HCP-C
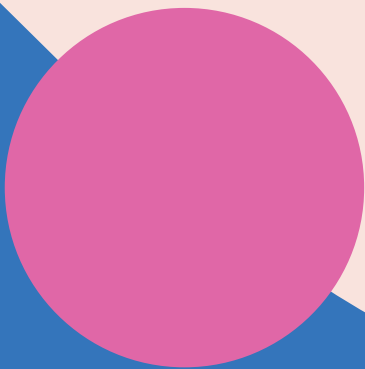
MODULE 1

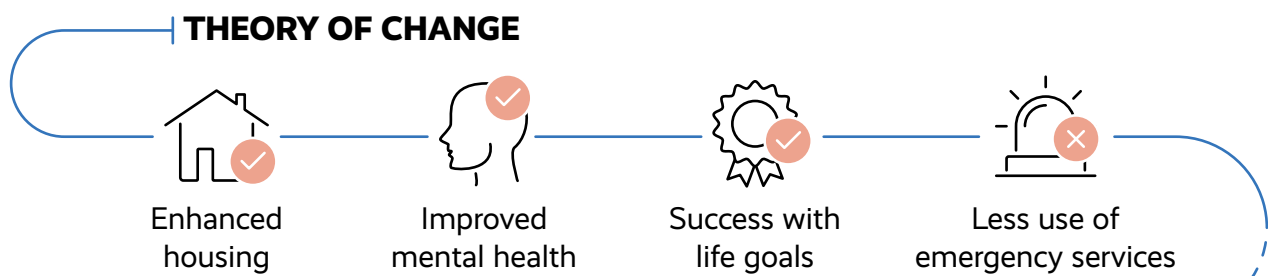# Overview of Housing Stabilization and Tertiary Prevention

OVERVIEW

There is extensive evidence from Canada and abroad that demonstrates that, while housing stability is *necessary* for most youth experiencing homelessness to improve their health and life circumstances, it is not *sufficient* in and of itself to do so. For most, without additional wrap-around supports, there is a high risk of re-entering homelessness, sustained mental and physical health challenges, social isolation, and limited success in improving quality of life in a range of areas such as employment, education, and community engagement. Interventions at the time of the transition to housing, out of homelessness, can be considered either "housing stabilization" or "tertiary prevention" − they are preventative in that they are designed to prevent a return to homelessness. The interventions needed in this transitional period typically need to cover several needs. These needs include mental health needs that are often complex, needs with respect to navigating a range of independent living challenges along with justice, employment, education and housing systems, and needs for social engagement and the support of peers. There is also a cultural overlay to the specific needs of youth from stigmatized and marginalized communities. For youth of Indigenous origin, specific considerations include access to cultural supports including elders and staff who share in Indigenous value systems, an emphasis in culturally-based language used in the provision of all wrap-around supports, as well as staff recognition that many Indigenous youth have developed distrust in service providers through difficult childhood experiences in care.

Providing this range of supports in an integrated and cohesive way usually requires a team that includes multiple disciplines and usually will require a multi-organization collaboration to deliver effectively. Ideally this work is largely done in the community and in spaces that are otherwise not homeless youth service spaces. Such interventions are not meant to replace other services − they are meant to be time-limited: serving as a bridge to other resources. If this isn't managed effectively the stabilization service will quickly fill up and close to many who need it.

The intended impacts of this model of intervention include: (1) Enhanced housing quality and tenure, (2) improved mental health and overall well-being, (3) success with life goals including employment, education, and decreased reliance on support services and systems, (4) less use of emergency services and reduced justice system engagement.

| THEORY OF CHANGE

| Enhanced housing | Improved mental health | Success with life goals | Less use of emergency services |

CONTENTS

1. What are the issues and challenges that youth face in the process of exiting homelessness and why isn't housing enough in and of itself?

While there is a limited body of evidence that describes the paths of young people take after they have exited homelessness, what is available suggests that progress in terms of community integration, quality of life, and mental health are challenged for the majority in the period after housing is obtained. For most progress in these areas are variable, with declines common, in study periods of one to two years after housing has been secured. Youth routinely reported having been told that their lives would be better once housed. In contrast, most struggle for extended periods in the effort to build a meaningful life while dealing with the physical and mental health fallout of major adversity through childhood and adolescence. The finding that these young people are not flourishing likely reflects service sectors emphasizing crisis response in which few resources are available to support youth after they have succeeded in the challenging task of finding housing and stability. Some work has suggested **a stage model for the experiences of youth who have exited homelessness**.

- The first stage, '**marginal stability'**, refers to a tenuous hold on some form of housing stability with continued high levels of adversity and connection with street activities and a cycling back into homelessness. In this stage youth face both individual level (e.g., addictions, continued engagement with street social networks and activities) and structural (e.g., challenges obtaining benefits, identification, uncertainty about how to engage education and employment resources) barriers that can readily undermine efforts.

- The second stage, **'stable but stuck'**, refers to youth having obtained a basic level of stability and the risks of homelessness are less immediate. However, most feel stalled at this stage with respect to having the ability to find success with larger life goals such as engagement in employment and education.

- The third stage is referred to as, **'gaining momentum'**, where youth are experiencing some tangible successes in larger life goals. In this stage hope begins to strengthen, though street-related challenges continue to hamper progress such as criminal records and the expense and difficulty of getting them expunged. Resonating through all of these stages is the trauma of homelessness and related mental health impacts that attend pre-street adversity, violence and victimization on the streets, and the isolation and disappointments that attend exiting homelessness.

2. What are the unique considerations that attend Indigenous youth exiting homelessness?

Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness often face unique needs due to an increased risk for mental health and substance use problems, significant experiences of marginalization, and increased engagement in child welfare services when compared to non-Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness. They are also at an increased risk for other negative outcomes associated with street involvement compared to non-Indigenous youth, including increased prevalence of HIV, unplanned pregnancies, criminal activity, experiencing a physical assault, and suicide attempts. Many Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness have been exposed to physical and/or sexual abuse prior to homelessness and many have lengthy involvement with child welfare services from a young age. Indigenous youth engaged in the child welfare system may enter homelessness as a result of inadequate services as they transition out of care. Specifically, the lack of services supporting this transition can result in reduced access to care as former care workers can no longer provide services and relationships leaving youth without access to necessary supports. Engagement with the child welfare system from a young age may also create distrust and apprehension regarding the involvement of various service providers, thus creating barriers when attempting to access necessary support services both to avoid entering homelessness as well as to successfully exit homelessness. The longstanding effects of colonization often means that many Indigenous youth have not had the opportunity to engage with their cultural identity, nor benefit from the protective role it can serve. The unique and compounded needs of Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness likely influence the success of initiatives to date aimed at providing mental health supports, case management, and stable housing to Indigenous youth. Moreover, these experiences highlight the need for culturally relevant interventions that support youth to explore and build their identities.
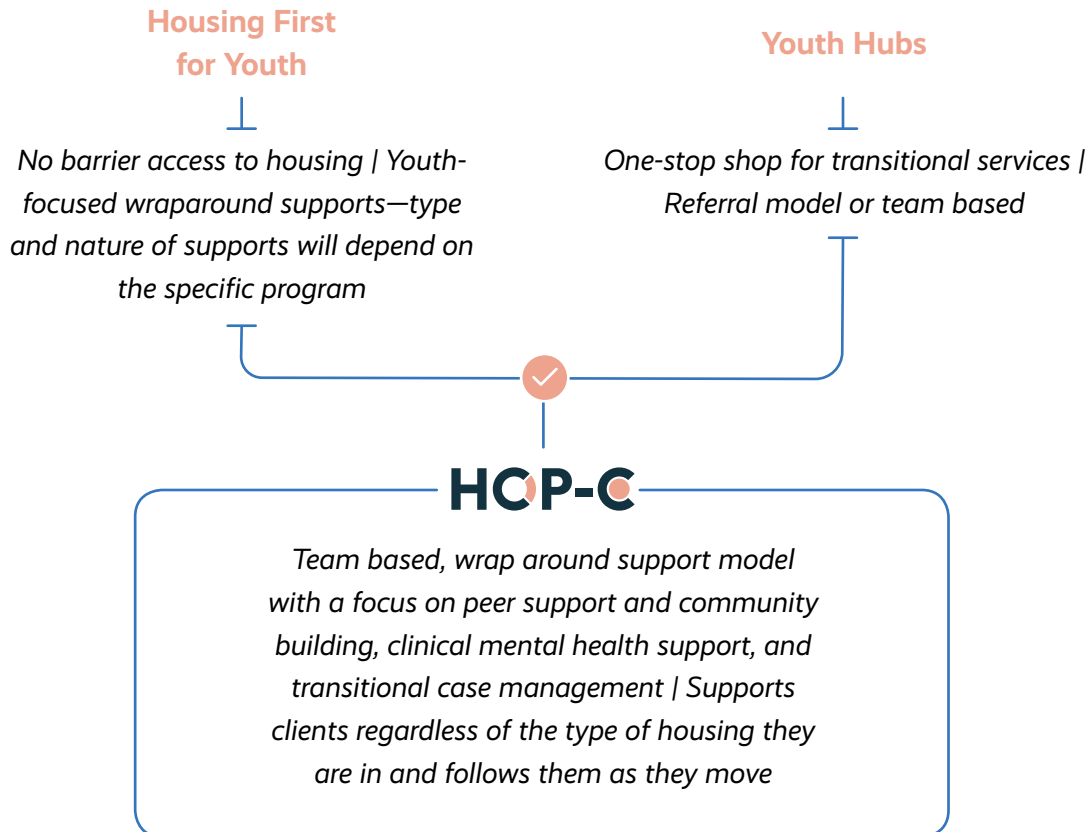
WOLF / HUMILITY

Think of your family, your fellow human beings and your community before you think of yourself. To know humility is to understand that you are not more or less important than anyone else. Being humble is surrendering to the Great Spirit, who has created and who directs all life.

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Bethany Koostachin

3. What do the terms tertiary prevention and housing stabilization mean as they relate to youth who have experienced homelessness?

There are different types of tertiary interventions. This practice guide has been built primarily around the HOP-C approach but the information and worksheets will be valuable for practitioners engaged in any collaborative housing stabilization intervention. The graphic below outlines how HOP-C compares to two other prominent models – Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) and Youth Hubs.

Housing First for Youth

No barrier access to housing | Youth-focused wraparound supports—type and nature of supports will depend on the specific program

Youth Hubs

One-stop shop for transitional services | Referral model or team based

HOP-C

Team based, wrap around support model with a focus on peer support and community building, clinical mental health support, and transitional case management | Supports clients regardless of the type of housing they are in and follows them as they move

Tertiary prevention refers to the prevention of a problem or condition *re-occurring* after it has been resolved. In this case, tertiary prevention refers to preventing youth from becoming homeless once again after they have been successfully and stably housed. Housing stabilization is another term used in this area – referring to providing supports that are necessary to stabilizing core housing and reducing the risk of housing loss.

4. What does the evidence and expert opinion suggest are needed for youth – above and beyond housing – to facilitate permanent exits from homelessness and extreme marginality?

It is clear that housing alone is an insufficient intervention for most youth experiencing homelessness. Complex forms of individual and systemic adversity need to be addressed and this is a population with both diverse needs and resources. Interventions at this critical juncture need to be **flexible**, **multicomponent**, and **leveraged**. Leverage is necessary for two reasons. First, youth homelessness is a problem with many layers. Complex, systemic problems such as youth homelessness require a focus on applying interventions at points in the system where pressure (in the positive sense) shifts many intersecting issues in the right direction. Second, funding in this sector is very limited. Hence, in essence, the 'biggest bang for the buck' is needed – intervening in a way that the effort put in produces the largest impact possible.

The approach advocated for in this guide addresses leverage in two ways. First, intervening when young people have overcome the major hurdle of obtaining housing allows for capitalizing upon an important degree of momentum – helping to ensure at this critical time that the momentum is not lost. Second, the approach advocated for here addresses the key needs of youth in transition – needs that we have spent a great deal of time coming to understand. The three youth need domains that we address here are:

1. **Transitional case management** – supporting youth in important life domains such as independent living skill development, employment, education while offsetting risks such as those posed by criminal justice engagement and challenges with an array of bureaucratic barriers – in housing among other areas.

2. **Mental health supports** – providing youth with both wellness-oriented group supports that concentrate on wellness-skill development (and don't feel like the many group interventions this population often cycles through) and individual interventions for more serious challenges such as complex trauma – provided by adequately trained and qualified professionals.

3. **Peer support** – providing youth with guidance and mentorship by young people who have successfully transitioned out of homelessness. Peer support in the frame described here is applied in a rigorous and comprehensive framework – one necessary for the desired impacts and for the well-being of the peers involved

Procedural elements that we also address include:

1. Providing the above supports through multi-service/agency collaborations.
2. Employing arts-based engagement in peer programming and using non-service-orientated spaces.
3. Using tailored approaches to engagement – attending closely to engagement methods that reflect transparency and genuineness, are reflexive to youth needs, and are culturally relevant.

CASE STUDY
The Housing Outreach Project – Collaboration (HOP-C)

HOP-C was initially developed in Toronto after a thorough study of the relevant systems gap and service requirements that youth transitioning into housing needed locally. **In our research on the topic several needs were highlighted, including**:

1. the need for flexible mental health supports with a trauma emphasis,
2. the need for services to be provided in non-homeless service spaces and through outreach,
3. the need for peer support, and
4. the need for outreach transitional case management.

Supports needed to be readily tailored to diverse youth in both demographics and life circumstances. Meeting all of these needs could not be readily done by a single organization, nor was it ideal to do so given the many spin off benefits of collaborative efforts. Hence, we looked at a multi-agency/multi-discipline approach – assembling a team that could support transitional case management, mental health intervention, and peer support. Further, the collaboration would provide outreach-oriented services in non-homeless service spaces.

To establish effectiveness and use evidence to support sustainability, research expertise was needed. For HOP-C, this translated into a partnership between organizations that had experience with transitional case management, an academic health sciences centre, and an arts organization for marginalized youth. Additionally, the arts organization afforded non-service oriented space for programs.

Finally, our collaboration required a 'backbone' organization that managed operations, finance and administration. Key organizations were identified to review the initial plan

for feasibility and partnerships established prior to implementation. A HOP-C advisory board, consisting of research, clinical experts, and youth with lived experience was also assembled.

HOP-C began to operate in 2015, providing multiple levels of support, including practical support navigating systems (e.g., financial supports, criminal justice, housing), social support with the aim of reducing isolation, as well as mental health support within the critical transition time of the first year of transition from homelessness.

The multi-disciplinary collaborative team included:

1. access to a transition-focused case manager who assisted in areas ranging from general support and encouragement to assistance in navigating relevant systems;

2. access to peer support involving individual contact via phone, text/email or in person, hosted drop-in style events/workshops involving art, music, or video/board games, as well as social outings (i.e. movies, museums, board game evenings). Towards the later stages of the project, the peers led a collective group of participants in designing and producing both hardcopy and digitized versions of a "Survival Guide" for young people in transition; and

3. access to mental health support by a clinical psychologist via a weekly group intervention developed to offer real-world strengths-based coping skills in, as well as access to individual therapy. Outcomes were assessed by a research assistant – attending to youth outcomes and staff experiences.

5. What are the core, cross-cutting, components of this work?

- Rigour in development (determining needs, identifying partners, developing the implementation plan).
- Employing intensive youth engagement at all stages and levels.
- Using a collaborative approach to leadership and implementation – similar to a collective impact framework.
- Carefully attending to equity and cultural relevance.
- Having a multi-layered communications and supervision process.
- Frequently revisiting the mission, plan, and iterating based on review.
- Evaluating all aspects.
- Cultivating a strong team – spending time on relationship development, carefully attending to well-being, having fun together.
- Attending to the power dynamics – as a function of organization, discipline, role on the team, etc.

6. Why is youth engagement at all levels and at all stages essential to success in this effort?

The importance of youth engagement is two-fold: young people are culture brokers and exposure to different levels of the program development process can build trust in the system while promoting an alternative vision of the future.

Youth engagement is necessary at all levels and stages because youth culture is constantly changing. Culture is shifting faster than the system can accommodate it, and the people shifting the culture are young people themselves. As ambassadors, creators and stakeholders, youth hold the key to their own engagement. However, young people are also at the beginning of the transition to adulthood in its fullest sense (owning assets, pursuing employment, etc.) and experience challenges to their identity as they go through this process. The effect of this transition to adulthood, especially within the context of chronic youth homelessness, can generate a high level of self-doubt, influence self-esteem and impact motivation to engage with mainstream society.

Youth engagement at all levels and stages is an opportunity to diversify our previous approaches to intervention and build off of what youth actually want and respond to. The opportunity to diversify also impacts young people because it exposes them to the process of program development from the ground up and builds trust and understanding with the system. When a young person is led by a young person, their response is tremendously different. This interaction allows for an alternative vision of possibility within difficult situations while building individual capacity and transferable soft skills (teamwork, communication, reliability, etc.) that can also affect outcomes in domains outside of homelessness.

Lastly, youth engagement at all levels is necessary for success within collaborations targeted at youth wellness because top-down approaches (as opposed to grassroots, horizontal engagement) do not take into account the 'youth voice' or actual youth experiences within systems which cannot be corrected unless they are identified by affected stakeholders.

7. What are the impacts that one wants to see as a result of this work and what is the evidence?

This work is intended to have multiple impacts. **For service recipients, the anticipated impacts are:**

- Better success with sustaining stable housing. Supported housing in and of itself can help achieve this, particularly Housing First approaches, and well-designed housing stabilization supports such as those addressed in this resource assist further.
- Better success with making tangible gains in areas of employment and education once housing has been secured.
- Better enablement for youth to achieve 1 & 2 above despite mental health challenges – with those challenges becoming less impactful as coping strategies improve.
- An experience of services that are well-coordinated, individually-tailored, comprehensive, and provided in community spaces that are conducive to growth and recovery.

For services and systems:

- Direct service providers experience interventions and processes as well-organized and impactful, experience professional growth through collaboration and professional development opportunities, and feel well in the workplace through excellent communications and support by colleagues.
- Systems see indirect benefits of cross collaborations for youth not directly participating in the intervention – through augmented staff skills as a function of partnership and better communication and flow of youth between agencies as a function of a better awareness of one another's supports.
- Systems can also benefit from fewer numbers of youth cycling back into crisis services in the healthcare and homelessness sectors, less cycling back into the justice system, and youth moving on to life situations wherein they can better contribute to broader social and economic advancement.

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