, there is a strong case to be made against having larger caseloads. Larger caseloads diminish the important and challenging work of HF4Y providers, resulting in service that only meets youth's basic needs, managing crises instead of focusing on long-term goals and providing opportunities for growth. For these reasons, successful HF4Y programs require a serious commitment on the part of communities and funders to ensure caseloads stay within these recommended limits.

*“Caseload numbers should be carefully balanced. When considering the impacts of including family and natural supports, complexities of targeted groups (LGBTQ2S, Indigenous) and the potential of managing crisis, caseloads in excess of 7 should be avoided.”*

Kim Kakakaway –Indigenous Housing First for Youth Expert



**Housing First programs that serve young people under 25 and operate with large caseloads are not consistent with fidelity to the HF4Y model and should not be described as such.**

## CASE MANAGEMENT TOOLS

It is important to have a set of case management tools and documents to complement the work and supports being offered to the young person. These tools demonstrate the young person's growth and areas of development, hold the young person accountable to the goals they have set, provide clear steps forward to achieving those goals, and act as a visual reminder of their accomplishments. A comprehensive set of case management tools also complements the team approach and provides an overview to every member of the team where all youth are at in the program, what they are working on, and what support is needed.

Many HF4Y programs that demonstrate high fidelity to the program model have a range of resources that they use with youth in their program. These resources include a youth overview to the HF4Y program, outlining expectations and supports they can expect while in the program so they can make an informed decision before consenting, intake packages, goal setting tools, youth surveys, and community transition plans. Examples of what these tools look like and how to use them can be found at [homelesshub.ca/HF4Y](https://homelesshub.ca/HF4Y).

## GOAL SETTING

Young people with experiences in systems have too often been defined primarily by their deficits, especially when services are determined by the degree of need. Positive youth development posits that each young person, regardless of their circumstances, has the ability to overcome adversity and achieve personal success. Everyone has unique strengths and abilities that can be developed to improve resilience and positive self-identity. This process begins with shifting the mindset from focusing on the "problem" or challenge at hand, to drawing on strengths to reframe or address vulnerabilities. Practically speaking, this involves recognizing what a young person identifies as their own strengths, abilities, or positive characteristics and working from there. Goal setting is an important component of case management that helps young people understand and separate their strengths and weaknesses in order to set a direction for their lives.

A major part of the case manager's role is providing youth the opportunity to explore their dreams and desires and create space for them to further build their identity. This can include challenging young people to re-frame or view a situation in a new light through motivational interviewing. For instance, if a young person is evicted from their apartment because of poor

behaviour, it may be worth having a discussion with them about how their actions can lead to negative consequences. These conversations, which can be difficult to have, are useful for identifying areas for personal development including resilience, self-awareness, and personal responsibility.

Goal setting assists youth in providing opportunities and finding direction, motivation, and a pathway for self-discovery. It also helps youth remain accountable to themselves, allows them to take control of their future, recognize and acknowledge their strengths, identify their support networks, and most importantly, celebrate the small steps towards progress that are sometimes hard to see.



**Goals must always be led by the youth with staff supporting on the side.**

In order to support effective goal setting, one must first build a trusting relationship with the youth. In line with the HF4Y core principle of youth voice, youth choice, and self-determination, young people must be supported to have their own goals, not goals set by someone else in their lives (including the preferences of their case manager). In other words, goals must always be led by the youth with staff supporting on the side. Goal setting may be an unfamiliar process for some youth and can raise many emotions, including fear. Goal setting must therefore be thoughtful and intentional, building out over time so that the youth can discover what is important to them and what direction they want to move in.



# EXAMPLES

## Example of Goal Setting

When Ashley sat down with Cass about setting some goals, he mentioned that he had always dreamed of becoming a veterinarian. Ashley knew that Cass had an active addiction to meth amphetamines, but she also knew that Cass was not ready to recognize this addiction. So, rather than identifying the addiction as a potential goal, Ashley followed Cass's wishes to take steps towards becoming a veterinarian. Together, they started making tangible goals: contact a veterinarian for an informational interview to find out what the job is like, do research on what kinds of education the profession requires and what skills are needed that cannot be learned in school, and find out what types of prerequisites are needed before attending university. But Cass was really struggling to accomplish these goals. He wasn't able to wake up to make an appointment with a veterinarian or to start researching programs because of his meth addiction. After six months of trying to make progress, he realized that he needed to address the addiction. Had Ashley told him this bit of information earlier, however, she more than likely would have faced denial and defensiveness from Cass. She also would have risked damaging his trust and their relationship. Cass needed to recognize on his own what goals he needed to accomplish. This experience also shows that case managers cannot expect people to address their addictions before they're ready.



There are different strategies to help young people with goal setting. The process of writing out goals provides clarity, accountability, and responsibility. Many youth-serving agencies choose SMART goals because they are tangible, require timelines, and provide steps to achieving youth's overarching goals. This approach also provides space for youth to think about what supports and resources they may need and what people, including their family and natural supports, can help them in achieving their goals.

In striving to help young people with goal setting, it is important to remember that there may be times when support staff may identify a goal that the youth does not. For example, a youth that actively uses substances may not see this as an area they want to focus on at this time. Supporting youth in the areas that are important to them will not only create buy-in and build trust but increase their desire to move forward and look to the future. Motivational Interviewing is an established approach to help young people understand and identify changes that can be healthy for them.

With all goal setting exercises, it is important to understand (for both staff and youth) that goals and priorities can fluctuate and change, which is why they should be reviewed a minimum of 90 days or as frequently as a young person would like. Periodically going back to the beginning steps to explore what needs to be modified will provide youth the focus and direction required to lead them to their desired outcome. For staff supporting youth, it is important to see yourself as walking alongside them as they discover their true self, build their self-esteem and efficacy are the results of setting goals. Families and natural supports should be considered when setting, tracking, and evaluating goals. For instance, this may include designating specific roles for family members to help hold the youth accountable for achieving their goals.

## SMART goals

The SMART goals approach suggests that ideally the youth's goals should be clear and achievable. Each goal should be:

- **Specific** – Who? What? When? Why? The goal should be specific, as specific goals are much more achievable.
- **Measurable** – How will you track your progress? Fitbit? Activity app? Good ol' pen and paper? Knowing how you are doing along the journey is crucial to actually reaching your goal.
- **Attainable** – How will you go about achieving your goal? Think of tangible ways to get there and then act on them. Break your goal into smaller steps.
- **Realistic** – Is your goal manageable, realistic? Look, we'd all probably like to climb Mount Everest and race in the Tour de France at some point, but let's manage expectations just a bit to ensure you don't get overwhelmed and discouraged.
- **Timely** – When will you achieve your goal? How much time do you need to get there? Everyone is busy, so to help get you to where you want to be and reach your goal, take some time to create realistic timelines and plan ahead.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF HOME VISITS

Weekly meetings between case managers and youth – often done in the home – are one of the few requirements of HF4Y. Few youth will absolutely refuse supports, but it is important that youth are informed of this requirement prior to intake so that they can provide informed consent. Home visits are an opportunity to engage youth in an environment that is most comfortable to them. They also provide case managers insight on strengths and areas for improvement in life-skills development. During home visits, case managers can see how youth are taking care of themselves, learn more about them, and find out what is important to them.

Home visits should include inquiring about basic needs, such as groceries or cleaning supplies, and ensuring no damages have been made to the unit. When the opportunity presents itself, these visits also serve as a chance to socialize over a cup of coffee and discuss personal goals and dreams. Program staff should work with young people in their homes to teach them new skills. For example, a HF4Y case manager can spend time during a home visit demonstrating how to cook a basic meal, how to do laundry, or how to plunge and clean a toilet.

In terms of timing, home visits should happen regularly for youth when they first enter the program and be adjusted as they increase their skills and autonomy.

It is a privilege to be invited into a young person's home, which means that case managers must acknowledge and respect their rules and boundaries. In other words, expectations and assumptions about lifestyle (e.g., cleanliness or décor) need to be checked at the front door, before entering a young person's home.

### **ENHANCING FAMILY AND NATURAL SUPPORTS**

Another part of case management in HF4Y involves helping young people broaden the network of support that they can rely on as they move forward in their lives. Family members and "natural supports" – that is, meaningful others in the life of a young person – are a good starting point for youth to build their network of support. The underlying ethos of a [Family and Natural Supports \(FNS\)](#) approach is that family – whether biological, adoptive, or chosen – is important to everyone. The Without a Home study on youth homelessness identified that 72% of youth surveyed had ongoing contact with at least one family member and 78% desired an improvement in relationships with their family (Gaetz et al., 2016). Natural supports may include family, friends, romantic partners, neighbours, coaches, co-workers, teammates, fellow students, and other relationships. Positive relationships give one a sense of belonging, identity, security, and self-esteem. In addition to helping meet emotional needs, they can also help to meet physical and instrumental needs.

# EXAMPLES

## Example of enhancing family and natural supports

Lauren was in a HF4Y program and had attended a detox program. When they left detox, they created a safety plan with their case manager: every time they wanted to use, they were going to bake. The weekend was coming and the staff were all off, so they made sure that Lauren had all the baking supplies they needed to support them through their new coping strategy. That weekend, Lauren called the emergency staff number because they were out of eggs. The staff did not believe running out of eggs was an emergency, so they tried to problem-solve. They told Lauren to knock on their neighbour's door and ask them if they have some extra eggs. Lauren thought this was a wild idea and feared that something bad might happen if they ask. Staff told them that this was a common neighbourly request and encouraged them to do it, even stayed on the line with them while they did. To Lauren's surprise, their neighbour was happy to lend an egg. Lauren told the staff that they couldn't believe the response. They went back to baking and offered their neighbour chocolate chip cookies the next day. After this experience, Lauren never had another guest management issue because of the relationship they developed with their neighbour. Lauren was able to practice life skills and understand the importance of relationships and respecting your neighbours. These lessons cannot be forced but must emerge through experience and time in the program.



Case managers can help young people identify positive relationships and meaningful people in their life by thinking about who they celebrate successes with and rely on for support during difficult times. It's important for case managers to consider how these people can contribute and be viewed as assets so that youth do not rely solely on the support of a case manager. For example, when appropriate, these chosen supports can accompany youth to view prospective homes, go to appointments, and be included in goal planning. Importantly, any inclusion of these supports must be determined by the youth. If youth want to improve their relationships with a family member or natural support, case managers should consider referring them to an FNS worker, who can provide dedicated services, such as family mediation, counselling, and coaching for youth and their supports. All HF4Y case managers should receive FNS training so that they can find ways to seek out and engage supports effectively and to know when dedicated FNS support is needed.



**In a HF4Y context, building family and natural supports will help the young person as they move forward in life and is a case support priority. This should be viewed as “building a safety net” for youth when supports end up backing away.**

## GRADUATION

There is no time limit on engagement in HF4Y programs: youth leave the program when they have determined they are ready. Many models of housing with supports (rapid rehousing, transitional housing) come with a short-term commitment of assistance. Research on the Foyer model demonstrates that shorter terms of support undermine key goal setting such as school engagement, as young people become more concerned and worried about whether they can make it and focus on survival (Gaetz & Scott, 2012).

Internal program data from Trellis (formerly the Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary) suggests that the average length of time spent in their HF4Y program (Infinity) is around 2.5 years (Personal Correspondence, 2017). In the end, graduation can be driven by the desire of the young person or as an outcome of a mutual conversation with their case worker. While there are no time limits and youth cannot be discharged from the program, it is important for case managers to stay focused on the youth's goals and to help them become more self-sufficient

so that they can graduate. When a youth is getting closer to 24, it may be determined that the young person is going to need ongoing case management support, which would require a warm transfer to an adult Housing First program. It is important to assess on an ongoing basis whether a young person is going to need continued support for a period of time – perhaps indefinitely – so that the program can provide a warm transfer into a HF adult program or supportive living program.

A HF4Y checklist has been developed that has the HF4Y core principles broken down into skills/abilities that are tangible for youth and staff to see (all tools and templates are available for download on [homelesshub.ca/HF4Y](https://homelesshub.ca/HF4Y)). This is a great tool to use when having a conversation with youth about graduation and learning from them where they think they are at, what supports/resources they still think they need, and what goals (if any) can look like moving forward so they can get closer to graduation. This tool is also helpful for youth who have become disengaged in the program.

# Housing Supports

With housing stabilized, youth can begin to contemplate their future and decide the direction of their journey. Housing support includes rent and income supplements provided by the program, helping a young person find suitable accommodation (including understanding what a lease is and the responsibilities of tenancy), taking care of one's home and avoiding damage, managing adverse experiences, such as a loss in income that may jeopardize one's housing situation, and in some cases helping the young person get rehoused.

## Rent and income supplements

Rent and income supplements are required components of a HF4Y program. Rent supplements must ensure that young people are not contributing more than 30% of their income to rent. If this is not possible, the program team should try to find other subsidies to offset monthly expenses (e.g., low-income transit pass). It is important to find housing that is affordable, which means that over the longer-term young people should be able to cover housing costs without a rental subsidy and not have to move to access a more affordable option. In other words, the housing options that are made available must be sustainable over the long-term.

Programs should consider setting their HF4Y program capacity based on how many rent supplements they can provide. A graduated increase in the youth's contribution to rent can be introduced once they have achieved housing and income stability – with the longer-term goal that the young person will be in the financial position to cover their housing costs. The purpose of decreasing these supplements over time is to assist the young person in becoming comfortable with paying their bills on their own, while having the safety net and support before they graduate from the program. Any decrease should be made in consultation with the youth with a clear understanding of why it is important and with youth voice and choice in determining the plan.



# EXAMPLES

## Example of rent and income supplements

Eli was in a HF4Y program for approximately six months and had made a lot of progress. Since starting the program, he was working and had begun paying rent for his one-bedroom apartment all on his own without a rent subsidy. He was consistently working and meeting rent for several months until his case manager, Laura, got a phone call one day. Eli had decided to reward himself by going on a shopping spree on Black Friday and couldn't make rent. Surprised, Laura realized that even though Eli was doing really well, he still had some life skills to learn, such as budgeting for leisure and disposable income spending. Had Eli left the program before this time, Laura would not have been able to help him make the rent and use this experience as a learning opportunity for Eli. This scenario demonstrates why HF4Y programs rent supplements should be decreased incrementally as youth make progress toward their goals while leaving room for error and bumps in the road. It also underscores why HF4Y programs should never have time limits.



High rents are a reality for young people who choose to live in large urban centres. In some cases, the rental rates can be as high as double what one would pay in a smaller neighbouring community. It is important that case managers work with youth to help them understand the trade-offs involved in choosing a place to live. Such trade-offs may include deciding between location, amenities, square footage, living with a roommate, etc. Guiding young people through this decision-making process is an important life skill.

One option for organizations located in areas where housing costs are high is to secure a master lease. Typically, with this approach, the service provider enters into a lease agreement directly with the landlord and takes on the responsibility of selecting tenants, managing monthly rent payments, and overseeing maintenance of the property. In practice, a service provider leases a multi-room dwelling (e.g., a large, multi-bedroom, detached house) and then rents each room out to a young person. The arrangement will differ in each community according to available housing stock and the financial policies of the agency. A master lease arrangement is a more efficient and cost-effective way to access housing stock that would otherwise be difficult for a young person to secure.

## **The role of the housing locator**

Having a Housing First program with staff dedicated to the administrative work of finding housing frees up critical time for case managers to focus on their youth (Collins et al., 2019). In many HF4Y programs, the role of the housing locator is often separate from the rest of the case management team. The housing locator does the majority of landlord recruitment and tenancy work for the team(s). Housing locators support youth to find affordable housing options and carry out administrative and logistical tasks related to housing, such as applying for housing and housing subsidies, securing tenant insurance, coordinating youth moves, and administrative support in preventing evictions (e.g., providing young with a list of their rights as a tenant or if needed, referring them to legal aid for further support). A large part of their role involves building and maintaining partnerships with landlords, real estate agents, affordable housing agencies, and other partners who are willing to support a HF4Y approach.

As the primary liaison for the landlord and tenant, the housing locator maintains ongoing contact with the landlord, builds a trusting relationship, and, after the youth, is the first point of contact if the landlord has concerns. It is important for the housing locator to have monthly contact with each landlord regardless of any emerging situation because it helps to maintain these relationships. The housing locator can also help resolve any disagreements or disputes

between landlords and tenants so that the case manager can fully advocate for the youth and maintain their trust. Housing locators and case managers should also meet regularly to better prepare them for any housing-related situations that may arise, such as rehousing a youth that chooses to leave their housing or is evicted.

Housing locators and case managers should familiarize youth with the provincial Landlord Tenant Act and educate youth about the responsibilities and qualities of good tenancy. They can model relationship building, so the youth can eventually manage their own relationship with the landlord and feel comfortable to contact them when concerns or questions arise.

## Engagement with landlords and other housing partners

Recruitment of private landlords is a critical factor in a tight rental housing market. But this task is not as challenging as some might imagine. Case studies from Housing First in Canada (Gaetz et al., 2013) and the At Home/ Chez Soi (Goering et al., 2014) study identify that some landlords find Housing First appealing because the funding and supports offered by the program offer a kind of guarantee of tenancy. In other cases, “landlords want to get involved because they are interested in making a contribution to solutions to homelessness. The key point is that even in tight housing markets, landlords can be persuaded to be partners in Housing First” (Gaetz et al., 2013:7).

HF4Y programs are more successful when they develop and nurture effective relationships with landlords, and housing providers. Program staff can build trust with landlords and property managers by emphasizing that the program provides much more than a rent supplement: it comes with support for both the young person and the housing provider.

*“Landlords can and should be incorporated as much as possible as members of the support team. They need to be trained to contact case managers regarding concerns as well as discuss things with the youth themselves. It should also be mandatory that case managers or housing locators, regardless of the existence of a problem, arrange to meet monthly with each landlord just to discuss how things are going. There should also be a landlord advisory group established to recruit, praise, honor, and learn from landlords as well as continuously teach them about Housing First.”*

Wally Czech, Director of Training,  
Canadian Alliance to End  
Homelessness

In fact, landlords can, and should, be considered as members of the support team. They will need support to learn about the HF4Y model, the agency as a whole, supports the program can offer, and most importantly how they can help end youth homelessness. Having a 24/7, on-call support line in case of emergencies is an important element of the HF4Y model. This number should be made available to landlords as well as youth in the program. A good practice for case managers and housing locators is to meet with the landlord on a monthly basis. These meetings take place to discuss how things are going or address any concerns that may have arisen regarding the young person's tenancy. Maintaining good landlord relations is an ongoing process that must be constantly nurtured. This means that agency-landlord relationships need to be established long before a young person is housed.

## Rehousing

In HF4Y programs, young people will sometimes need to be rehoused because their existing housing is not a good fit or they are forced to leave because of eviction. In cases of eviction, some young people may respond to losing their housing as another personal failure or setback. It is important for the worker to assure the young person that these things happen, and to treat the loss of housing as an important learning opportunity that can inform their future decision-making. Keep in mind that a loss of housing does not mean a loss of case management support or discharge from the program.

For some youth, rehousing may happen numerous times while in the program. If housing cannot be secured before they are required to leave their current housing, youth should be supported to access a shelter or stay with a friend or family member until new housing is secured. During this time, it is very important that the caseworker make every effort to engage the youth and continue to provide supports (including possibly additional resources) until they are housed again. For youth that will experience multiple moves, their choice of housing may become more limited and take additional time to secure. For that reason, it is critical that caseworkers keep youth informed about housing and continue working on other goals with them, making sure that they feel supported by the HF4Y program.

# EXAMPLES

## Example of rehousing

Jaden had been living in a house with three other roommates. While he was content to finally have a place to call home, something about it wasn't right. He found after time that he had very different lifestyle habits and preferences than his two roommates, who had a very good and established relationship with the landlord. Jaden shared these concerns with his HF4Y worker, Derek. After some discussion and clarification about the problem, they decided to meet with the roommates and landlord to discuss the issues and work on a solution. In this meeting, it became clear that Jaden would be better off living on his own. The landlord agreed that it was the best decision. With the support and coaching of Derek, Jaden gave two months' notice. During this time, they were able to find a basement apartment within his budget that was more suitable. Because the decision was discussed openly, Jaden felt comfortable in his home while he was searching for a new place to live and never had to access shelter or stay on a friend's couch. In some cases, the first place to live that a youth chooses will not be the right decision. It is therefore important for the HF4Y worker to support them to find housing that they feel can become their home. For Jaden, this meant trying housing for a while, deciding that it was not the right fit, and then trying again.

# Youth-Centred Supports

Working with young people in a HF4Y context means embracing a Positive Youth Development orientation in all aspects of service delivery. Positive youth development builds strengths and assets, while nurturing personal resilience. The following sections demonstrate how the core principle of Youth Choice, Youth Voice, and Self-Determination work in practice.

*“Practitioners of HF4Y need to be aware of the focus needed on positive youth development and life skills development within the work. Essentially, every interaction a HF4Y worker has with a young person is an opportunity to build those skills.”*

Kim Ledene, Director of Housing and Shelter, Trellis (formerly the Boys and Girls Club of Calgary)

## Putting youth choice into action

In the context of HF4Y, “choice” means that young people are able to make their own decisions about their goals and future, what services they receive, and when to start using (or end) services. Case managers work with young people to identify their assets and areas of development and to support the development and actualization of their identified goals. In this way, the case manager plays a supportive role, walking alongside the young person as they make progress toward their goals.

Young people must be able to exercise some choice regarding the location and type of housing they receive (e.g., which neighbourhood, independent or congregate setting, etc.). Some young people may want independent, scattered-site housing, while others may feel that congregate, transitional housing models better suit their needs. Young people who experience homelessness, like other youth, may prefer to live with roommates (which may also be the only financially viable option). Whatever housing option a young person chooses, it is important for case managers to allow youth to change their mind and be rehoused into the type of housing that they think would work best for them.

In giving youth a say, one must also work within the limitations of the housing market, which will likely be constrained by local availability and affordability. But even in this context, young people should still have choice (for instance, to accept or refuse an option) and a clear understanding of why choice is limited. Young people should not be put in a position of thinking their place in the program is jeopardized if they do not cooperate by taking the only option presented to them.

Some housing options (e.g., transitional housing programs) may have preconditions, such as participating in school or employment. A complete HF4Y program and system provides at least one other option without preconditions so that youth can decide whether or not they are interested in and/or ready to pursue conditional housing. If a young person chooses a housing model that has preconditions, it is important to inform them that they have the right to change their mind and choose a different housing option at any time.



**“I had meaningful conversations with youth about returning to school or university college options after high school finishes. This is an exciting time for these youth as they can explore, dream, and imagine different opportunities and careers that are of interest to them. In particular, I encourage them to explore their interests and strengths rather than what they have been told to do by other adults or authority figures in their life. This is their moment to decide where they want to be in the next five-ten years, an important part of positive youth development. One youth in particular is finishing high school this month and is exploring options for university. This is the first time she has been given the opportunity to explore and feels excited and empowered to choose what she wants to do. In addition to having these important conversations, it has added to her drive and work ethic in achieving these goals that are catered to her and her needs and wants. Focusing on the youth and following a youth-driven framework has had positive impacts on her well-being, sense of self, confidence, and determination.” – HF4Y Case Manager**

## LIMITS OF CHOICE

It must be stated that no individual has free and complete choice to do whatever they want; this would apply to anyone in society. It is important to explain this and provide examples to young people so they are not misled in what is meant by choice. Young people should be supported in making choices in order to be able to learn from their mistakes.

Participation in a HF4Y program does come with two conditions:

1. Young people must agree to a weekly visit or contact with a caseworker.
2. If young people have an income source, they are expected to contribute up to 30% to the cost of rent.

Young people in the early stages of adolescence or who may be living with cognitive impairments (e.g., brain injury, developmental delays, and/or FASD), may find it difficult to make decisions on their own. In these cases, options and choices may need to be negotiated to guide young people to make decisions that are feasible and reasonable, both short- and long-term.



**Young people should have a say in the kind of housing they want, but it is always important to remember that they have the right to change their mind.**

## TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE AND HEALING-CENTRED ENGAGEMENT

Working through trauma can take time, and in many cases, may occur alongside or before other daily activities, such as education and employment. Trauma may include physical, mental, and/or emotional abuse, exploitation, and criminal victimization. The experience of trauma can impact cognitive development, decision-making, how people respond to stress, the regulation of aggression and anger, as well as motivation. For these reasons, HF4Y case management must be informed by an understanding of trauma and its effects and how best to support recovery.

Trauma-informed care does not address or treat experiences of trauma directly. Rather, it involves the organizational implementation of principles, policies, and procedures to increase client safety and prevent re-traumatization in the context of services (Kirst et al., 2017; Elliott et al., 2005; Fallot and Harris, 2005). For example, organizations can apply



a trauma-informed care approach by training staff on trauma and involving clients in decision-making with regards to treatment in order to create a collaborative and safe environment for recovery. HF4Y services and resources must provide space for young people to explore how trauma has affected their life. This should be done in a supportive way, which may include referrals to relevant clinical or therapeutic supports that foster well-being and personal growth. Ultimately, youth should lead this process, with dedicated guidance from their case manager and family and natural supports.

While it's important to recognize that many youth have been impacted by trauma, some service providers are now using the language of "healing-centred engagement" as a strengths-based lens on trauma-informed care. Healing-centred engagement shifts the focus on trauma as a deficit to the skills and strengths young people have and can use in healing and moving forward. Most importantly, it reminds practitioners that youth are more than their trauma.

*"I have had numerous youth, one a few months ago from Haven's Way, that shared with me that they are more than what has happened to them. That they are more than their experience of homelessness."*

Caseworker

### CAPTURING YOUTH VOICE

In order to ensure a quality program and supports, there needs to be a clear and safe mechanism for young people to provide feedback and suggestions. As a core principle of HF4Y, youth voice must be an integral component of any HF4Y evaluation. While formative evaluations should always include interviews or focus groups with youth in order to capture their experiences, it is important to provide an opportunity for youth to rate their satisfaction with the program while they are receiving service. This is important because it provides information related to the youth's satisfaction that is different from the information being collected in a formative evaluation. Satisfaction is an attitude based on a perception of quality of service; if program users perceive that programming is effective, the desired outcomes of the program are more likely (although not guaranteed) to occur. A youth satisfaction survey provides program staff and management the opportunity to hear directly from young people about what is and is not working for them, allowing adjustments and improvements to be made on a regular basis.

Some examples of program elements affecting one's satisfaction include:

- Physical environment
- Reliability of the service provider
- Responsiveness and empathy of the service provider
- Cultural appropriateness
- Accessibility and convenience of services provided
- Continuity of care
- Efficacy/outcomes of care
- Perceived quality of care or services provided

Surveys can be developed and tailored for the program or pre-existing surveys can be adopted if content aligns with the relevant particular aspect(s) of service delivery being measured. In electing to develop a survey, it is helpful to refer to the program logic model, which identifies the key activities the youth should be/have been completing. Other issues to consider in developing and delivering satisfaction surveys are the reliability and validity of the survey. Surveys can be self-administered or interviewer-administered. This will depend on resources such as time, staff, and budget.

# Standards of Practice and Program Fidelity

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Along with outcomes measurement, clear standards of practice and assessing program fidelity ensure that HF4Y programs are achieving what they intend to do. Without standards of practice, programs and practices may veer away from the core principles of HF4Y. Standards of practice and fidelity reviews are forms of accountability that practitioners and supervisors should use to maintain program and service delivery quality and to assess how practitioners can grow and evolve.

## Standards of Practice

Standards of practice are designed to provide clarity and direction about how services and supports are delivered and to ensure a standard of quality in case management practice. The social work profession is regulated by provincial and territorial bodies. These governing bodies issue directives and ethical guidelines that registered social workers must adhere to. However, specific organizations can also establish standards of practice to guide how services should be delivered according to a prescribed program model, such as HF4Y. Standards of practice ensure that services and supports are delivered in a consistent way by all case managers, while still allowing for supports to be tailored to the needs of young people. This is particularly important as case managers may differ substantially in terms of training, experience, approaches to work, and favoured practices. When an organization issues standards of practice, these directives must be defined and supported through training, case conferencing, data collection, and the utilization of shared tools and resources.

These standards can be set by any organization delivering HF4Y programming or can be arrived at through joint consultation with community partners. Regardless of the standards selected, they must conform to the principles of HF4Y as described in this document and comply with the standards of practice and codes of conduct issued by relevant regulatory bodies.

### **WHY ARE STANDARDS OF PRACTICE IMPORTANT?**

Standards of practice:

- Ensure the principles of HF4Y are operationalized in day-to-day case management activities and program management.
- Hold staff accountable for their work in delivering support to young people.
- Ensure services are delivered in a consistent and predictable manner.
- Build continuity of care, allowing program staff to provide back up support when needed.

Maintaining clear, consistent, and timely documentation is a proven method of achieving standards of practice. Case managers can refer to documentation at any point for guidance, clarification, and quality improvement. Most importantly, documentation shares the youth's journey and outlines what steps are being taken to support their wellbeing, accomplishments, and goals. Documentation also ensures that youth do not have to repeat their stories multiple times.

While case management tools such as case plan documentation, goal planning, and case noting may appear to be the least appealing components of HF4Y frontline work, they are nevertheless important. In practice, many staff may feel that this work weighs them down and can be time consuming. However, documentation does not need to be cumbersome if it is incorporated into regular practice on a daily or weekly basis. To ensure routine documentation practices, all staff should have access to a dedicated workspace where they can complete tasks that do not require face-to-face interactions with youth. This environment should be comfortable, clean, properly lit, and furnished with appropriate office furniture that meets the needs of program staff. It should be a space that fosters comradery, social engagement, and dialogue between colleagues – where both celebration can occur and work can get done.

## ASSESSING FIDELITY TO THE HF4Y PROGRAM MODEL

Because HF4Y is a relatively new innovation there can be significant variations and inconsistency in how youth-focused Housing First programs are implemented and operate. Many Housing First programs are offered to youth in ways that are very inconsistent to the approach we are offering through HF4Y. In some cases, adult Housing First programs are offered to young people under 25 with few modifications to meet the needs of young people.

The model of HF4Y put forward here has been designed in a specific way to meet the needs of developing adolescents and young adults. Without clear guidelines regarding fidelity to the HF4Y program model, there is a risk of inconsistent implementation. There is also a risk that other approaches to Housing First for young people are inappropriately described as Housing First for Youth.

Fidelity assessment is a necessary tool for measuring the integrity of a particular application of HF4Y in order to assess the extent to which core principles and program model design is adhered to.

In light of this, there is a clear need for fidelity assessment to evaluate the extent to which components of the program model are being implemented in a way that is true to the core principles and practices of the HF4Y program model presented here. Fidelity assessment “helps reduce the chance that outcomes, positive or negative, will be misappropriated to a model never fully implemented in practice” (Watson, et al., 2013: 2). Fidelity Assessment has played an important role in taking Housing First to scale, and a body of research demonstrates that there is a positive relationship between applying this assessment and positive program outcomes (Watson et al., 2013; McNaughton et al., 2017).

There are two important things to consider regarding fidelity assessment. First, the fidelity assessment process is not a “test” meant to pass negative judgement on how or whether a community is doing HF4Y right. Rather it is designed to support the continuous quality improvement of the intervention consistent with the HF4Y program model in order to lead to better outcomes for young people. Second, the fidelity assessment process does not impose a rigid orthodoxy about how to deliver HF4Y. It may be necessary for organizations to make adaptations to the model based on local circumstances or conditions. The fidelity assessment can be used to assess these adaptations and determine whether or not they compromise the service delivery model.

It is recommended that HF4Y programs complete a fidelity review within the first year of operation. The review is a comprehensive evaluation of the program, which assesses performance, along with how closely the program's operations and service delivery conform to the principles of HF4Y. Fidelity reviews are completed by a team of peers who are familiar with the model and are also outside of the organization. They provide an opportunity to learn and gain valuable feedback and support moving forward.

Fidelity assessments usually occur over a one- or two-day site visit. During their visit, reviewers attend a team meeting; interview staff, young people, and community partners; conduct file reviews; and ask for informal feedback at the end of the site visit. Once an on-site review is completed, a detailed report and action plan with step-by-step instructions on how to achieve fidelity, the tools and resources needed, and a timeframe is provided to the agency as well as ongoing program support to help the program reach higher fidelity to the model. This report includes the strengths of the program in relation to the core principles and fidelity to the model and recommendations. The report itself can also be used as a tool to advocate for further supports for young people, funding, and systems change. Organizations should not look at fidelity reviews as a punitive process but instead as a learning opportunity to share great work, learn from colleagues, and be connected to a larger community of practice and resources across the country.<sup>4</sup>

A Way Home Canada currently offers fidelity assessments for HF4Y programs. Adapted from the Pathways Housing First fidelity scale, the HF4Y fidelity scale measures fidelity across five domains:

1. **Choice over range of housing options;**
2. **Choice over range of supports;**
3. **Separation of housing and support;**
4. **Support philosophy and practice; and**
5. **Program features.**

A Way Home Canada also provides training and practice support for communities implementing the HF4Y program model. This support may include co-developing a work plan with communities who are looking to enhance program performance.

To learn more visit [homelessnesslearninghub.ca](https://homelessnesslearninghub.ca).

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4. Read more about the fidelity reviews conducted for our Making the Shift HF4Y demonstration sites in this blog post: [Practicing What You Preach: Program Fidelity in Housing First for Youth](#)

# Conclusion

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Research shows that preventing and ending youth homelessness starts with understanding the unique needs of young people – which are markedly different than those of adults. The HF4Y program model is designed to do just that. It builds upon best practices evidenced in the At Home / Chez Soi and Pathways Housing First research pilots. However, these practices have been adapted to accommodate the emotional, developmental, cultural, and physical needs of young people who are transitioning into adulthood.

Implementing HF4Y is an ambitious undertaking that demands an all-hands-on-deck approach. This manual is designed to provide practical tips and advice for communities interested in implementing the HF4Y program model. It covers a range of topics, including staffing, training, assessment, and youth-centred service delivery — elements that communities will need to address as they move forward with planning. Underpinning this work must be a commitment to listening to the voices, opinions, and ideas of young people. In other words, young people must be involved in all facets of program planning, adaptation, and implementation.

Successful implementation of HF4Y depends largely on community partners' commitment to the belief that everyone, regardless of circumstance, has a right to safe, affordable, and appropriate housing, so that they can realize their full potential.



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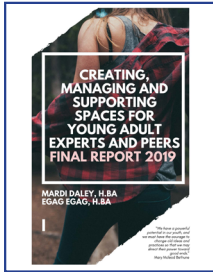
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# Further Reading



## Creating, Managing and Supporting Spaces for Young Adult Experts and Peers

Mardi Daley, Egag Egag



## Family and Natural Supports: A Framework to Enhance Young People's Network of Support

Meryl Borato, Stephen Gaetz, Lesley McMillan



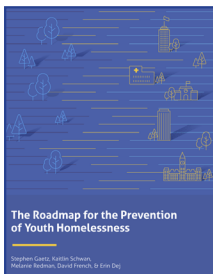
## Housing First in Canada: Supporting Communities to End Homelessness

Stephen Gaetz, Fiona Scott, Tanya Gulliver



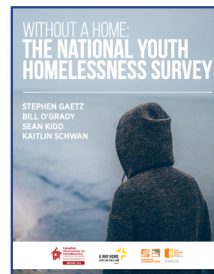
## Live, Learn, Grow: Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Homeless Youth

Stephen Gaetz, Fiona Scott



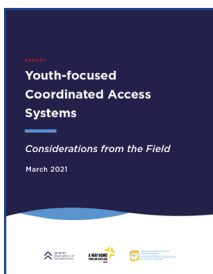
## The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness

Stephen Gaetz, Kaitlin Schwan, Melanie Redman, David French, Erin Dej



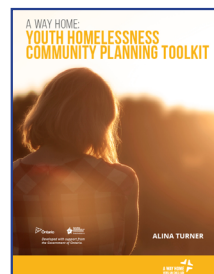
## Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey

Stephen Gaetz, Bill O'Grady, Sean Kidd, Kaitlin Schwan



## Youth-focused Coordinated Access Systems: Considerations from the Field

David French, Amanda Buchnea, Erika Morton



## A Way Home: Youth Homelessness Community Planning Toolkit

Alina Turner

# Glossary

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**Anti-oppression practice:** Anti-oppression practice is a combination of strategies, theories, and actions that challenge social and historical inequalities and injustices that are systemic to our systems and institutions by policies and practices that allow certain groups to dominate over other groups.

**Assertive Community Treatment (ACT):** In the ACT model, a multidisciplinary team in the community where the individual lives, rather than in an office-based practice or an institution, provides case management. The team involves psychiatrists, family physicians, social workers, nurses, occupational therapists, vocational specialists, peer support workers, etc. and is available to the patient/client 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

**Assessment:** Assessments provide a means of screening clients for prioritization purposes as well as planning, system navigation and case management.

**At Home/Chez Soi:** The [At Home/Chez Soi project](#), funded by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, examined Housing First as a means of ending homelessness for people living with mental illness. The project followed more than 2,000 participants for two years, and was the world's largest trial of Housing First, with demonstration sites in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montréal, and Moncton.

**Collective Impact:** Collective Impact calls on the various players and interests that touch on a carefully-defined issue to work together to develop and implement a plan that will fundamentally change outcomes for a population.

**Community of Practice (CoP):** A community of practice is a group of individuals who have a shared passion or concern for something that they collectively take part in. This group meets regularly to learn from each other and better their abilities.

**Coordinated Access:** Coordinated Access systems are designed to streamline access to necessary supports, including housing and rent supplements. This is done by organizations collaborating on creating a standardized process for intake, assessment and referral, supported by a common and shared data infrastructure.

**Critical Time Intervention (CTI):** Critical time intervention (CTI) is a time-limited model which is evidence-based. It is intended to reduce the risk of homelessness by enhancing continuity of support for individuals with severe mental illness during the transition from institutions to community living. CTI works in two main ways: by providing emotional and practical support during the critical time of transition and by strengthening the individual's long-term ties to services, family, and friends.

**Data management system:** A data management system allows agencies to monitor client outcomes on a regular basis. It also facilitates the development and use of shared performance standards among service providers.

**Developmental evaluation:** Developmental Evaluation (DE) is an evaluation approach which is more long-term than traditional evaluation. In this approach, the evaluator is embedded in the work as a part of the team. DE is used to assist real-time learning in complex initiatives.

**Family and Natural Supports (FNS):** The goal of a [Family and Natural Supports \(FNS\)](#) approach is to strengthen youth's relationships with family as well as other natural supports, including meaningful adults in their lives. What actually constitutes a "family" is variable, based on individual experience (growing up with grandparents, for instance) and cultural contexts and should be defined by the young person.

**Fidelity, Fidelity assessment:** Program fidelity refers to the level that the delivery of an intervention stays true to the original protocols and program model.

**Healing-centred engagement:** A framework which views those with trauma as responsible parties in their care and recovery instead of as a victim of the traumatic events which they were exposed to.

**Intensive Case Management (ICM):** Intensive Case Management (ICM) is a team-based approach designed for clients with lower acuity but are identified as needing intensive support for a shorter and time-delineated period.

**Master lease:** A master lease is when a lease is in the landlords' name when the tenant originally moves in. Once it is deemed that the housing arrangement is "stable", the landlord transfers the lease to their tenant's name.

**Motivational Interviewing:** Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a style of working with a client that focuses on allowing the client to direct the change rather than telling the client what they need to do. It is about having a conversation about change.

**Outcomes evaluation:** Outcomes evaluations determine how effective a program is, and whether it is achieving its desired objectives.

**Pathways to Housing Model:** Developed in 1992 by Dr. Sam Tsemberis in New York City, the [Pathways to Housing Model](#) is a “consumer-driven evidence-based Housing First model that provides immediate access to permanent supportive housing to individuals who are homeless and who have mental health and addiction problems.”

**Positive youth development:** Positive youth development orientation – strengths-based case management – focuses on building life skills. Specifically, it:

- Identifies the youth’s personal strengths in order to build self-esteem and a positive sense of self
- Works to improve the youth’s communication and problem-solving skills
- Enhances and builds natural supports, including family relationships
- Assists the youth in personal goal setting
- Helps the youth to access educational opportunities and identify personal interests

**Program evaluation:** Program evaluation combines both theory and practice and is used by organizations to gather information for program planning, designing, implementing, and assessing results.

**Reaching Home:** [Reaching Home](#): Canada’s Homelessness Strategy is a community-based program provided by the Canadian government aimed at preventing & ending homelessness. The program gives funding directly to communities across Canada in order to support them in preventing and ending homelessness.

**Screening:** Screening is a process in which homeless-serving service providers begin to determine if individuals meet program eligibility requirements. Once eligibility is determined, screening allows service providers to create a system of prioritization based on need.

**System of care:** An adaptive network of structures, processes, and relationships grounded in system of care values and principles that provides children and youth with serious emotional disturbance and their families with access to and availability of necessary services and supports across administrative and funding jurisdictions.

**Systems planning:** Systems planning is the analysis, planning and design of an integrated system and defined service-delivery components that work together towards a common end; in this case to prevent, reduce and end homelessness. It requires identifying the basic components of a system and understanding how these relate to one another.

**Trauma-informed approach:** Trauma-informed approach means that everything the HF4Y program or system does is based on an acknowledgement of the existence of trauma, and that recovery and support must be part of how we work with young people.

**Warm transfer:** A warm transfer is a “friendly referral”. This is when a worker speaks with their contacts at another program to see if they have space for a young person to join. This typically happens when a young person is moving from one jurisdiction to another. If the young person is accepted to the new program, the old and new workers meet with the young person to ensure that they feel supported as they transition from one program to another.

**Youth Assessment and Prioritization (YAP) tool:** The [YAP tool](#) is a non-clinical, strengths-based assessment of youth who are at-risk of or experiencing homelessness that strives to be as accurate as possible, in a non-prescriptive, youth-driven way.

The assessment is designed 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.

**Youth homelessness prevention:** [Youth homelessness prevention](#) refers to 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. Youth homelessness prevention must be applied using a rights-based approach and address the unique needs of developing adolescents and young adults.