



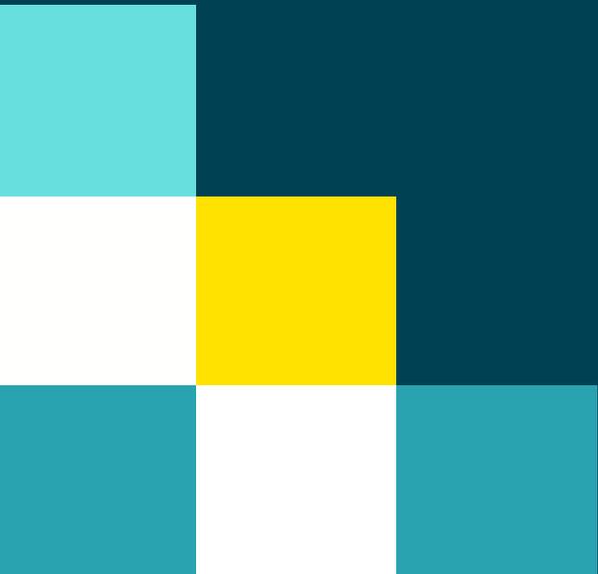
**Wales Centre for Public Policy**  
**Canolfan Polisi Cyhoeddus Cymru**

# Preventing youth homelessness

**An international review of  
evidence**

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# Summary

- In June 2017, the First Minister announced that he would ask the Wales Centre for Public Policy to contribute research on youth homelessness prevention. This international evidence review, and the supplementary report *Youth homelessness and care leavers: Mapping interventions in Wales* (Stirling 2018), form this contribution.
- The current emergency-focused response to youth homelessness is failing young people. Studies from around the world show that we are missing critical opportunities to intervene early, and we often fail to move young people out of homelessness quickly.
- Young people's lives are rich and complex. Unsurprisingly then, preventative actions that seek to intervene 'upstream' of a homelessness crisis point are diverse, and demand effective, coordinated action across policy fields and across public service partners.
- We adopt Gaetz and DeJ's (2017) five-part **typology of homelessness** prevention as a useful tool to structure this report, and wider action. There is good evidence for some interventions across the typology:
  - **Systems prevention:** Evidence supports youth-led discharge planning; family mediation and reunification prior, during, and after exits from public systems; financial and housing supports following exits from care or prison; trauma-informed case management; prison diversion programmes; and improved access to mental health and addiction services;
  - **Early intervention:** Evidence supports school-based prevention, especially when youth-centred and grounded in community-based partnerships, incorporating screening for the early identification of housing precarity (e.g., the Geelong Project, Australia); as well as respite housing combined with family mediation and reunification support;
  - **Eviction prevention:** Robust evidence supports the immediate-term efficacy of both financial assistance (e.g., rent subsidies) and legal advice, supports, and representation in preventing evictions;
  - **Housing stabilisation:** Evidence indicates that youth-focused housing models show promise; and strengthening young people's wellbeing, family and community connections can contribute to homelessness prevention.
- While focus will inevitably be drawn to programmatic interventions, policy to progress the **structural prevention** of homelessness – specifically, tackling poverty and affordable housing – remains critical to ensuring other forms of prevention are effective.
- We recommend an integrated 'one-government' approach, which offers young people real voice and choice in addressing their own housing needs, and which is then able to provide individually-tailored support.

# Introduction

In recent years there has been a notable shift in policy and scholarship towards preventing youth homelessness. In response to the shortcomings of reactive policy, countries around the world are developing, implementing, and evaluating ways to reduce the likelihood that any young person will become homeless (Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick, 2008; Mackie, Thomas, and Bibbings, 2017; Poppe and Gale, 2018).

In Wales, speaking at the launch of the *End Youth Homelessness Cymru* campaign in June 2017, the First Minister announced that he would ask the Wales Centre for Public Policy to contribute research to inform policy and practice on youth homelessness prevention. This report, and the supplementary report *Youth homelessness and care leavers: Mapping interventions in Wales* (Stirling 2018), together form this key contribution.

Recent scholarship suggests that homelessness prevention is best understood as:

**“Policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness. It also means providing those who have been homeless with the necessary resources and supports to stabilise their housing, enhance integration and social inclusion, and ultimately reduce the risk of the recurrence of homelessness.”** (Gaetz and DeJ, 2017, p. 35)

In the context of a global shift towards prevention, this international review identifies evidence-based interventions, promising practices, youth-identified prevention priorities, and intersecting policy elements contributing to the prevention of youth homelessness. The evidence review is guided by the following questions:

- Which factors (or patterns of factors) are known to increase risk of youth homelessness?
- Which policies and programmes are effective in preventing youth homelessness?
- What are the characteristics of effective strategies to prevent youth homelessness?
- What evidence is still needed to support the prevention of youth homelessness, and how might it be generated?

This report draws upon a careful assessment of this evidence base to develop a set of recommendations to divert young people from experiences of homelessness effectively.

# Methodology

For the purposes of this review, we employ the *Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness*, which defines youth homelessness as “the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence” (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016, p.1). Given that some academic literatures, organisations, and countries employ divergent definitions of youth homelessness, we did not exclude from our review any research that employed a different definition or age range.

Employing the homelessness prevention typology proposed by Gaetz and DeJ (2017), this review identifies and evaluates the international evidence base for youth homelessness prevention in five core areas: structural prevention, systems prevention, early intervention, eviction prevention, and housing stability. Two approaches were taken with this emerging area of scholarship: (a) the development of a robust international literature review of the existing scholarly research and grey literature, and (b) the identification of promising practices and interventions with emerging evidence, in consultation with experts and key informants. The methods for each task are as follows:

- (a) **Literature review** - An international review of all available research on youth homelessness prevention was conducted, including both scholarly research and grey literatures published between 2000 and 2018. A total of six scholarly databases were searched as part of this review. A broader literature review was conducted to capture policies and interventions that are not explicitly conceptualised as ‘youth homelessness prevention’ but may still function as such. The review distinguished between approaches that are evidence-supported and those that show promise or have an evolving body of evidence, identifying key gaps in knowledge in the process.
- (b) **International practice review** - While many practice examples of youth homelessness prevention exist, evidence of their efficacy often remains internal to organisations and agencies. The team engaged international experts and key organisations leading promising preventative interventions in order to collect, curate, and assess any emerging evidence, innovation, and knowledge with respect to youth homelessness prevention (See Annex A for Interview Guide). These interviews not only validated the literature review component of the review, but also offered important rationale and focus for the report’s recommendations.

Finally, this review also includes a brief review of youths’ perspectives on homelessness prevention, given the unique importance of designing policy solutions that meet youths’ self-identified needs.

# Causes of youth homelessness

In order to prevent youth homelessness, we must address the factors that cause it. Research indicates that young people's experiences of homelessness is best understood as a series of socially and individually disadvantaged circumstances that include a lack of access to permanent, stable, and safe housing (Gaetz et al, 2014). Youth who experience homelessness encounter unique barriers and challenges to stabilising their housing, engaging with school and education, meeting their daily needs, and remaining safe because of their age and developmental stage in the lifecourse (Day and Paul, 2007; Vitopoulos et al, 2017).

The causes of youth homelessness involve a complex set of interrelated factors, often operating in a cumulative way in a young person's lifetime. A socio-ecological model can be used to organise and explain why young people become homeless, dividing contributing factors into three primary domains: structural factors, system failures, and individual and relational factors (Gaetz, 2014; Gaetz and Dej, 2017):

**STRUCTURAL FACTORS** are “broad systemic, economic, and societal issues that occur at a societal level that affect opportunities, social environments, and outcomes for individuals” (Gaetz and Dej, 2017, p. 18). In many cases, youth homelessness is driven by structural and systemic factors that *create the conditions under which* personal or relational crises produce homelessness for young people. Some of the structural factors that contribute to youth homelessness include:

- Lack of affordable housing (e.g., Shinn, Brown, and Gubits, 2017)
- Childhood poverty (e.g., Embleton et al, 2016)
- Discrimination on the basis of age, race, ethnicity, citizenship, sexuality, or gender expression (e.g., Slesnick and Prestopnik, 2005a)
- Violence and intergenerational trauma experiences by refugees, asylum seekers and in some countries, indigenous groups (e.g., Thistle, 2017; Quilgars et al., 2008)

Evidence indicates that broader structural factors (e.g., difficulty getting a job due to racism) and systems failures (e.g., difficulty accessing mental health supports) set the stage for youth to become homeless when they face a personal or interpersonal crisis (e.g., family violence).

**SYSTEM FAILURES** refer to situations in which “inadequate policy and service delivery within and between systems contribute to the likelihood that someone will become homeless” (Schwan et al, 2018, p. 3; see Gaetz and Dej, 2017). This includes barriers to accessing public systems, failed transitions from publicly funded institutions and systems, and silos and gaps both within and between government funded departments and systems, as well as within non-profit sectors (Gaetz and Dej, 2017). A pan-Canadian consultation with youth who

had experienced homelessness highlights key system issues of access, availability, and affordability, meaning that young people are often unable to gain access to the services, supports, benefits, and resources to which they are entitled (Schwan et al, 2018). Research also consistently shows that in the absence of strong transitional supports, many young people transition directly from child welfare, corrections, and healthcare facilities into homelessness (Nichols and Doberstein, 2016; Wylie, 2014). Importantly, certain populations of young people, such as newcomers, experience greater systemic challenges and barriers, thus increasing their risk of experiencing homelessness (Ratnam, Fitzpatrick, and Thang, 2018).

**INDIVIDUAL AND RELATIONAL FACTORS** “refer to the personal circumstances that place people at risk of homelessness” (Gaetz and Dej, 2017, p. 21). A key cause of youth homelessness is conflict or breakdown in the family home, which can be linked to challenges such as substance use, mental health issues, and disengagement from social systems or education (Gaetz, 2014). Research also shows that adverse childhood experiences, such as abuse and neglect, are powerful contributors to homelessness for young people (e.g. Cutuli et al, 2013). In such circumstances, youth may flee or be removed from unsafe, abusive, or neglectful homes (Kidd et al, 2014; Schwan et al, 2018). While these individual and relational factors may appear to be the most direct causes of homelessness for many youth, research demonstrates that these factors are underpinned by structural and system problems and failures.

## Defining youth homelessness prevention

Recent scholarship suggests that youth homelessness prevention should build upon the following broader definition of homelessness prevention:

**“Policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness. It also means providing those who have been homeless with the necessary resources and supports to stabilise their housing, enhance integration and social inclusion, and ultimately reduce the risk of the recurrence of homelessness” (Gaetz and Dej, 2017, p. 35).**

We argue that in adopting this definition, any youth homelessness prevention intervention must occur within the context of: (1) the immediate *provision* of housing to youth experiencing homelessness or housing precarity, or (2) the immediate *protection* of housing for youth at risk of homelessness. While homelessness prevention interventions range considerably in their focus and intent, and may not be specifically housing-focused (e.g.,

family mediation efforts), such interventions *must involve immediate access to housing* in order to be defined as homelessness prevention. Homelessness prevention can be broken into a 5-part typology:

**1. Structural Prevention** – This means working upstream to address structural and systemic factors that contribute to housing precarity and expose individuals and families to the risk of homelessness. Through legislation, policy, and investment, the goal is to enhance housing stability and inclusion through legislation, policy and investment that promote poverty reduction, income security, access to appropriate housing, inclusion, safety, wellness, and security of tenure.

**2. Systems Prevention** – The focus here is addressing institutional and systems failures that either indirectly or directly contribute to the risk of homelessness. In some cases, policies and procedures are designed in ways that undermine the ability of individuals to get access to needed supports that would stabilise their housing. In other cases, the lack of planning and supports for individuals transitioning from public systems (e.g., hospital, corrections, child protection) can produce a higher risk of homelessness.

**3. Early Intervention** – This includes policies, practices, and interventions that help individuals and families who are at extreme risk of, or who have recently experienced, homelessness obtain the supports needed to retain their current housing or rapidly access new and appropriate housing. Early intervention strategies require effective identification and assessment mechanisms, system navigation support, and potentially case management and integrated systems responses. These supports are designed to provide local temporary housing solutions if people lose their housing so that they are able to maintain natural supports (friends and relatives) and local connections to institutions that they are currently engaged in (e.g., health care, education, community services).

**4. Eviction Prevention** – This includes programmes and strategies designed to keep individuals and families who are at risk of eviction in their homes, and that help them avoid entering into homelessness. A type of early intervention, evictions prevention focuses more on housing supports, and includes landlord/tenant legislation and policy, rent controls and supplements, emergency funds, housing education, and crisis supports for people imminently at risk of eviction.

**5. Housing Stability** – This involves initiatives and supports for people who have experienced homelessness so that people can exit homelessness in a timely way and “never experience it again” (Gaetz and Dej, 2017, p. 44).

The evidence in the following chapters is organised according to this Gaetz and Dej (2017) typology followed by a summary of key findings and recommendations for action by government.

# Structural prevention

The roots of homelessness are embedded within the “broad systemic economic and societal issues that occur at a societal level and affect opportunities, social environments, and outcomes for individuals” (Gaetz and DeJ, 2017, p. 18). Research suggests that without addressing the structural drivers of homelessness, we are unlikely to prevent or end homelessness for young people (Culhane and Metraux, 2008; Parsell and Marston, 2012). Fortunately, there is strong evidence to suggest that particular structural changes have positive effects on reducing homelessness, increasing the incomes of youth and their families, as well as improving the health, wellness, and housing stability of young people.

## Defining structural prevention

Structural prevention involves dismantling the policies, legislation, practices, and systems that contribute to housing precarity for youth and their families, and replacing these with policies designed to increase economic security, housing stability, and social inclusion for all people. Because young people are often embedded in relationships of dependence with adults (Gaetz, 2014), structural prevention must also address the structural factors that contribute to housing precarity for adults as well.

While youth face many of the same structural challenges that put adults at risk of homelessness, these difficulties manifest differently in the lives of young people (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017). When effective, structural prevention contributes to a reduction in the number of young people entering homelessness by addressing the *unique ways* in which structural factors place youth at risk of housing precarity.

## Evidence for the structural prevention of youth homelessness

This section explores population-level evidence for three critical elements of youth homelessness prevention: poverty reduction and elimination, increasing the availability of affordable housing, and homelessness prevention policy and legislation.

### a) Poverty reduction and elimination

Poverty is a key driver of homelessness for all people, including youth (Embleton et al, 2016). Childhood experiences of poverty can be detrimental to young people’s development (Tucker, Marx, and Long 1998), and poverty can contribute to high stress and family breakdown within the home (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017). Structural changes in the

economy also mean that there are fewer full-time, permanent jobs available for youth, and that those available are often low-wage and precarious (Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons 2016). In recent years, child poverty in the UK has risen to 29% and poverty among working-age adults with children has risen to 20% (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017, p. 19). In Wales, while the number of children living poverty is significantly lower than two decades ago, the number of children living in poverty by 2016 was 2% higher than in 2006 (Barnard, 2018). The Institute for Fiscal Studies predicts a sharp rise in child poverty in the UK into 2020 due to welfare reform (Browne and Hood, 2016).

Research shows that countries with robust welfare states and embedded poverty reduction strategies report lower rates child poverty and homelessness (Fitzpatrick and Stephens, 2007; Olsson and Nordfeldt, 2008). During our consultation with international experts, Dr. Beth Watts articulated, “*Any prevention strategy or plan must recognise that the roots of youth homelessness are child poverty*” (Watts, Beth. Senior Research Fellow at Heriot-Watt University. Personal interview, 22nd June, 2018). The Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s [UK Poverty Report](#) (2017) recommends a substantial set of evidence-based strategies to reduce child and family poverty, including:

- Raising the incomes of families with children through increased investments in benefit programmes (e.g., the Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit)
- Reducing or eliminating requirements needed to access benefit programmes (e.g., Universal Credit)
- Increasing and simplifying income assistance for youth-led and low-income families, including through improved maternity allowances, child care subsidies, and subsidies to support families with children who have disabilities
- Strengthening education for all children, including through efforts targeted to improve the educational attainment of children from low-income backgrounds.

As welfare is not a devolved issue, these recommendations are aimed primarily at the UK Government.

## b) Increasing the availability of affordable housing

Research has long demonstrated that a lack of affordable housing is a key cause of homelessness for children, youth, and adults (Brisson and Covert, 2015; Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2013; Poppe and Gale, 2018). Data from the United States indicates that income and housing market dynamics are the two key determinants of homelessness for individuals and families (Culhane, Metraux, and Byrne, 2011; Quigley and Raphael, 2002). In many countries, the housing market cannot keep pace with demand (e.g., Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2013). Limited stock of affordable housing creates competition amongst low-income renters (Brisson and Covert, 2015), exacerbating housing instability for households who do not have the resources or income to compete (Koebel, 1997).

**“The one thing all homeless people have in common is a lack of housing. Whatever other problems they face, adequate, stable, affordable housing is a prerequisite to solving them.”  
(Dolbeare, 1996, p. 34)**

Countries that have the lowest rates of homelessness in the world, such as Finland and Denmark, have invested heavily in affordable housing (O'Sullivan, 2017). International evidence demonstrates that lower rates of homelessness are correlated with increased investments in affordable housing (e.g., Fitzpatrick and Stephens, 2007; Pleace, Teller, and Quilgars, 2011), suggesting that this should be a key priority for any government seeking to reduce homelessness. Studies also indicate that homelessness can be dramatically reduced through targeted housing subsidies (Culhane et al, 2011; Quigley and Raphael, 2002). Such findings suggest that multiple strategies are needed to increase the availability of affordable housing for young people experiencing housing precarity. Finland has adopted a unique approach to this challenge, developing a youth-specific housing system (operated by the [Finnish Youth Housing Association](#)) that provides housing and counseling to young people transitioning to independence (age 18-29 years) (Pleace et al, 2015).

## Finnish Youth Housing Association (NAL)

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Youth homelessness in Finland is in part sustained by a shortage of small, affordable rental units in metropolitan areas. A **recent review** of Finnish homelessness policy found that for some young people in Finland, their homelessness is primarily the result of lacking the income to pay for the high costs of rental units. This group of young people do not necessarily require intensive support services in order to stabilise their housing, but are in dire need of affordable rental units if they are to avoid homelessness (Pleace et al, 2015, p. 71).

The Finnish Youth Housing Association (NAL) (Nuorisotasuntoliitto in Finnish) responds to the need for youth-focused, affordable housing across Finland. The NAL is a non-profit, non-governmental umbrella organization comprised of 24 local associations and 7 national member organisations targeted at defending young people's interests in housing matters across Finland. NAL owns both non-profit constructor organization NAL Asunnot and NAL Palvelut. The NAL provides affordable housing opportunities for all non-student young people between the ages of 18 and 29, offering over 3100 rental properties in over 30 cities across Finland.

Services offered through NAL include:

- Accessible, youth-friendly application processes to apply for NAL housing
- Housing counselling for all tenants, including financial and debt advice
- Resources and guides to support young people transitioning into independent housing
- Individual support (e.g., floating support) for some young tenants
- Active referrals to additional services and supports

The NAL works collaboratively with other youth-serving organizations and municipalities in order to meet youth's needs and stabilise youth's housing. Pleace and colleagues (2015) argue that the NAL model can be a particularly helpful model for young people who are transitioning from the child welfare system, the criminal justice system, as well as health and addiction services. However, the 'low intensity support' provided through NAL may not be sufficient for some youth who require greater support services in order to stabilise their housing.

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Youth homelessness prevention must involve increasing the availability of affordable housing options to youth and their families through a range of mechanisms, including:

- Building and maintaining affordable housing stock (including rental housing, social housing, and supportive housing);
- Introducing mechanisms to increase the affordability of rental housing (e.g., rent subsidies, emergency housing funds);
- Implementing rent control measures;

- Penalising landlord discrimination within the housing market; and
- Introducing and enforcing legislation to protect individuals' right to housing (including children and youth).

## c) Homelessness prevention policy & legislation

All efforts to prevent youth homelessness can be strengthened, supported, enforced, and defended through legislation and social policy. Recent international examples include: the *Housing (Wales) Act* (2014); England's *Homelessness Reduction Act* (2017); Ireland's National *Homeless Prevention Strategy* (2002); and Washington State's *Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Act* (2015). The Welsh and subsequent English legislation legally require the local council to immediately assist anyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness, if they are deemed eligible for assistance. While evidence is still emerging, early evaluations of the *Housing (Wales) Act* (2014) indicate that this policy intervention is successfully decreasing the number of people who are homeless (including youth), as well as reducing the number of people in temporary accommodations (Mackie, Thomas, and Bibbings, 2017). While the specific effects of this policy on youth have not been examined to date, this evidence holds considerable promise for structural youth homelessness prevention.

## Summary and gaps in knowledge

In order to effectively prevent youth homelessness, governments must address the underlying factors that put people at risk of homelessness in the first place (Parsell and Marston, 2012), including poverty, discrimination, lack of affordable housing, and insufficient social safety nets. Evidence strongly suggests that interventions focused on reducing poverty, increasing incomes, and improving access to affordable housing for families in poverty can effectively reduce the risk factors associated with youth homelessness. Evidence also indicates that when preventative interventions mitigate the structural drivers of homelessness (e.g., through the provision of financial supports to offset the gap between minimum-wage income and housing costs), these interventions are more successful at stabilising housing. Research also suggests that structural prevention efforts (e.g., increasing the affordable housing stock) are often the foundation upon which other types of prevention can achieve their objectives (e.g., Housing First for Youth).

While most scholarship on homelessness prevention mentions structural prevention, a vast majority focuses on individualised prevention strategies (Culhane et al, 2011; Gaetz and Dej, 2017; Pawson et al, 2007). Though early intervention or eviction prevention efforts may assist individuals to avoid homelessness, it is only through structural prevention that we can prevent *new* cases of homelessness from arising (Shinn, Baumohl, and Hopper, 2001). In order to be maximally effective, youth homelessness prevention must involve structural

prevention. Further research and concept building are needed to better understand the unique effects of particular kinds of structural interventions (e.g., poverty reduction strategies, homelessness prevention legislation) on young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

# System prevention

Addressing youth homelessness requires dismantling the processes through which public systems (e.g., healthcare, housing, criminal justice) contribute to youths' trajectories into homelessness. Key system failures that are implicated in this process include: "(1) barriers to accessing public systems; (2) failed transitions from publicly funded institutions and systems; and (3) silos and gaps both within and between government funded departments and systems, and also within non-profit sectors" (Gaetz and Dej, 2017, p. 20). Studies demonstrate direct causal links between system failures and homelessness (Nichols and Doberstein, 2016). In many cases these institutional and system failures combine in ways that compound disadvantages and risks of homelessness for individuals and families.

Systems prevention addresses the "institutional and systems failures that either indirectly or directly contribute to the risk of homelessness" (Gaetz and Dej, 2017, p. 44). Four key strategies for systems prevention include:

1. "Fixing policy and procedural barriers to facilitate program access and support;
2. Enhancing access to public systems, services, and appropriate supports;
3. Reintegration supports: Facilitating effective transitions from public institutions or systems" (Gaetz and Dej, 2017, p. 56-57); and
4. System coordination and integration.

The following presents the available evidence and emerging practices supporting youth homelessness systems prevention within three key public systems: criminal justice, child protection, and the mental health system. Two additional public systems implicated in the prevention of youth homelessness include education (see Early Intervention) and immigration. Evidence on how the immigration system can effectively prevent youth homelessness is sorely under-researched and requires further exploration.

## Preventing youth homelessness in the criminal justice system

Youth experiencing housing instability face significant risks to criminal justice involvement (O'Grady, Gaetz, and Buccieri, 2013), and report numerous negative interactions with law enforcement (Schwan et al, 2018). Once charged with a crime, young people face complex challenges navigating the criminal justice system, surviving and coping during incarceration, and successfully exiting prison (Mares and Jordan, 2012). The transition from incarceration

to independence is often difficult and puts young people at increased risk of homelessness (Estrada and Marksamer, 2006). While there are clear opportunities for youth homelessness prevention within the criminal justice system, criminal justice is not devolved in Wales. This limits the potential scope of action for Welsh Government.

## **a) Improving legal supports, advice, and representation for young people**

Evidence suggests that providing legal supports, advice, and representation often improves court outcomes and sentencing for young people (Mendes, Baidawi, and Snow, 2014).

Available research indicates the need for:

- Improved legal supports for youth in care (Pecora et al, 2017);
- Equity-based legal supports for children and youth leaving the criminal justice system (Hollingsworth, 2013);
- Legal outreach services for youth (Schwan et al, 2018);
- Legal supports and services that address the legal needs and rights of LGBTQ+ youth, black youth and youth of colour, and youth with precarious legal status such as refugees and asylum seekers (e.g., Estrada and Marksamer, 2006); and
- Legal supports and representation for homeless youth who have been victims of crime, including within public systems (e.g., foster care) (Britton & Pilnik, 2018).

## **b) Diversion from imprisonment**

While numerous studies demonstrate the efficacy of programmes that divert young people away from prison (e.g., Wilson and Schwarz, 2012), limited research assesses their effect on housing stability for youth or youth at risk of homelessness. However, there is strong evidence that diversion programmes effectively address some of the personal and familial factors that contribute to homelessness (e.g., family conflict) (e.g., Routt and Anderson, 2011). With this in mind, effective family-focused, trauma-informed diversion programmes should tackle some of the challenges that incarceration creates for young people, including: fractured relationships with family and community, interrupted educational attainment, and mental health challenges (all of which create difficulty accessing and maintaining housing) (Dodge, Dishion, and Lansford, 2007; Gaetz and O'Grady, 2013).

In many countries, enrolment in diversion programmes is at the discretion of local police services (Jordan and Farrell, 2012). This demonstrates a need to enact broader diversion strategies that extend beyond programmatic interventions. Doing so will require increased collaboration, supported by legislative and policy efforts such as:

- Amending or removing 'zero tolerance' policies for young people;

- Facilitating partnerships between schools and diversion programmes in order to intervene early when youth are at risk of being in conflict with the law. Legislation such as Colorado's *Smart School Discipline Law* is an excellent example;
- Eliminating policies and practices that criminalise youth experiencing homelessness, such as issuing fines for begging in public spaces (O'Grady, Gaetz, and Buccieri, 2011, 2013; Sylvestre and Bellot, 2014);
- Expanding the age mandate of diversion programmes to include youth over the age of 18; and
- Training and support for police officers to more compassionately respond to young people experiencing homelessness (Schwan et al, 2018).

Research has also demonstrated the value of interventions such as removing or reducing mandatory sentencing policies (Webster and Doob, 2015), and establishing amnesty programmes that allow youth experiencing homelessness to clear their records of charges related to offences such as begging – the accumulation of which make it difficult for youth to leave the street (O'Grady et al, 2013). (We acknowledge that as these are criminal justice matters, such measures are beyond the devolved competence of the Welsh Government at the current time).

### c) Reducing pathways to criminal justice involvement for youth in care

Many studies demonstrate that child welfare involvement is often a pathway to criminal justice involvement for youth (Halemba et al, 2004; Wylie, 2014), with one Ohio study revealing that more than half the inmates in prisons across the state were former youth in foster care (DeRouselle, 1999). Housing stabilisation supports and homelessness prevention is needed for youth involved in both systems (so-called “crossover youth”) (Mendes et al, 2014; Wylie, 2014), with evidence supporting:

- Interventions that reduce the loss of independent living through planning and services when youth are placed in detention (Brown et al, 2008);
- Legislation and supports to help young people return to care following incarceration, where safe and appropriate to do so (Wylie, 2014), which has also been shown to be cost-effective (Courtney et al, 2009);
- Improved representation and advocacy for youth in care in the criminal justice system (Mendes et al, 2014); and
- Legal recourse and advocacy for youth who have experienced violence, discrimination, harassment, and trauma within the criminal justice and/or child welfare systems (Estrada and Marksamer, 2006).

## d) Ensuring housing stability and supports following transitions from the criminal justice system

Transitioning from a detention facility is difficult for many youth, particularly when they lack services or supportive adults to assist in finding housing, maintaining education, or obtaining employment (Wylie, 2014). Further, youth with criminal records experience profound difficulty obtaining rental housing (Mendes et al, 2014). Research indicates that housing stability following transitions from the criminal justice system can be supported by:

- Reconnection and reunification with family and community and access to housing, supported by intensive case management from well-trained professionals (Mares and Jordan, 2012);
- Planning for youths' transitions out of corrections upon entry into the criminal justice system, including planning for re-entry into school and employment (Menon et al, 1995); and
- Effective coordination and multi-agency planning to increase efficiency, efficacy, and reduce costs (St. Basils, 2017).

UK homelessness scholars Dr. Suzanne Fitzpatrick and Dr. Beth Watts identified St. Basil's **Youth Justice Accommodation Pathway** (2017) as a promising model in this area during our consultation with international experts. This is an adaptation of the '**Positive Pathways**' model (2015) developed by St. Basils (England). This model might be considered alongside the Welsh Government's current prisoner pathway model, which sets out provisions to ensure that transition of young people from juvenile systems into stable accommodation (Welsh Government, 2015).

## St. Basil's Youth Justice Accommodation Pathway

St. Basil's **Youth Justice Accommodation Pathway** articulates four strands of activity to support housing stability for youth transitioning from corrections:

Strand	Key Components
1: Young people in the community: preventing homelessness and reducing offending	Early intervention to prevent young people involved in offending from becoming homeless Multi-agency information and planning to reduce re-offending Safeguarding youth and families at risk of harm
2: Young people in custody: planning for successful resettlement	Resettlement planning with families from the outset Identification of supports and housing following release Contingency plan preparation
3: Jointly commissioned accommodation and support	Supported housing secured in advance of release Specialist services for youth with complex needs Preparing youth for independence
4: A range of housing options with resettlement supports	Landlord engagement to procure shared and self-contained housing options Youth have access to a range of tenure types Support to set up and sustain a tenancy

### e) Promoting family reconnection, social supports, and social inclusion for youth following transitions from the criminal justice system

In addition to housing supports, studies show that re-entry into the criminal justice system can be reduced through supportive social networks (Spencer and Jones-Walker, 2004; Todis et al, 2001), and educational and employment supports (Menon et al, 1995). Importantly, research indicates that supportive adult relationships are one of the most important factors in determining a youth's housing status and wellbeing following a transition from incarceration (Louisell, 2006). There is a growing evidence base for family-based interventions with youth who offend, where appropriate (Knorth et al, 2008; Murphy et al, 2010; Wilson, 2013). Research suggests the need for youth justice services to investigate whether, how, and in what forms family-based interventions can support youth who exhibit offending behaviours, repeat offending, or negative interactions with the law (Mendes et al, 2014). Research indicates the importance of early intervention to address abuse and neglect within the home,

given that these experiences often contribute to offending behaviours. One American study found that children and youth with these backgrounds are 55% more likely to be arrested and 93% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime, compared to children and youth who have not experienced or neglect (Tuell, 2003). These statistics demonstrate the urgent need to prevent these experiences for young people, thereby mitigating a key contributor to offending behavior, and the subsequent risks of housing instability that criminal justice involvement engenders.

## Preventing youth homelessness in the child protection system

Evidence from around the world consistently demonstrates that among homeless youth populations, a very large proportion have been involved in the child welfare system (Fowler et al, 2006; Fowler, Toro, and Miles, 2009; Gaetz et al, 2016). A pan-Canadian study found that 57.8% of homeless youth had previous involvement with the child welfare system (Gaetz et al, 2016), and UK-wide studies have indicated that within their first year out of care, between 22-33% of youth experience homelessness (Stein, 2012). Research also demonstrates the over-representation of racialised, and LGBT children and youth in the child welfare system (e.g., Blackstock, Trocmé, and Bennett, 2004; Gaetz et al, 2016), as well as youth with disabilities (Bruhn, 2004; Hill, 2012), revealing child welfare involvement to be an important equity issue (Nichols et al, 2017).

There is robust evidence demonstrating the dire need for child welfare system change in many countries in order to prevent homelessness for youth. Despite divergent child welfare legislation around the world, child welfare systems can contribute to youth homelessness prevention by: (1) preventing youth from entering the child welfare system; (2) improving youths' experiences within care; and (3) supporting youths' transitions from care. The following explores the evidence supporting policy and practice interventions within child welfare that may contribute to the prevention of youth homelessness. The provision for young care leavers in Wales is covered in more detail in our supplementary report *Youth homelessness and care leavers: Mapping interventions in Wales* (Stirling 2018).

### a) Ensuring housing stability and supports following transitions from child protection

Transitions from child welfare are extremely challenging and often correlated with poor health, education, housing, and employment outcomes (Courtney and Dworsky, 2006; Courtney et al, 2011b; Perez and Romo, 2011; Wertheimer, 2002). Studies indicate the particular efficacy of flexible subsidised, transitional, and supportive housing options for

youth following transitions from care, in combination with education and employment assistance, healthcare, and life skills training (Courtney and Huering, 2005; Kimberlin, Anthony, and Austin, 2009; Lemon, Hines, and Merdinger, 2005; Lorentzen et al, 2008; Montgomery, Donkoh, and Underhill, 2006). Longitudinal evidence on independent living programmes for youth exiting the child welfare system also show positive effects on housing stability (Pecora et al, 2006). Importantly, successful transitions to independence for youth has been linked to providing youth with the opportunity to choose their housing type (Kroner and Mares, 2011).

Youth should be engaged in planning for this transition well in advance of aging out of care, including through strong case management while in custody (Nichols et al, 2017; Scottish Parliament, 2012). Studies have demonstrated that the quality and quantity of supports following exits from child welfare are strongly correlated with success in numerous life domains (Stein, 2006; Wade and Dixon, 2006), and that post-care support reduces the likelihood of criminal offending (Mendes et al, 2014). Such supports may be particularly important for youth with multiple complex needs (Hiles et al, 2013; Whalen, 2015).

International experts engaged as part of this review noted that the issue of transitions from child protection must be urgently addressed. Experts also maintained that youth homelessness numbers would drop significantly if government and community services coordinated and/or integrated to ensure transitions are seamless, rights-based, and focus on housing stability (Watts, Beth. Senior Research Fellow at Heriot-Watt University. Personal interview, 22nd June, 2018; Morton, Matthew. Research Fellow at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Personal interview, 29th June 2018). Experts identified Barnardo's **Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework** as a promising model for promoting housing stability among care leavers (Watts, Beth. Senior Research Fellow at Heriot-Watt University. Personal interview, 22nd June, 2018).

A policy intervention that also has promise is the '**After Care Guarantee**', developed by FEANTSA and several European countries to provide youth with an 'aftercare worker' from age 16 to 24 in order to support housing, education, health, and wellbeing.

## **b) Housing stability during child welfare involvement**

Lack of stability while in care has been found to produce a range of negative outcomes for youth (Gypen et al, 2017; Salazar et al, 2013; Villegas et al, 2014; Wade and Dixon, 2006), with frequent changes in housing and support placements linked to poor long-term housing outcomes (Havlicek, 2011; Mares, 2010). In order to reduce foster care breakdown and housing instability in care, evidence suggests:

- The effectiveness of the **Treatment Foster Care model** in reducing placement instability (Fisher & Gilliam, 2012; Reddy and Pfeiffer, 1997);

- The need to implement improved screening mechanisms to identify and respond to abuse and neglect within foster care homes (Schwan et al, 2018);
- The importance of accessible health, mental health, and addiction supports for both carers and youth (Day and Paul, 2007), as well as mediation and counselling supports; and
- The need to improve foster families' access to information, resources, and services that can support their care of the young person (Brown et al, 2007)

A smaller body of scholarship addresses the housing needs of youth in residential care (e.g., group homes), suggesting that improved outcomes for youth are associated with child-centred and trauma-informed practices (Clough, 2008). A structured review of evidence on residential care models identified four promising models that improve housing outcomes for youth in care: **the Sanctuary Model**, **the Stop Gap Model**, **the Teaching Family Model**, and the **Positive Peer Culture Model** (James, 2011).

### **c) Interventions to improve mental health, educational, and employment outcomes for youth in care and transitioning from care**

Research has consistently demonstrated poor mental health, educational, and employment outcomes for youth in care, and who have transitioned from care (McAuley and Davis, 2009; Mendes and Moslehuddin, 2006). An Australian longitudinal study indicated that after transitioning out of care, a staggering 50% of youth had attempted suicide within four years (Cashmore and Paxman, 2007). Available evidence demonstrates:

- The need to dramatically increasing the availability of mental health services for this population, including through outreach and school-based interventions (Gaetz, 2014; Schwan et al, 2018);
- The importance of adopting trauma-informed mental health services for youth in care and transitioning from care (Tarren-Sweeney and Vetere, 2013; Mendes et al, 2014);
- Interventions that strengthen the therapeutic capacities of case workers and carers of youth in care show promise for reducing mental ill-health among young people in care (Herrman et al, 2016)

While there are many interventions that aim to improve mental health, education, and employment outcomes for youth in care or transitioning from care, there is limited evidence of their effect on housing stability.

## d) Reconnecting and reunifying youth and families

Research suggests that child welfare systems do not sufficiently support young people to form positive connections with adults, leaving many youth disconnected from social supports when they leave the system (Courtney et al, 2011b; Gaetz et al, 2016). Importantly, a recent study found that amongst youth placed into foster care, those who were reunited with families had a much lower probability of homelessness compared to youth who were not (Fowler et al, 2017), highlighting the positive role that family reunification can have on housing stability. While other studies have demonstrated the significance of high-quality relationships to post-care outcomes for youth (Cashmore and Paxman, 2006), further research is needed to better understand what types of support models best promote these relationships for care leavers.

## e) Extending the age of care and providing 'after care' supports

In recent years, some countries and regions in the Global North have extended the age requirement and/or supports for youth in care beyond the age of 18. For example, Scotland has introduced legislation that extends the age of care and enhances the state's obligation to support young people into their early 20s (The Scottish Government, 2013). In Wales, Part 2 of the Housing (Wales ) Act 2014 and Part 6 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act put in place significant provisions to enable policy action (Stirling, 2018). Although few studies have yet to assess the outcomes of this new legislation due to its recency, previous research has found a reduction in homelessness among youth in foster care in American states that extended the age of care beyond 18 (Dworsky, Napolitano, and Courtney, 2013). This reduction only appears to last until the extension ends at age 21, suggesting the extension may only delay homelessness for some youth, and that the supports provided while in care are not sufficient to address the risk factors that lead to homelessness upon aging out (Dworsky, Napolitano, and Courtney, 2013). Future research should assess whether extending the age of care is linked to reductions in homelessness among care leavers, and what other system changes may be needed to maximise the beneficial impact of such policies.

# Preventing youth homelessness in the mental health system

Mental health and housing status are powerfully linked (Hadland et al, 2011; Kidd, 2013; Kidd et al, 2017). Research indicates that mental health challenges are both a precursor to

(Craig and Hodson, 1998; Karabanow et al, 2007), and consequence of (Kidd et al, 2017, Kidd et al, 2018), homelessness for young people. A recent pan-Canadian study indicated that 85.4% of Canadian homeless youth were experiencing a mental health crisis, and 42% had attempted suicide at least once (Gaetz et al, 2016).

There is a dire need for mental health supports and services for young people *before* they are on the streets, as well as immediate access to this care once they become homeless (Kidd et al, 2018). Many youth experiencing homelessness identify that mental health and addictions supports for themselves and their families would have prevented their homelessness, and that access to these supports would have made transitions into housing faster, more effective, and more successful (Schwan et al, 2018). This section presents three key areas of mental health system change that can contribute to the prevention of youth homelessness.

## a) System change to improve youth and families' access to mental health and addiction services

Affordability, accessibility, and availability of mental health and addictions services are a key issues for youth and families at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness (Schwan et al, 2018). Youth experience profound barriers to accessing mental health services, and research demonstrates that young people rarely access supports at times when they are in greatest need (Merikangas et al, 2011; Ratnasingham et al, 2013). Restrictions around age and drug-using behaviours also create barriers to accessing supports (Krüsi et al, 2010).

Key system changes and interventions that hold promise for improving youth and families' access to mental health and addiction services include:

- Early intervention, community-based programmes, and services for young people with emerging mental health issues. Evidence-based programme models include *Jigsaw* in Ireland (O'Keeffe et al, 2015) and *Headspace* in Australia (Muir et al, 2009);
- Highly accessible school-based mental health services supported by effective screening methods to identify emerging issues (MacKenzie, 2018);
- Free family counselling and mediation to families facing housing precarity and other challenges, using evidence-based models such as ecologically based family therapy (Cully, Wu, and Slesnick, 2018);
- Reducing costs and wait times to access mental health services, as well as requirements such as identification, proof of citizenship, and parental permission (Kidd et al, 2018);

- Ensuring mental health service provision across all agencies is trauma-informed, anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive, culturally sensitive, and equity-based (Abramovich, 2016; Kezelman and Stavropoulos, 2012);
- Implementing highly accessible service delivery models, such as ‘youth hubs’, that co-locate mental health services with others such as primary care, employment supports, and housing services. Strong examples in Canada include **ACCESS Open Minds** (pan-Canadian), and **The Foundry** (British Columbia, Canada); and
- Establishing information sharing agreements across youth-serving organisations in order to improve access and quality of care (Nichols and Doberstein, 2016).

## b) Integrated care for youth and families

The segregation of different systems of care (e.g., health, housing, addiction services), and the disconnected efforts of organisations within these systems, make it challenging to address the whole-person needs of youth and families who are struggling with housing instability and mental health challenges. Scholars, advocates, and youth with lived experience of homelessness have consistently called for ‘integrated care’, in which youth services seek to address youths’ needs collaboratively across providers, services, sectors, and systems (McGorry et al, 2007). Two dimensions of integrated care for which there is evidence include:

- **Coordinated entry** – Coordinated entry refers to standardised intake and assessment processes wherein youths’ needs are matched with appropriate services and supports across systems. Research has demonstrated that coordinated entry – such as the UK’s **Common Assessment Framework** - leads to better outcomes for children and youth (and results in significant cost savings) (Easton et al, 2011).
- **Information sharing across organisations and systems** – Data management and information sharing is critical for effective coordinated service delivery across multiple systems and agencies, allowing to track client flow, measure the impact of preventative efforts, and respond quickly when interventions are failing (Nichols and Doberstein, 2016).

Many countries in the Global North have been moving towards systems coordination and integration through practices, such as community plans to prevent and end youth homelessness, data sharing, and ‘collective impact’ approaches (e.g., Forum for Youth Investment, 2014; Turner, 2016). Systematic research and evaluation is needed to assess the effects of system coordination and integration as they are implemented in communities. As identified by Dr. Matthew Morton, “Early screening to determine housing instability and access the right connections should be the priority for any prevention programme” (Morton,

Matthew. Research Fellow at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Personal interview, 29th June 2018).

### **c) Ensuring housing stability for youth transitioning from healthcare and inpatient care institutions**

Research has also linked unsupported transitions from healthcare institutions, psychiatric wards, hospitals, and rehabilitation centres to youth homelessness (Backer, Howard, and Moran, 2007). In a study of adolescents discharged from psychiatric residential treatment, one third experienced homelessness after discharge (Embry et al, 2000). While Forchuk and colleagues (2006, 2008) have demonstrated the efficacy of transitional housing and supports for adults making these transitions, evidence for youth populations is much thinner. Although these adult models may be adaptable to the needs of youth, further research in this area is required to assess which supports are needed to stabilise housing for youth exiting these institutions.

## **Summary of evidence and gaps in knowledge**

Existing scholarship demonstrates that transforming public systems' policies and practices can support youth homelessness prevention. Perhaps the most robust evidence exists for interventions within child welfare, including interventions that nurture family and natural supports, expand post-care services, and prepare youth for independent living. Research also indicates that unsupported transitions from care, corrections, and in-patient healthcare institutions directly causes of homelessness for many youth. Effective interventions to support youth during these transitions include: youth-led discharge planning that initiates early; family mediation and reunification prior, during, and after exits from public systems; financial and housing supports following exits from care or prison; trauma-informed case management; incarceration diversion programmes; and improved access to mental health and addiction services for youth and their families/carers.

As a fusion policy issue that crosses multiple systems and sectors, scholars have argued that youth homelessness prevention should be supported by an integrated, cross-system approach focused on dismantling the system failures that contribute to youth homelessness. Additional cross-system changes that would assist in the prevention of youth homelessness include:

- Adopting a youth-centric and family-focused orientation (MacKenzie, 2018) in all public systems, working with both youth and their family members to address the challenges they face, when it is safe, appropriate, and desirable to do so;
- Improving youths' awareness of their rights, entitlements, and benefits, as well as available services and supports they are entitled to;
- Adopting an integrated approach across systems to address the needs of youth who are at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness;
- Improving youths' transitions from publicly funded institutions and systems through targeted interventions and system change;
- Evaluating the efficacy of interventions aimed at stabilising housing for youth transitioning from publicly funded institutions and systems;
- A cross-system focus on outcomes beyond housing for youth, including outcomes related to mental health challenges, social inclusion, wellbeing, engagement with employment and education, and family relationships;
- The development of screening tools, both within and between public systems, that are capable of identifying youth's risk of homelessness (in addition to youth's assets);
- Employing an equity and trauma-informed lens in designing system changes to prevent youth homelessness; and
- Applying harm reduction models and philosophies within child protection to ensure stability and positive growth for youth.

Despite these findings, the evidence base for the systems prevention of youth homelessness is scant in some areas. There has been more limited scholarship on the contributions that healthcare, education, and immigration systems can make to youth homelessness prevention. Additionally, there are numerous methodological challenges to attributing causal links between particular forms of systems prevention (e.g., system coordination) and reductions in youth homelessness, indicating a need for innovative, cross-disciplinary research in order to better understand these effects.

# Early intervention

In many parts of the world, our response to youth homelessness has been through the provision of emergency services and legal or criminal reprisal. By most measures this has been highly ineffective, and youth homelessness continues to increase in many Global North countries (MacKenzie et al, 2016; National Center for Homeless Education, 2017; Pleave and Fitzpatrick, 2004). Early intervention approaches, by contrast, seek to identify and address the challenges that young people and their families face *before* they experience homelessness, thereby reducing entries into homelessness. These interventions identify and address “the physical, emotional, material, interpersonal, social, and educational needs of young people who are at imminent risk of, or who have just become, homeless” (Gaetz, 2014, p. 482).

Through early intervention efforts, young people are provided with the supports to remain housed safely with their family, or transition into appropriate and safe independent accommodation (Gaetz et al, 2014). Many early intervention programmes seek to strengthen the protective factors that mitigate risk of homelessness and stabilise housing for young people through increasing school engagement, nurturing family and natural supports, improving health and wellness, and enhancing conflict resolution skills.

**“We need to increase our support for the complexities of these interventions. Too many of our interventions are called ‘prevention’ but only support youth once they are homeless.”**

**(Hayes, Jasmine. Deputy Director, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. Personal interview, 19th June 2018).**

A review of the available evidence indicates four types of early intervention for which there is strong evidence: **school-based interventions**, **housing-led early interventions** (e.g., Host Homes), **enhancing family and natural supports**, and **prevention-focused mental health and addiction supports**.

## School-based early intervention

Youth experiencing homelessness often face profound difficulties obtaining education (Gaetz, 2016; Gaetz and O’Grady, 2002; Karabanow et al, 2010; Liljedahl et al, 2013). In a pan-Canadian survey of youth (13-24) who are homeless, 50.5% identified as not being engaged in employment, education, or training (Gaetz et al, 2016). Low rates of school

completion are related to a number of factors, including learning disabilities, addiction issues, trauma, and mental health problems (Gaetz et al, 2016). Importantly, evidence suggests that school attendance can bolster key social protective factors for children and youth (Henley, 2010), enabling youth to cultivate resilience, social skills, and positive social relationships (Alvord and Grados, 2005; Henley et al, 2010).

Schools are optimal environments to address the unmet needs of youth experiencing housing precarity and reduce the barriers to service delivery (Bradley, 2011), particularly given that 77% of youth from homeless families regularly attend school (Sulkowski and Michael, 2014). The objective of school-based early intervention programmes is to identify youth who are at risk of homelessness, school disengagement, and other significant challenges in order to provide supports that will effectively reduce these risks, stabilise youths' housing, strengthen relationships with their families, and keep youth in their communities (Gaetz and Dej, 2017). Recent research and evaluation demonstrates the particular efficacy of partnerships between schools, social service providers, and other community resources in delivering early interventions (Poppe and Gale, 2018), especially when a "youth-centred, family-focused approach" is taken (MacKenzie, 2018).

The **Youth Reconnect** programme in Australia is an early and effective example of this approach. Launched in 1999, there are now over 100 Youth Reconnect programmes across Australia. Targeted to young people aged 12-18 and their families, Youth Reconnect is located young people's schools and aims to prevent homelessness by providing supports and services through a network of community-based, early intervention services (Australian Government, 2013). Youth Reconnect seeks to:

- Link schools and young people to community-based services that can support youth and their families;
- Improve awareness of youth homelessness amongst school staff, teachers, and administrators, including knowledge of available local services;
- Systematically identify when young people are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness, and quickly intervene to stabilise housing; and
- Improve young people's engagement with education, employment, training, and community (Australian Government, 2013).

Evaluations of the Youth Reconnect programme have shown many positive outcomes (Evans & Shaver, 2001; Australian Government, 2013), and the Australian government's comprehensive review (2003) indicated positive outcomes with respect to: housing stability for youth, young people and parents' ability to manage family conflict, engagement in education and employment, and community connection. A Canadian example employing a similar model is The RAFT's **Youth Reconnect** programme, which provides place-based

supports to divert youth from entering the shelter system and remain housed in their communities.

Building on the successes of Youth Reconnect is **The Geelong Project** (TGP) – a leading Australian school-based early intervention. TGP is based on a “community of schools and youth services’ model” of early intervention (COSS) (MacKenzie, 2018, p. 5). The COSS model offers place-based support for youth and families with the goal of reducing withdrawal from education, preventing entry into the criminal justice system, and addressing familial issues that contribute to homelessness. Results indicate that between 2013-2016:

- The number of youth entering the homelessness support system **declined by 40%**, with research identifying a causal link to TGP; and
- Among schools piloting TGP, early school leaving **declined by 20%** (MacKenzie, 2018).

**“Geelong is the truest form of prevention. Its adaptability to different contexts, local systems, and infrastructure would allow for it to be scaled and adopted internationally.”**

**(Morton, Matthew. Research Fellow at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Personal communication, 29th June 2018)**

The success of TGP is currently being mobilised by the *Upstream International Living Lab* (UILL) - an international social research and development consortium focused on the design, implementation, and study of programme and policy interventions that foster systems change resulting in the prevention of youth homelessness. The core of this work is to facilitate the adaptation and implementation of the TGP model within each of the countries participating in the consortium.

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### **The Geelong Project & the COSS Model (Australia)**

Initiated in 2010, the Geelong Project is based on a “community of schools and youth services’ model of early intervention” (COSS) (MacKenzie, 2018, p. 5). The model offers place-based supports for youth and families with the goal of reducing withdrawal from education, preventing entry into the criminal justice system, and addressing familial issues that contribute to homelessness for young people.

**Key Service Delivery Characteristics:**

*Community Collaborative:* A ‘community of schools and youth services’ shares responsibility for jointly identifying and referring students at risk of homelessness. There is a single point of entry for all students, and ‘early intervention workers’ support youth through case management support. Referral decisions are data driven and use a multi-stage screening process to identify young people at risk of homelessness.

*Population screening for risk:* The model uses a unique strategy to identify youth at risk of homelessness. While the Youth Reconnect programme relies on adults or young people to self-report when in crisis, the COSS model screens *all* students for both risks and assets. All students complete a **Student Needs Survey**, and the results are compared with additional observational data from teachers and counsellors. Youth deemed at risk of homelessness, criminal involvement, or dropping out are given a brief screening interview. Students are then referred for community-based supports that use a three-tiered model in their response.

*A flexible and responsive practice framework:* The model has three levels of response:  
Tier 1: Active monitoring by school staff, or a secondary consultation where a referral is made to another programme or agency.

Tier 2: Casework support, either brief counselling or case management by TGP.

Tier 3: ‘Wrap-around’ case management for complex cases requiring the formal involvement of several agencies.

Within this approach, the delivery of the response depends on the type of support needed, which can vary over time. The model’s ability to function longitudinally and flexibly is crucial to achieving efficient service delivery and improved homelessness outcomes.

*Embedded longitudinal outcomes monitoring and measurement:* The COSS model’s community approach to outcomes for young people follows the whole group of at-risk youth within the community, monitoring achievements over time.

More detail on the model, and a recent evaluation of its efficacy, can be found in the **2018 Interim Programme Evaluation** (MacKenzie, 2018).

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Other community-school partnerships that employ family-focused interventions have shown similar positive outcomes. An evaluation of the Siemer Institute’s *Stable Families Program* (United States) revealed that among families receiving a range of housing, counselling, and case management services through school-based interventions, 72% were able to obtain stable housing, 65% had increased their income, and 99% of youth remained stable in school (Poppe and Gale, 2018, p. 54). The efficacy of these programmes is linked to school-based screening tools that can quickly detect when youth are at risk of homelessness and facing difficulties (MacKenzie, 2018; Poppe and Gale, 2018).

## Housing-led early interventions

Research indicates that when young people have to leave home, many attempt to temporarily stay with friends or family. However, some youth are unable to find temporary accommodation or support, ending up on the street or in shelters that are often far away from their community, friends, and school (Schwan et al, 2018). Housing-led early interventions aim to provide immediate short-term (e.g., Host Homes) or longer-term housing (e.g., Rapid Rehousing) solutions to these housing challenges faced by youth.

**“How do we engage those youth who aren’t connected to services?”**

**(Slesnick, Natasha. Professor of Human Development and Family Science at Ohio State University. Personal communication, 29th May 2018)**

## Respite housing (Host Homes)

Respite housing, commonly referred to as “**Host Homes**,” is a form of shelter diversion that provides short-term housing and supports for youth who have had to leave home. The aim of the Host Homes model is to provide immediate supports and a safe place to stay within the community, diverting young people from entering the shelter system and enabling youth to stay connected to family and peers, while remaining in school (Gaetz and Dej, 2017). This model provides the opportunity for youth and their family to address underlying issues (separately and jointly), combined with a family reunification strategy, if appropriate and safe. While Host Home models differ, they often involve community members temporarily offering a room in their house to a young person at risk of homelessness, enabling the youth and their family to receive supports while next steps for housing are determined.

Focusing on family reconnection can strengthen families and reduce the amount of time that young people may experience homelessness (Gaetz et al, 2013). This model may also help prevent young people transitioning out of foster care from entering the youth homelessness system by reducing their sense of isolation (Gaetz et al, 2013). While evaluations of specific Host Homes programmes exist, there is limited comparative evidence demonstrating the efficacy of the Host Homes model across communities and countries. However, two Host Homes programmes provide strong evidence of the model's promise:

- **Nightstop** (Depaul, UK) is the most extensive Host Homes programme in the UK, providing youth in 40 communities with community-based support services. A 2010 evaluation indicated that after staying at a Nightstop Host Home, 21% of youth returned to their family home, 36% moved into supported housing, 14% obtained independent accommodation, 11% moved into social housing and 14% moved in with a friend (Insley, 2011).
- **Youth Advocates of Sitka** (Sitka, Alaska) provides youth aged 5-21 with temporary accommodation with a state-licensed host family for a maximum of 18 months. Evaluation indicates that between 2008-2012, 96% of youth who participated in Youth Advocates transitioned into a stable housing environment upon departure (Raising the Roof, 2018).

Host Homes have also been identified as an effective early intervention because of their flexibility and cost effectiveness (U.S. Department of Housing and Development, 2016). Because Host Homes do not depend on fixed congregate living sites, they can cost significantly less per young person than communal shelter operations (Raising the Roof, 2018). The flexibility of Host Homes also enables this model to be used as emergency shelter replacements or as longer-term housing for youth that are transitioning from care (U.S. Department of Housing and Development, 2016). **Point Source Youth**, in New York City, has initiated some important Host Homes work as an alternative to shelter stays, specifically targeting LGBTQ youth.

Early intervention efforts, including housing-led early interventions, must quickly and effectively identify young people who are at risk of homelessness. Unfortunately there is limited research available on tools that can support this process. The Geelong Project's **universal screening tool** is a strong example in Australia. The **Youth Assessment and Prioritization Tool (YAP)** is a Canadian tool that has been developed to screen for risk of homelessness amongst youth, and is currently being tested as part of the **Making the Shift** project. This tool may hold promise for screening for risk within a range of sectors and social services.

## The Youth Assessment Prioritization Tool (Canada)

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The **Youth Assessment and Prioritization Tool (YAP)** is a Canadian tool developed to screen for risk of homelessness amongst youth. It is generally conducted when a vulnerable young person comes into contact with the social service system. The tool consists of 22 mandatory pre-screen questions focused on short and long-term risk of homelessness, followed by an interview (if necessary). The interview portion focuses on a young person's life history and current situation, as well as their strengths and assets. Over the course of the assessment scores are assigned within five primary domains:

- a. Immediate risk of homelessness
- b. Risk of Long-Term Homelessness
- c. Prioritization
- d. Mental health
- e. Trauma

The information gained through the assessment helps the assessor (often a caseworker) to make decisions on the best service pathway for the young person, as well as referral and prioritization recommendations. Unlike many other assessment tools, the YAP is strength-based – capturing youth's strengths, skills, assets, and goals, in addition to their vulnerabilities.

The University of Ottawa will be conducting the validation process on the YAP tool and the results will be released once completed.

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## Strengthening family and natural supports

Family separation and conflict is associated with homelessness, with research consistently showing links between family conflict, abuse, child welfare involvement, poverty, and housing precarity (Pleace et al, 2015). Research also indicates that child welfare involvement, family breakdown, and, in some contexts, family separation are commonplace among families experiencing homelessness (Shinn et al, 2015; Shinn, Brown, and Gubits, 2017), and family breakdown has been shown to increase the risk of poverty (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017). The importance of family and caring adults in the lives of young people demonstrates the need to invest in programmes which strengthen family and natural supports (e.g., teachers, co-workers, coaches) when youth and their families experience housing precarity.

**“We learned that many youth were able to remain at home with the promise of support, that nobody wants to be a bad parent, families don’t want kick their kids out, but they believe they are out of solutions.”**

**(Ledene, Kim. Director of Youth Housing & Shelter at Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary. Personal interview, 12th June, 2018).**

There is scarce research on the effect of family and natural support programmes on housing stability for youth, despite family mediation and supports being one of the most prevalent forms of homelessness prevention (Pawson et al, 2007). Trends in available research indicates that:

- Temporary accommodation for young people, including respite accommodations can bolster motivation for families and caregivers to seek and engage in supportive interventions (Day and Paul, 2007; Slesnick and Prestopnik, 2005b); and
- Ecologically based family therapy shows promise as a preventative measure for young people at risk of homelessness. Randomised control trials have shown improved family relations, as well as reduced substance use and improved mental wellbeing (Slesnick and Prestopnik, 2005b).

Additionally, the [Making the Shift Demonstration Project](#) (Canada) is conducting a developmental evaluation of eight Family and Natural Supports preventive interventions across eight Canadian cities. These demonstrations are testing how the intervention works in different settings (e.g., shelter, school, and outreach contexts) for at-risk or recently homeless young people (Gaetz, 2017).

# Mental health and addiction supports

Research shows that young people who are vulnerable to becoming homeless are simultaneously at risk of developing mental health problems, given that the risk factors for both often overlap (e.g., poverty, abuse, school absence, family discord) (Breugel and Smith, 1999; Day and Paul, 2007; Toro, Lesperance, and Braciszewski, 2011). Many young people only seek mental health and substance use treatment once they are in or near a crisis (Vitopoulos et al, 2017), and some experience profound barriers to obtaining help (Schwan et al, 2018). Intervening early, when mental health distress and housing precarity arise, is critical to ensure positive long-term outcomes for youth (Kidd et al, 2014). This is particularly the case given evidence that youth who leave homelessness quickly are less likely to experience mental health and substance use problems (Milburn et al, 2012; Toro, Lesperance, and Braciszewski, 2011).

There is a dearth of research on *preventative* supports for young people who are at risk of homelessness and experiencing mental health and/or substance use problems. Available evidence indicates that:

- Having a spectrum of services available is important to support the diverse mental health and addiction supports needed amongst youth. Youth with high-level needs will require more intensive and long-term support towards housing stability and independence (Kidd et al, 2016);
- Close, therapeutic relationships with mental health professionals are key to a young person's treatment, engagement and retention, and research demonstrates the particular importance of trauma-informed approaches to care (Kidd et al, 2014; Vitopoulos et al, 2017);
- Post-crisis support can help to prevent eviction and tenancy breakdowns, and support family mediation, social skills development, personal skill development (e.g., coping resources), and training and employment opportunities (Day and Paul, 2007);
- Professionals working in schools are in a strong position to advocate for the mental health needs of unaccompanied youth (Sulkowski and Michael, 2014); and
- The provision of school-based mental health services aids in reducing mental health disparities experienced by youth who are homeless (Cummings, Ponce, and Mays, 2010).

Finally, as Day and Paul (2007, p. 21) note, “prevention work is concerned not just with young people, but also with their parents or carers.” Carers of young people leaving the child welfare system report high levels of stress and challenges coping (Day and Paul, 2007; Herman et al, 2011). Early evidence suggests that supporting the mental health and

wellbeing of carers and system workers can help improve transitions out of child welfare for young people (Herman et al, 2011).

## Summary of evidence and gaps in knowledge

While there are many promising early intervention models and programmes in communities around the globe, research and evaluation is just beginning to catch up with the effects of these programmes. This review of available evidence indicates:

- Intervening early when youth are identified to be at risk of homelessness is critical to positive short- and long-term outcomes for youth, with some research indicating cost savings associated with this approach;
- There is population-based evidence supporting the efficacy of school-based interventions, the positive effects of which research and experts link to community-based partnerships, family-focused interventions, and screening tools for identifying youth at risk;
- Respite housing, combined with family mediation and reunification supports, can effectively prevent homelessness for youth. Longitudinal research is needed to understand the long-term effects of these interventions;
- Young people and their families enormously benefit from early access to trauma-informed mental health and addictions supports; and
- Extensive research is needed to better understand the efficacy of early intervention programmes on youth homelessness prevention, the relative contribution of individual programme services to observed outcomes, and the outcomes of early interventions for particular groups of youth (i.e., LGBTQ+ youth, youth of colour, newcomer youth, youth with children, youth with disabilities, youth with mental health challenges, youth with gang involvement, and others).

In implementing early intervention models and programmes across public systems, a ‘system of care’ approach should be considered. Such an approach aims to ensure that relevant services, supports, and public systems are coordinated or integrated in order to maximise the efficacy of early interventions. A promising model for implementing an integrated, cross-system early intervention response is the **‘Positive Pathways’** model (2015), developed by St. Basils (England).

## The Positive Pathways Model (St. Basils, England)

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The **Positive Pathways Model** is a flexible framework for local authorities and their partners, to use to provide a planned approach to homelessness prevention and housing for young people (St. Basils, 2015). The model is based in policy analysis, research, and consultations with young people, local authorities, charities, and other organisations.

### Key Service Areas

#### 1. Information and advice for families

Timely, accurate information and advice about housing options, delivered in a range of ways including through schools to reach young people, families and professionals.

#### 2. Early Help

Early intervention targeted to reach households where young people are most likely to be at risk of homelessness, in addition to 1 above. Delivery involving all local services working with young people and families at risk, e.g. Troubled Families programme, Family Support, Youth Support and Youth Offending Services.

#### 3. Integrated response ('hub' or 'virtual hub') and gateway to commissioned accommodation and support

Led by the Housing Authority and Children's Services, an integrated service for young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or need help with planned transitions to independence. Housing options and homelessness prevention services come together, often co-located, with other services including support for pathways into learning and work. Underpinned by assessment and including a needs driven gateway into commissioned supported accommodation and flexible housing related support services. Key data collection point to inform ongoing development of the pathway.

#### 4. Commissioned accommodation and support

A range of accommodation and support options designed for younger and more vulnerable young people. Accommodation and support is linked together in some options, for example supported accommodation, Foyers, supported lodgings and Housing First. Flexible outreach support is also available to support young people wherever they live (including in the family home) and stick with them when they move if needed.

#### 5. Range of housing options

A range of safe, decent, affordable housing options, shared and self-contained, in the private, social and third sectors. May include creative approaches such as partnerships with learning providers and employers to provide dedicated accommodation that underpins participation in learning and work. Access to flexible outreach support (4) in case young people need it.

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# Eviction and foreclosure prevention

Available research reveals high rates of eviction in many countries in the Global North, with American survey data indicating that eviction may occur in up to 1 in 14 renter households (Desmond and Schollenberger, 2015). Isaacs (2012) estimates that 2.3 million children and their families in the United States lost their homes due to foreclosure between 2007 and 2012, and an additional 6 million children were residing in homes at risk of foreclosure. Many European countries also report high rates of evictions and foreclosure (Fitzpatrick et al, 2012; Stenberg et al, 2011), and an estimated 100,000 “bailiff assisted” evictions occur in Australia each year (Beer et al, 2006). Eviction and foreclosure trends may vary over time, in response to changes in a range of economic, welfare, and regulatory factors (Statistics Wales 2016).

While many people who experience an eviction do not become homeless, research demonstrates a high correlation between eviction and homelessness (Holl, van den Dries, and Wolf, 2016). People are more likely to become homeless when individual vulnerabilities occur alongside tight rental markets, neighbourhood change, systemic inequity (e.g., racism), low social assistance rates, and competitive job markets (Desmond, 2016; Desmond and Gershenson, 2017).

Both eviction and foreclosure are pathways into homelessness and housing precarity for young people and their families, often driven by a complex array of factors (Poppe and Gale, 2018). Scholars have argued that children are often the “invisible victims” of foreclosures and evictions (Isaacs, 2012), with consequent housing instability linked to health challenges (Curtis et al, 2010), fractured social networks (Manzo et al, 2008), and poor academic outcomes (Mueller and Tighe, 2007; Rumberger, 2003). Eviction can also contribute to inadequate parental attention (Luginaah et al, 2010), parenting stress (Desmond and Kimbro, 2015), and family breakup (Libman et al, 2012). Unsurprisingly, prior evictions are relatively common among youth that are homeless (Zivanovix et al, 2016).

Eviction prevention efforts are critical to ensuring youths’ housing stability and wellbeing. Research indicates we can categorise them into 6 main categories:

- Policy & legislative eviction and foreclosure prevention;
- Eviction and foreclosure prevention for housing providers;
- Eviction and foreclosure prevention for private market landlords;
- Eviction and foreclosure prevention for service providers;
- Interventions and supports for tenants facing eviction or foreclosure; and
- Court-based eviction and foreclosure prevention.

## Defining eviction and foreclosure prevention

Eviction, generally understood as “landlord-initiated forced moves from rental property” (Desmond and Kimbro, 2015, p. 4), occurs both formally (e.g., through the court system) and informally (e.g., landlord request to leave the housing unit), with research demonstrating that landlords also use a range of illegal tactics to force tenants out (Brescia, 2008). Similarly, foreclosure involves the re-possession of a mortgage property by a lender when the owner fails to remit mortgage payments (Mian, Sufi, and Trebbi, 2015, p. 2587).

Eviction and foreclosure prevention generally refers to any programme, policy, intervention, or strategy aimed at keeping individuals and families in their home with tenure, thereby avoiding eviction or foreclosure and reducing the risk of entry into homelessness (see Gaetz and Dej, 2016; Poppe and Gale, 2018). As such, eviction and foreclosure prevention can be understood as both a form of *early intervention* and *housing stabilisation* within the typology of homelessness prevention (Gaetz and Dej, 2017).

## Evidence for eviction and foreclosure prevention

The evidence base demonstrating the efficacy of eviction and foreclosure prevention efforts is relatively small, with a 2012 systematic review of the literature identifying only 7 relevant articles (Holl, van den Dries, and Wolf, 2016). No youth-specific interventions to prevent eviction or foreclosure were identified in a review of scholarly literature. Though youth aged 18 to 24 are commonly included in studies on eviction prevention, outcomes for youth are rarely disaggregated from adults. Studies on preventing the eviction and foreclosure of families also commonly include children and youth, but few provide insight into children and youths’ unique experiences of these interventions.

A review of the literature revealed evidence supporting 4 strategies for preventing eviction and foreclosure that have direct and indirect implications for youth: (a) **financial supports for tenants**, (b) **legal support, advice, and representation**, (c) **screening and referral of at-risk households**, and (d) **comprehensive financial, housing, health, mediation, and case management supports**. Given that there is no peer-reviewed research on youth-targeted interventions, caution should be used when extrapolating these findings to youth populations. Nonetheless, the inclusion of older youth (age 18 to 24) and families in available studies suggest that these interventions have promise for young people.

## a) Financial support for tenants

Available evidence demonstrates the particular efficacy of financial supports (e.g., rental assistance, rent supplements, housing subsidies, emergency housing funds, housing vouchers) in preventing individuals and families from entering homelessness. Studies in North America, where these supports are less consistently available than they are in the UK, indicate high rates of efficacy even when financial support is minimal:

- Evans, Sullivan and Wallskog's (2016) study of an emergency cash assistance programme in Chicago found that those who received a one-time benefit of \$1000 were 76% less likely to experience homelessness within six months than those who did not.
- Among persons living with HIV/AIDS, a shallow rent subsidy of \$200-\$400 a month was found to decrease homelessness and enable recipients to maintain independent housing (Dasinger and Speiglmann, 2007).

Even among studies that controlled for risk factors (e.g., family conflict, history of poverty, domestic violence), cash assistance for rental and mortgage arrears was found to reduce family homelessness from 20% to between 2 and 5% when compared to families who received no assistance (Burt et al, 1999).

Some limited evidence also supports the effectiveness of debt advice on rental arrears. Evans and McAteer (2011) demonstrate that social housing tenants who received debt advice had a 37% decrease in rental arrears within a year, while those who did not receive advice experienced a 14% increase in rental arrears. More broadly, research also suggests that financial supports for those at risk of eviction can improve health outcomes and reduce healthcare service usage, including for youth (Wolitski et al, 2010). However, early research into the impacts of welfare reform as it is rolled out in the UK, which includes a halt to direct rent payments to landlords, suggests this reform will increase the number of tenant households falling into arrears (Protheroe et al, 2017).

No studies were identified that compare the relative efficacy of different financial support models, how outcomes are linked to programme duration, or the specific efficacy of financial supports for young people facing eviction while living independently.

## b) Legal supports, advice, and representation

A strong evidence base exists for the role of legal support, advice, and representation in preventing eviction. Importantly, even very brief legal supports and representation are effective, with one New York intervention reporting a 98% efficacy of preventing eviction when tenants were provided with minimal attorney support during their court proceeding (Seedco, 2010, p.14). Legal representation has been shown to dramatically increase a tenant's likelihood of avoiding eviction (Gunn, 1995; Seron et al, 2001). For example, Seron

et al.'s (2001) randomised experiment found that tenants who received legal advice and supports were significantly less likely to receive an eviction warrant (24% compared to 44% in the control group), and full representation by an attorney in court significantly lowered eviction warrants for represented tenants (10% compared to 44% in the control group). Bright and Whitehouse (2014) note the effectiveness of representation for defendants in possession proceedings in England and Wales.

The majority of studies available do not report on the age of recipients of legal support, advice, or representation. However, given the unique importance of legal representation for children and youth in navigating the justice system (Khoury, 2010), these interventions have promise for youth and youth-led families, particularly if they are developmentally and individually tailored.

### c) Screening and referral of at-risk households

There are few evaluations of the efficacy of programmes that screen and refer individuals or families at risk of eviction or foreclosure to services and supports. Available studies suggest the need for implementing 'alarm systems' across public housing systems and networks of care in order to identify and refer households in need of housing assistance (Nettleton and Burrows, 1998; Crane and Warnes, 2000; Allen, 2006; Salize et al, 2006; Phinney et al, 2007). There is great variability with respect to how these alarm systems can be implemented. For example, Van Laere, de Wit and Klazinga's (2009) study of an Amsterdam housing association found that households, including youth-led households, which received house visits were associated with increased early identification of problems and a reduction in evictions. No studies were found that specifically report on approaches to screening and referral for youth-led households.

### d) Comprehensive financial, housing, health, mediation, and case management supports

A review of the grey literature indicates that many eviction prevention programmes combine a range of financial, housing, and case management supports, some of which provide services 24 hours per day, year-round. While these programmes vary significantly with respect to the populations served and the supports provided, several studies demonstrate the evidence for this approach for families (Goodman, Messeri, and O'Flaherty's, 2016; Hill et al, 2002; Rolston et al, 2013). Two studies are worthy of highlight:

- Goodman, Messeri, and O'Flaherty's (2016) analysis of *Homebase* – an American multi-method intervention for families facing evictions – found that the intervention reduced New York City shelter entries by an estimated 5% - 11% over a period of four years. Similarly, Rolston and colleagues' (2013) evaluation of Homebase's

*Community Prevention* (CP) programme found that families' shelter stays were reduced by 22.6 nights among those who received services.

- Hill and colleagues' (2002) Scottish study on comprehensive housing and supports for families evicted or at risk of eviction (*Family Project*) demonstrated the relative success of a comprehensive approach. The intervention provided housing units, group work, and outreach to families for up to 2 years. Of the 56 families included in the study, 33 reported achieving their major goals, and 6 of 10 families interviewed felt their housing situation had improved following intervention. Importantly, 75% of the children interviewed felt their housing had improved and some children reported decreases in family conflict, improved relationships, and increased feelings of stability. Families who received housing reported greater success in achieving their major goals than families that only received outreach support (83% compared to 56%), indicating the value of housing provision within a suite of services.

There is also some evidence demonstrating the importance of landlord mediation and liaising within a suite of comprehensive services for adults and families (Curcio, 1992; Ecker, Holden, and Schwan, 2018; Nelson and Sharp, 1995), but there has been limited analysis of the unique contributions mediation makes to eviction or foreclosure prevention when delivered amongst a suite of services and supports.

## Summary of evidence and gaps in knowledge

Across the eviction and foreclosure prevention literature, the strongest evidence exists for: (1) financial supports for tenants; (2) legal supports, advice, and representation; and (3) comprehensive financial, housing, health, mediation, and case management supports. While there is some limited evidence supporting screening and referral to prevent evictions, evidence suggests that the immediate provision of concrete resources (i.e., housing, financial support) is most effective at preventing evictions for individuals and families, including youth-led families and families with children and youth.

Despite some compelling findings in these areas, further research is sorely needed. As Holl and colleagues' (2016) systematic review demonstrates, the evidence for eviction prevention is both small and variable – interventions target diverse groups, have diverse purposes, and vary in duration. This makes it difficult to compare the relative efficacy of interventions. There is limited longitudinal data to determine long-term impacts and shed light on whether interventions *defer*, rather than *prevent*, eviction or foreclosure.

Most importantly, there is very limited knowledge on eviction and foreclosure prevention specifically for youth, making it difficult to determine: (1) what interventions are most effective

for youth, (2) what factors affect the efficacy of these interventions for youth, (3) how youth from diverse marginalised populations respond to different preventative interventions, and (4) the most effective mechanisms for engaging young people in eviction and foreclosure prevention. Gaps in knowledge suggest the need for research in several areas, including:

- Studies comparing outcomes associated with diverse approaches to eviction and foreclosure prevention for youth, ideally through the use of RCTs;
- Effective and efficient financial supports to prevent eviction among youth and families. A Swedish study indicating that 80% of Swedish evictees owed less than €2000 (Eriksson et al, 2010), and a Toronto-based Canadian study indicating average rental arrears to be \$4,065 (CA) (Ecker et al, 2018), suggest that research should explore the relative efficacy and cost-effectiveness of shallow rent subsidies for youth and their families;
- How eviction and foreclosure prevention efforts can best stabilise youth in education, employment, and/or training, given the demonstrated negative consequences that housing instability and frequent moving has on attaining education and employment (Mueller and Tighe, 2007; Rumberger, 2003; Schwartz et al, 2007);
- How to effectively screen for young people at risk of eviction or foreclosure within public systems (e.g., education, primary healthcare) and social services (e.g., drop-in programmes), in order to connect these young people with necessary supports; and
- How eviction and foreclosure prevention can best support younger youth (ages 13 to 17) in ways that are developmentally appropriate.

# Housing stabilisation

Youth homelessness prevention does not just aim to prevent homelessness for youth who are at risk of homelessness; it seeks to prevent homelessness for youth that have already experienced housing precarity and homelessness. Housing stabilisation refers to strategies and interventions that ensure young people exit homelessness as quickly as possible, and that they do not become homeless again (Gaetz & Dej, 2017, p. 78). Housing stabilisation is a form of tertiary prevention, and Housing First is a strong evidence-based example of housing stabilisation.

Young people with street involvement encounter profound challenges in establishing and stabilising their housing and living conditions, in part because of their developmental age and stage in the life course (Gaetz et al, 2013; Kidd et al, 2016). Many of these youth face the responsibilities of independence *before* they have accumulated the necessary skills, experiences, and psychosocial resources to undertake this transition (Crane et al, 2014; Hagan and McCarthy, 2005). Youth experiencing homelessness often lack the resources and social supports needed to build the skills necessary for independent living (Milburn et al, 2009; Mayock, Corr, and O'Sullivan, 2011; Tevendale, Comulada, and Lightfoot, 2011). With this in mind, housing stabilisation interventions are critical to transitioning youth off the streets and preventing re-entry into homelessness.

While there is not a large body of research on the housing trajectories of youth who have transitioned out of homelessness, the results are compelling. Research suggests that housing stabilisation can be achieved and sustained through the provision of housing and income supports, accompanied by interventions that build youths' skills, assets, resources, and health towards a sustained exit from homelessness. Evidence also indicates that prolonged experiences of homelessness undermines housing stability and wellness *even if* young people exit homelessness, as many will continue to grapple with trauma, mental health challenges, addictions and extreme poverty. Transitioning into housing from homelessness, therefore, will not necessarily translate into improved wellbeing for youth, nor is it a strong predictor of healthy living, labour force participation, or social inclusion (Kidd et al, 2016).

These insights indicate that while safe, affordable, and accessible housing is key to stabilising housing for young people, additional factors such as employment and income supports, supports for mental health and substance use, and building relational and social support networks also matter and contribute to positive youth development, stability, and a meaningful life (Gaetz and Dej, 2017).

## Defining housing stability

Housing stabilisation efforts, at their core, seek to ensure young people have access to permanent, stable housing. Scholars have generally defined housing stability along a continuum. At one end is an absolute lack of customary access to reasonable housing (often framed as “couch surfing,” emergency shelter stay, or “living rough”), and at the other end of the continuum is access to safe, permanent, affordable housing in the absence of any risks or threats to stability (Crane et al, 2014). Some authors have argued that when we define housing stability, we should include variables such as security, housing quality, and good relations with landlords (Crane et al, 2014), and should consider factors such as financial status and legal status (Frederick et al, 2014).

## Evidence for housing stabilisation interventions and approaches

There are two categories of housing stabilisation interventions: **short-term/immediate services** (including emergency shelter or drop-in services) and **longer-term interventions** that provide housing and case management supports. Formal evaluations of the effectiveness of short-term/immediate services for youth experiencing homelessness are limited (Slesnick et al, 2009), and their efficacy is unclear (Kidd et al, 2016). Additionally, most studies focus on adults, and it is unknown whether these interventions are developmentally appropriate or effective for young people (Altena, Brilleslijper-Kater, and Wolf, 2010; Kozloff et al, 2016; Slesnick et al, 2009).

Available evidence on housing stabilisation for youth can be organised into five key areas which Gaetz and Dej (2017) argue should be part of any broad housing stability strategy: **housing supports; health, mental health, and substance use supports; income, education, and employment supports; complementary supports; and social inclusion** (Gaetz, 2017, p. 79; Gaetz, 2014)

### a) Housing supports to stabilise housing

Housing supports to stabilise housing include assistance with securing and retaining housing, rent supplements, eviction prevention, and immediate and longer-term maintenance support (Gaetz and Dej, 2017). The most significant success factor in housing stabilisation interventions – and the first step of support – is access to safe, affordable, appropriate housing (Kidd et al, 2014). A lack of housing options promotes young people’s cycling through contact with systems such as shelter, justice, and substance use treatment (Vitopoulos et al, 2017).

An enormous evidence base exists for the efficacy of **Housing First** for stabilising housing for adults experiencing homelessness, making it a truly ‘best practice’ (Gaetz and DeJ, p. 78; Goering and Streiner, 2015). However, research indicates that the **Pathways Model** of Housing First is not nearly as effective for youth under the age of 25 (Kozloff et al, 2016). In response, Housing First is being adapted and tailored as an intervention for young people who are homeless (Cheng et al, 2013; Gaetz, 2017; Goering and Streiner, 2015; Holtschneider, 2016; Kozloff et al, 2016; Tsemberis and Eisenberg, 2000). The **Housing First for Youth model** (HF4Y), developed by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (Gaetz, 2014, 2017), is the most clearly articulated version of the programme model, and is framed by the following core principles: (1) a right to housing with no preconditions; (2) youth choice, youth voice, and self-determination; (3) positive youth development and wellness orientation; (4) individualised, client-driven supports with no time limits; and (5) social inclusion and community integration (Gaetz, 2017). This model has been adapted in several European countries, including Scotland, Ireland, and Belgium. The Making the Shift Demonstration Project (Canada) is currently testing the Housing First for Youth model in three Canadian cities, and is collaborating with European researchers to create a standardised assessment framework for HF4Y.

There is also some evidence to support the efficacy of **The Foyer** model in stabilising housing for youth. The Foyer model is a transitional housing and supports intervention that aims to bolster young people’s transitions to independence by assisting with their housing stabilisation and income/financial resources (Gaetz and Scott, 2012). This review yielded few studies reporting on Foyer programme evaluations, thus much remains to be tested. One study from the USA identified positive impacts of the Foyer model on young people in need of housing and supports (Culhane, Metraux, and Hadley, 2002), however, they did not analyse outcomes for young people specifically. In one study focused on young people ages 18-25 years (Raithel et al, 2015), programme participants had fewer stays in shelter and jail in the two years following programme entry.

During our consultation with international homelessness experts, a resounding theme across housing discussions was the barriers that exist in asserting time limits on housing. Experts also raised the need to ensure youth have choice and voice in addressing their housing needs.

## **b) Health and well-being supports to stabilise housing**

Central to ensuring effective housing stabilisation is the provision of supports for health and wellbeing, including supports for primary health care, mental health, quality of life, and general well-being. Harm reduction and substance use supports as part of housing stabilisation interventions have been found to stabilise housing (Kreindler and Coodin, 2010) and improve mental health, including for LGBTQ+ identifying young people (Powell et al, 2016). Canadian studies by Sean Kidd and colleagues (Kidd et al, 2016; Vitopoulos et al,

2017) also demonstrate the importance of a trauma-informed approach to working with young people within housing stabilisation programmes.

Some studies have shown that even a year post-homelessness, many young people still have poor mental health and quality of life - putting at them risk for re-entry into homelessness (Kidd et al, 2016). Such findings demonstrate the need for ongoing health and well-being supports once young people are stably housed, enabling youth to quickly access supports when things go wrong.

### **c) Income supports, educational engagement, and access to employment to stabilise housing**

Income supports, as well as education and employment, including courses, workshops, training, and skill-building opportunities, are key for young people to maintain their housing stability (Gaetz, 2014). The availability of income supports and housing subsidies appear to have some of the most significant impacts on housing stabilisation for youth, in addition to access to employment (particularly minimum wage) and employment training and support (Frederick et al, 2014; Kidd et al, 2014; Rog and Buckner, 2007). Research finds that income stability, and access to minimum wage employment, precedes and powerfully predicts stable housing.

Research also indicates reconnection to education is an important goal for many youth, but it is greatly impacted by housing stability (Day and Paul, 2007). In a longitudinal study on residential stability, Roy and colleagues (2016) found that youth who had sought psychological support, had earned a high school diploma, and were working during a one-year follow-up time point, were up to 50% more likely to achieve housing stability compared to other youth. There is also some evidence supporting the efficacy of Critical Time Interventions in improving educational engagement for children and youth experiencing family homelessness (Shinn et al, 2015).

### **d) Complementary supports to stabilise housing**

Complementary supports are “designed to facilitate housing stability among those who have accessed housing with the goal to help individuals and families improve their quality of life, integrate into the community, and potentially achieve self-sufficiency” (Gaetz and Dej, 2017, p. 82). Precarious conditions that contribute to housing instability, including nutritional vulnerability, social isolation, and school disconnection, are created when young people are re-housed without adequate supports in place (Gaetz et al, 2013).

For youth, key complementary supports include life skills, financial management supports (Day and Paul, 2007), and system navigation supports. Research demonstrates the importance of coordinated supports for youth, including for youth in rural areas where services may be difficult to access and under-resourced (Farrin, Dollard, and Cheers, 2005;

Skott-Myhre, Raby, and Nikolaou, 2008). Further, it is important that young people are able to reconnect with services they previously exited without facing consequences (Vitopoulos et al, 2017). This may be critical given evidence that a young person's sense of personal control in service delivery directly impacts housing stability (Slesnick et al, 2017).

## e) Social inclusion supports to stabilise housing

Social inclusion supports foster meaningful activities and social relationships with friends and caregivers for youth, as well as cultural infusion and community connection (Gaetz and Dej, 2017). A majority of young people who are homeless have isolated, limited, and fraught relations with friends, peers, and family members or carers (Crane et al, 2014).

Limited evidence exists on effective strategies for increasing social inclusion amongst youth within housing stabilisation programmes, possibly because longitudinal data examining these life areas is rare. Evidence from the voices of young people themselves (Slesnick et al, 2017; Schwan et al, 2018; Thistle, 2017), as well as longitudinal studies on housing stability (Kidd et al., 2016) indicate that connection to others, reconnection with family, and access to a range of supports sustainably increases housing stabilisation outcomes. Gains in community integration and quality of life can take time for young people to discover and establish. One follow-up study (Kidd et al, 2016) found that after a year of being housed, young people did not experience gains in community integration and quality of life. Such findings demonstrate the need for longer-term social inclusion supports for youth.

# Summary of evidence and gaps in knowledge

Available literature on housing stabilisation approaches and interventions for young people demonstrates:

- Housing stabilisation is improved for youth with increased access to housing subsidies and monetary supports, as well as skill building in financial management;
- The strength of the evidence supporting Housing First suggests this model holds promise for youth experiencing homelessness, and emerging research on the efficacy of Housing First for Youth programmes (e.g., Gaetz, 2017) should be followed closely;
- A spectrum of housing options should be offered in order to best meet the needs of diverse young people;

- Programmes should be tailored to meet the developmental needs of young people, and should incorporate a person-centred, trauma-informed, strengths-based lens that considers positive youth development in context. The core principles of Housing First for Youth align with this approach;
- Populations experiencing greater levels of precarity and disadvantage should be a priority and strategic focus in the development of evidence-based housing stabilisation programmes;
- Support services should be available to meet the diverse needs of young people, and should be tailored per the expressed needs of each youth (Kidd et al, 2014);
- The length and intensity of services should also be determined by the young person (Crane et al, 2014), with evidence indicating that supports should be sustained and/or accessible for a considerable period of time after youth access housing; and
- Trusted, respectful, and therapeutic relationships between young people and the professionals supporting their transition out of homelessness are critical to achieving housing stability (Kidd et al, 2014).

# Youths' perspectives on youth homelessness prevention

The first and most obvious step in thinking about youth homelessness prevention ought to be to ask young people for their insights. Unfortunately, this kind of engagement is often overlooked when considering renewed policy or a shift in direction for programmes. While this evidence review identified very little research on youths' understandings and insights into homelessness prevention, one large consultation with 114 Canadian youth on homelessness prevention (Schwan et al, 2018) revealed some important prevention priorities for youth.

## Youths' structural prevention recommendations

- Increase social assistance rates and create accessible pathways to quickly obtain social assistance, identity documents, and rent subsidies for youth and their families
- Build and expand affordable housing for youth and their families, offering a range of housing models to meet the needs of diverse youth
- Do not predicate access to youth housing on mandatory attendance in programmes, school, or employment, and reduce the acuity criteria required to access youth housing
- Make services, supports, benefits, and entitlements in all systems easier to access for youth with disabilities

## Youths' systems prevention recommendations

- Improve coordination and collaboration across services and systems to reduce barriers to accessing supports and services for youth and their families
- Ensure all professionals are trained in anti-oppression, LGBTQ allyship, empathy, trauma-informed care, and cultural competency
- Implement school-based mechanisms to screen for, and provide immediate supports to, youth experiencing abuse, neglect, mental health challenges, addictions, and homelessness
- Ensure there are robust, youth-centred after care plans for youth transitioning out of hospitals, rehabilitation centres, detox centres, and recovery houses

## Youths' recommendations for preventing the individual and relational causes of homelessness

- Provide free family counselling and mediation, including for foster families

- Provide access to free courses, programmes, or support groups on parenting and life skills, enabling parents who are struggling with poverty, addiction, and/or mental health issues to access help without fear of criminalisation or having their children removed
- Increase the availability of non-judgmental spaces in which young people can talk about experiences of abuse and develop self-esteem, self-worth, and self-respect

Youths' insights magnify the key areas of focus that need to be emphasised within youth homelessness prevention. In designing prevention policy and practice, we must pay close attention to the contributions youth can make to change. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) acknowledges the right of a child or youth to express their views, be heard, and have their views given due weight. This promotes respect for children as active participants in their own lives. The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure (2011) requires the Welsh Government to have regard to the UNCRC in its policymaking and practice, and gave rise to the publication of the Children's Rights Scheme, which provides a basis for youth-focused policy making. Consequently, any youth homelessness prevention strategy should employ the following principles for youth engagement:

- Involving youth in public policy on a regular and ongoing basis
- Engaging youth in all elements of research, policy, and programme development
- Providing all youth the opportunity to share their experiences and opinions
- Seeking opportunities for youth to influence decision making

# Summary of findings

Despite decades of efforts, youth homelessness continues to rise in many countries in the Global North (Yaouancq et al, 2013). This international evidence review demonstrates the need for a more proactive approach to youth homelessness. In order to be maximally effective, youth homelessness prevention should involve all five strands of prevention: structural prevention, system prevention, early intervention, eviction prevention, and housing stabilisation (Gaetz & DeJ, 2017). In making the shift to prevention in Wales, policy and practice responses should be guided by the following key findings from this evidence review:

## Structural prevention

- Interventions that focus on reducing poverty, increasing income, and reducing conflict amongst families in poverty are effective at reducing many of the factors that put youth at risk of homelessness.
- Increasing the availability of affordable housing stock demonstrably contributes to reductions in homelessness amongst, children, youth, and families.

## Systems prevention

- Youth homelessness can be effectively reduced through interventions that improve housing stability for youth transitioning from public systems. Effective interventions and approaches include: youth-led discharge planning that initiates early; family mediation and reunification prior, during, and after exits from public systems; financial and housing supports following exits from care or prison; trauma-informed case management; incarceration diversion programmes; and improved access to mental health and addiction services for youth and their families/carers.
- As a fusion policy issue that crosses multiple systems and sectors, youth homelessness prevention should be supported by an integrated, cross-system approach focused on dismantling the system failures that contribute to youth homelessness. Coordinated entry and information sharing across and between organisations and government support these efforts.

## Early intervention

- School-based prevention interventions are particularly effective at preventing youth homelessness, especially when youth-centred, family-focused, and grounded in community-based partnerships across social services, healthcare, and education. Screening techniques for the early identification of housing precarity and other issues are important components of this work. Promising evidence exists for the COSS model used by the Geelong Project (Australia).

- Respite housing (e.g., Host Homes), combined with family mediation and reunification supports, is highly effective at shelter diversion and shows considerable promise for youth homelessness prevention.

## Eviction prevention

- There is robust evidence demonstrating the short-term efficacy of eviction prevention interventions, specifically financial assistance (e.g., rent subsidies) and legal representation. These interventions are effective even when minimal supports are provided. Research is needed to assess how eviction prevention interventions can best meet the needs of youth.

## Housing stabilisation

- Youth-focused housing models, including Housing First for Youth and the Foyer, show considerable promise for preventing youth homelessness and ensuring youth do not return to homelessness. In order to implement these housing models, many communities need to increase the availability of affordable, youth-specific housing. Emerging research in this area will help assess the efficacy of these models for different youth populations.
- Strengthening family, natural supports, and community connections for youth is a critical component of effective housing stabilisation efforts. Interventions that include family mediation, family counselling, and family reunification report stronger outcomes for youths' housing stability and wellness.
- Effective preventative responses to youth homelessness must not focus exclusively on housing stability, but should also address youths' wellbeing, social inclusion, connection with community and culture, and engagement with education, employment, and training.

More broadly, research indicates that youth homelessness prevention requires targeted interventions and approaches that account for the distinct challenges that young people face. All prevention interventions should be developmentally and individually tailored, while ensuring respect for children and youths' right to self-determination. Further research is needed in many areas of youth homelessness prevention, particularly research that is comparative, longitudinal, employs Randomised Controlled Trials, and assesses outcomes beyond single programme effects.

In implementing youth homelessness prevention, the Welsh Government should seek to adopt interventions with demonstrated effectiveness. However, there are challenges to determining whether, how, and why youth homelessness prevention efforts are effective. First, it is difficult to assess whether interventions are effectively preventing homelessness long term, or merely mitigating or deferring it (Culhane et al, 2011). Second, it is difficult to

ensure that services and resources are targeted towards those most likely to become homeless (Burt, 2007; Culhane et al, 2011; Poppe and Gales, 2018). Third, when prevention interventions provide multiple services, it is difficult to assess the relative contribution of each service to preventative outcomes. Fourth, the evidence base supporting youth homelessness prevention is variable – while there is strong evidence and promising practices in some areas, many are under-researched.

Facing these methodological challenges, we must return to what we do know from decades of research: the current emergency-focused response to youth homelessness is failing young people. Studies from around the world show that we are missing critical opportunities to intervene early, and we often fail to transition youth out of homelessness quickly. In countries across the Global North, our public systems are contributing to youth homelessness and trapping young people on the streets. Even after exiting homelessness, young people suffer tremendously for years from the damage caused by the experience.

The Welsh Government has the opportunity, with the evidence presented, to make an unprecedented policy shift towards youth homelessness prevention. An investment and course-correction on youth homelessness will create the foundation necessary to fill the knowledge, programmatic, and systems gaps nationally. Introducing bold policy will also validate the work happening in communities, giving permission to communities wanting to innovate, and leading to the one-government approach required to respond to the complexity of this issue.

# Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended as a guide to government policy and investment in the pursuit of preventing youth homelessness. They derive directly from the evidence base and expert insight captured in the process of developing this report. Some of the recommendations reflect Welsh Government action or movement that may already be in place; for those, the recommendations should serve as validation of the good work underway. Further, while the Welsh Government may not have full autonomy to lead action in all of these areas, our recommendations below reflect what is ideally required for a comprehensive approach to youth homelessness prevention.

Further, in implementing these recommendations, government should prioritise and lead formal and informal engagement of young people with lived experience of homelessness in the development of relevant policies, practices, and legislation. Youth play an important role in advocating for their priorities and interests, and should be supported to actualise their fundamental right to be engaged in decisions that affect them.

## Cross-government action

- Adopt a cross-government commitment to preventing youth homelessness, with a focus on supporting front-line services to implement evidence-based interventions and policies that are youth-informed and evidence-based.
- Develop and implement a national strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness, the cornerstone of which is a commitment to youth homelessness prevention embedded across all relevant government departments and tiers. This strategy should be supported by a dedicated budget line investment and a senior political sponsor. It should meaningfully engage youth experiencing homelessness during its creation.
- Elements of a national strategy should include:
  - A cross-government definition of youth homelessness and youth homelessness prevention;
  - Ambitious targets to prevent and end youth homelessness, supported by tools to measure progress;
  - Governance through a cross-government committee, made up of senior civil servants, that is responsible for developing a coordinated systems approach to youth homelessness prevention. The committee should use a client-centred approach to guide alignment efforts across government;
  - Amendment of existing policies and practices across government to ensure that the intervention of public systems does not create or foster housing precarity for young people or their families;

- A flexible and sustainable funding model that can advance programme interventions that respond well before a young person experiences homelessness, and ensure youth exit from homelessness as rapidly as possible;
- Develop a national research agenda on youth homelessness in order to advance a cross-systems focus on youth homelessness prevention, organised according to the prevention typology identified by Gaetz & DeJ (2017).
- Develop a cross-systems assessment and screening tool to identify, assess, and respond to the needs of youth at risk of homelessness. The goal of this tool should be the early identification of homelessness risk amongst youth and their families, thus providing the opportunity to intervene before youth become homeless.
  - This tool could be adopted in various public system contexts (e.g., primary healthcare, schools), accompanied by mechanisms to ensure that identified youth are immediately connected to appropriate services and supports.
- To assess progress towards the prevention of youth homelessness, develop an evaluation framework for front-line services to assess their progress towards youth homelessness prevention.
- Work across public services to dramatically increase the public's awareness of available services, supports, benefits, and entitlements for children, youth, and families at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness.
  - Support the professionals that work with children and youth (e.g., teachers, doctors) to actively educate young people on available supports and services, as well as their rights and entitlements.

## Health and social care

- Implement 'zero discharge into homelessness' policies within health and social services contexts serving youth, recognising that public system discharge is a key contributor to youth homelessness. As part of this work, all young people leaving healthcare or social service institutions should be engaged early and often in planning processes that address their housing stability and necessary wrap-around supports. These policies should be accompanied by sufficient investment to ensure the provision of financial supports to youth post-discharge, if needed.
- Champion and implement youth-friendly models of harm reduction within care placements (e.g., foster care, group homes) and post-care (e.g., post-care transitional housing) that focus on reducing risk or harmful effects associated with substance use and other behaviours.
- Create after care provision that commits to the provision of ongoing support (as needed) to youth in care until the age of 25, provided through existing youth-serving providers. Any care guarantee should be evaluated annually to assess its efficacy at improving housing stability for youth post-care. It should also:

- Provide highly accessible systems navigation supports upon entry into care until the age of 25, provided by an After Care Worker.
- Ensure discharge planning processes which engage youth early and often, and centre on providing youth with a range of housing options post-care, including family reunification. Planning should explicitly address employment, education, health and mental health, life skills, and social inclusion, and connection with family, friends, and community post-care.
- Offer a guarantee to housing that is safe, appropriate, and affordable for all young people leaving care, up to the age of 25, guided by the principles of youth choice, youth voice, and youths' right to self-determination.
- Provide financial supports (e.g., rent subsidies, social assistance) that are highly accessible and sufficient for youth to meet their basic needs.

Stirling (2018) outlines the relevant recommendations for actions to be taken in Wales.

## Education

- Support councils and schools to implement school-community partnerships aimed at delivering interventions capable of preventing youth homelessness. The foundation of these interventions should be partnerships between schools, healthcare, mental health supports, and community-based social services, with a focus on:
  - The early identification of housing precarity and other issues for young people through effective screening mechanisms, which could build on good examples from the Geelong Project or Youth Assessment and Prioritization Tool examples highlighted in this evidence review;
  - Preventing early school leaving due to housing precarity or other issues;
  - Family mediation, counselling, outreach, and reunification (if appropriate); and
  - Highly accessible, low-barrier, trauma-informed supports and services for young people at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness.
- Provide integrated planning and supports to the Ministry of Housing and Regeneration, in conjunction with the suggested low-income housing voucher/rent subsidy programmes, in order to increase accessibility to well-performing schools for youth in poverty or experiencing housing precarity.

## Criminal justice

- Ensure youth being discharged from the criminal justice system are engaged in planning processes early and often, providing youth with a range of housing options following incarceration. Planning should explicitly address employment, education, health and mental health, life skills, and social inclusion and connection with family, friends, and community post-care. A starting point for understanding these pathways could build on the evidence presented in the supplementary report (Stirling, 2018).

- Family and community reconnection or reunification efforts, where possible, desired, and appropriate, should be imbedded within a suite of options for youth transitioning from justice systems.
- Review existing youth justice policies to determine how these policies, in writing or in practice, contribute to housing precarity or homelessness for young people.
  - Amendments, if required, should provide youth with alternatives to incarceration, remove minimum sentencing policies and zero tolerance policies for youth, and provide mechanisms through which the courts can take into consideration childhood experiences of trauma, violence and neglect during sentencing.
  - In Wales, engage the Wales Youth Justice Advisory Panel within the review to ensure youth voice and experiences are reflected in the policy changes/improvements.
- Provide youth-centred education and advocacy on legal and human rights, coupled with tools and pathways to access legal supports when their rights are violated.

## Welfare

- Increase and simplify income assistance for youth-led and low-income families, including through improved maternity allowances, child care subsidies, and subsidies for families with children who have disabilities and/or mental health challenges.
- Conduct a review of income assistance for youth-led and low-income families, including maternity allowances, child care subsidies, and subsidies for families with children who have disabilities and/or mental health challenges to determine if financial support provided by government is sufficient to prevent youth homelessness.

## Housing

- Strengthen current homelessness legislation to focus on preventing youth homelessness, as well as activities focused on youth discharges from public systems (e.g., health, child welfare, justice). To achieve this, government could:
  - Embed existing government homelessness duties within justice and child protection legislation to enforce upstream interventions;
  - Provide investments to support the implementation of youth-focused, evidence-based models of housing, such as Housing First for Youth, Host Homes, and the Foyer. These models should be grounded in principles of youth choice, youth voice, and self-determination;
    - Front-line services should be required to report on how implementation of these models addresses the needs of youth experiencing multiple challenges and disadvantages.

- Ensure 'duty to assist' legislation appropriately and effectively responds to the needs and rights of young people, guaranteeing children and youth receive the same protection as adults.
- Pay particular attention to the need for increased stock dedicated to families and youth who are poor, experiencing housing precarity, or experiencing homelessness.
  - Consider expanding youth-focused affordable housing by developing a youth housing association to guide these efforts, similar to the Finnish Youth Housing Association.
  - Youth-focused housing investments should be built on the principles of youth choice, youth voice, and self-determination, and should be developmentally appropriate and reflect youths' unique needs.
- Invest in the development and expansion of low-income housing voucher and rent subsidy programmes for families and individuals experiencing housing precarity and other challenges (e.g., health difficulties, disability), implemented with comprehensive housing, mediation, health, and case management supports.
  - This programme should be highly accessible, immediately responsive to need (i.e., 7 days/week, 365 days/year), and balance housing selection in high-opportunity neighborhoods, which provide safer housing choices, well-performing schools, access to transit, etc.
- Embed a focus on prevention within the existing youth homelessness. As part of these efforts, existing agencies and organisations serving youth who are homeless should be supported to implement evidence-based prevention interventions for youth, including family mediation and reunification, systems navigation, rapid exits from homelessness, and supports that enable youth to remain in their communities and school.

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# Glossary

**Critical Time Interventions - Critical Time Intervention (CTI)** is an “empirically supported, time-limited case management model designed to prevent homelessness in people with mental illness following discharge from hospitals, shelters, prisons and other institutions. This transitional period is one in which people often have difficulty re-establishing themselves in stable housing with access to needed supports. 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” (Centre for the Advancement of Critical Time Intervention, 2009, p.1).

**“Crossover Youth”** - The term “crossover youth” is used to refer to youth who have involvement with both the child welfare system and the youth justice system. Research demonstrates that youth in in the child welfare system often have negative interactions with the criminal justice system, and face unique challenges in navigating the legal and justice systems.

**Early Intervention** - Early intervention approaches to youth homelessness seek to identify and address the challenges that young people and their families face *before* they experience homelessness, thereby reducing entries into homelessness. These interventions identify and address “the physical, emotional, material, interpersonal, social, and educational needs of young people who are at imminent risk of, or who have just become, homeless” (Gaetz, 2014, p. 482). Key examples of early intervention programmes include The Geelong Project (Australia), Host Homes (e.g., Nightstop, UK), and shelter diversion (e.g., The RAFT, Canada).

**Ecologically-Based Family Therapy** – Ecologically-based family therapy (EBFT) is based upon the Homebuilders family preservation model. EBFT is “structured to provide immediate, intensive services over a brief time period. In most cases, the crisis is precipitated by the threat of removal of a child by Child Protective Services, a child’s running away, or a child’s ejection from the family” (Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2007, p. 278). Within the EBFT approach, “families are seen by a single counselor and services include a wide range of behavioral, cognitive, and environmental interventions, depending on the family’s needs. The programme does not require all family members to be present or involved, and both family and individual sessions are used” (Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2007, p. 278).

**Eviction and Foreclosure Prevention** - Eviction and foreclosure prevention generally refers to any programme, policy, intervention, or strategy aimed at keeping individuals and families in their home with tenure, thereby avoiding eviction or foreclosure and reducing the risk of entry into homelessness (see Gaetz and Dej, 2016; Poppe and Gale, 2018). As such, eviction and foreclosure prevention can be understood as both a form of *early intervention*

and *housing stabilisation* within the typology of homelessness prevention (Gaetz and Dej, 2017).

**Homelessness Prevention** – Homelessness prevention refers to “policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness. It also means providing those who have been homeless with the necessary resources and supports to stabilise their housing, enhance integration and social inclusion, and ultimately reduce the risk of the recurrence of homelessness.” (Gaetz and Dej, 2017, p. 35)

**Host Homes** - Respite housing, commonly referred to as “**Host Homes**,” is a form of shelter diversion that provides short-term housing and supports for youth who have fled their home or been kicked out. The aim of the Host Homes model is to provide immediate supports and a safe place to stay within the community, diverting young people from entering the shelter system and enabling youth to stay connected to family and peers, while remaining in school (Gaetz and Dej, 2017). This model provides the opportunity for youth and their family to address underlying issues (separately and jointly), combined with a family reunification strategy, if appropriate and safe. While Host Home models differ, they often involve community members temporarily offering a room in their house to a young person at risk of homelessness, enabling the youth and their family to receive supports while next steps for housing are determined.

**Housing First** - ‘Housing First’ is a recovery-oriented approach to homelessness that focuses on quickly moving people experiencing homelessness into independent and permanent housing, providing ‘wrap around’ supports and services as needed. The underlying principle of Housing First is that people are better able to move forward with their lives if they are first housed, regardless of what challenges they face (e.g., addictions, mental health issues). Through Housing First programmes, housing is immediately provided, followed by supports to address physical and mental health, education, employment, substance use, and social isolation. Housing First is consistent with a human rights approach to housing. This model is heavily supported by evidence and can be considered a ‘best practice.’

**Housing Stabilisation** - Housing stabilisation refers to strategies and interventions that ensure young people transition out of homelessness as quickly as possible, and that they do not cycle back into homelessness again (Gaetz & Dej, 2017, p. 78). Housing stabilisation is a form of tertiary prevention, and Housing First is a strong evidence-based example of housing stabilisation. Housing stabilisation for youth can be organised into five key areas which Gaetz and Dej (2017) argue should be part of any broad housing stability strategy: housing supports; health, mental health, and substance use supports; income, education, and employment supports; complementary supports; and social inclusion (Gaetz, 2017, p. 79; Gaetz, 2014)

**Intergenerational Trauma** – Intergenerational trauma refers to the transmission of historical oppression and its consequences across generations, resulting in negative consequences such as homelessness. Intergenerational trauma results in systematic health, economic, and social disparities. The influence of intergenerational trauma on Indigenous homelessness is well documented in the [Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada](#) (Thistle, 2017).

**Pathways Model of Housing First** – The [Pathways Model of Housing First](#) was the first popularised model of Housing First, developed by Sam Tsemberis and Pathways to Housing in New York in the 1990s. This model introduced the principle of providing housing to people first, followed by supportive treatment services in order to address any challenges faced by the individual (e.g., substance use, mental health challenges). The model is heavily supported by evidence.

**Structural Prevention** – The structural prevention of homelessness involves dismantling the policies, legislation, practices, and systems that contribute to housing precarity for youth and their families, and replacing these with policies designed to increase economic security, housing stability, and social inclusion for all people. Because young people are often embedded in relationships of dependence with adults (Gaetz, 2014), structural prevention must also address the structural factors that contribute to housing precarity for adults as well. Key examples include efforts to increase the availability and affordability of housing, poverty reduction, and investing in universal healthcare.

**System Failures** – In the context of youth homelessness, systems failures refer to situations in which “inadequate policy and service delivery within and between systems contribute to the likelihood that someone will become homeless” (Schwan et al, 2018, p. 3; see Gaetz and Dej, 2017). This includes barriers to accessing public systems, failed transitions from publicly funded institutions and systems, and silos and gaps both within and between government funded departments and systems, as well as within non-profit sectors (Gaetz and Dej, 2017). In many cases these institutional and system failures combine in ways that compound disadvantages and risks of homelessness for individuals and families.

**Systems Prevention** - Systems prevention addresses the “institutional and systems failures that either indirectly or directly contribute to the risk of homelessness” (Gaetz and Dej, 2017, p. 44). Three key strategies for systems prevention include: “Fixing policy and procedural barriers to facilitate programme access and support; enhancing access to public systems, services, and appropriate supports; and Facilitating effective transitions from public institutions or systems” (Gaetz and Dej, 2017, p. 56-57). Key public systems that are targeted in systems prevention work include child welfare, education, healthcare and addictions, criminal justice, and immigration.

**Trauma-Informed Approach** – A **trauma-informed approach** to supporting youth experiencing homelessness involves working “at the client, staff, agency, and system levels from the core principles of: trauma awareness; safety; trustworthiness, choice, and collaboration; and building of strengths and skills.” At the practice level, this involves “discussing the connections between trauma, mental health, and substance use in the course of work with all clients; identify trauma symptoms or adaptations; and, offer support and strategies that increase safety and support connect to services” (BC Provincial Mental Health and Substance Use Planning Council, 2013).

**Treatment Foster Care model** – **Treatment Foster Care Treatment** “is out-of-home care by foster parents with specialised training to care for a wide variety of children and adolescents, usually those with significant emotional, behavioral, or social issues or medical needs. Treatment foster care is designed to provide safe and nurturing care to a child or youth in a more structured home environment than typical foster care, and it can be a cost-effective alternative to residential treatment. Foster parents typically receive additional supports and services” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2017).

**Youth Homelessness** - According to the **Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness**, “youth homelessness refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence. Youth homelessness is a complex social issue because as a society we have failed to provide young people and their families with the necessary and adequate supports that will enable them to move forward with their lives in a safe and planned way. In addition to experiencing economic deprivation and a lack of secure housing, many young people who are homeless lack the personal experience of living independently and at the same time may be in the throes of significant developmental (social, physical, emotional and cognitive) changes. As a result, they may not have the resources, resilience, education, social supports or life skills necessary to foster a safe and nurturing transition to adulthood and independence. Few young people choose to be homeless, nor wish to be defined by their homelessness, and the experience is generally negative and stressful. Youth homelessness is the denial of basic human rights and once identified as such, it must be remedied. All young people have the right to the essentials of life, including adequate housing, food, safety, education and justice” (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2014).

**Zero tolerance policies** within various social service and housing settings (e.g., youth shelters, transitional housing), zero tolerance policies refers to policies that prohibit youth from using substances in order to access supports of services. In many cases zero tolerance policies mean that young people will be barred from accessing supports, or removed from services or housing, if they are using substances. In a criminal justice / public order context, it refers to an approach to policing low-level offences which is rigorous and comparatively inflexible.

# Annex

## A – Interview guide

### Questions for Expert Scholars:

1. In your opinion, what are some of the most effective methods or practices in place that are preventing young people from becoming homeless in (community/region/country)?
  - Can you provide examples, context, and/or connections to these methods/practices?
  - Have you seen an evaluations or reports on these interventions?
2. Can you tell me about any innovations that you see happening in your community/region/state/ country that may be promising in preventing youth homelessness?
  - Who is leading these?
3. Has your community/state/country adopted any policy or legislation that you think is contributing to the prevention of youth homelessness?
  - What effects do you think these policies/legislation have had?
4. Where do you think there are gaps in knowledge about the prevention of youth homelessness?
5. Has provincial, state, or federal government policy been able to keep pace with the innovations at the community level around prevention?
6. What would you describe as the major barriers for organisations and governments when considering a move to a homelessness prevention-focused mandate?
7. How can we work to increase organisational and bureaucratic confidence in adopting prevention-focused activities?
8. With whom would you recommend I talk to who could provide more insight into youth homelessness prevention interventions and policies?

### Questions for Practitioners:

1. Can you tell me about your programme/intervention and how it is contributing to the prevention of youth homelessness?
  - How has this compared to other approaches your organisation/agency has used in the past?  
*(Probe for: programme model, length of intervention, partnership/coordination with other services, targeted population, staff allocated, staff positions, model's origin, effects and efficacy at preventing homelessness, etc.)*
2. Do you have any evaluations, research, or reports demonstrating the effects of your programme/intervention?
  - What have these shown?  
*(Probe for: internal or external evaluations, funding reports, annual reports, programme model documentation, high level data, data on youth served, etc.)*

3. Can you discuss some of the challenges involved in the homelessness prevention work you are doing?
  - What external factors (e.g., funding, policy, culture of the homelessness sector) make the work you do challenging?
4. What would you need to more effectively engage in your prevention work and scale it up further in your organisation/community/region/state/country?  
 (Probe for: government support, change in understanding of the issue, legislation/policy, funding, system coordination, etc.)
5. Where do you think there are gaps in knowledge about the prevention of youth homelessness?
6. With whom would you recommend I talk to who could provide more insight into youth homelessness prevention interventions and practices on the ground?

## B – Interviewees

Who	Organization	Location	Rationale for Engagement
<b>Darla Bardine, Executive Director</b>	National Network for Youth	Washington, District of Columbia, United States	<b>The National Network for Youth (NN4Y)</b> has been a public education and policy advocacy organization dedicated to the prevention and eradication of youth homelessness in America for over 40 years. As the largest and most diverse network of its kind, NN4Y mobilises over 300 members and affiliates –organizations that work on the front lines every day to provide prevention services and respond to runaways and youth experiencing homelessness and human trafficking.
<b>Carol Caton, Ph.D., Professor of Clinical Public Health</b>	Department of Psychiatry, Columbia University	New York, New York, United States	Dr. Caton has had a long-standing interest in homelessness and mental illness and has received considerable external funding for research in this area. Dr. Caton is currently collaborating on a grant to develop a primary care-based intervention for depressed homeless mothers, and a grant to develop a cognitive remediation intervention for homeless youth, designed to improve their employability. She participated in the development of <i>Uniting for Solutions Beyond</i>

Who	Organization	Location	Rationale for Engagement
			Shelter, the New York City plan to end chronic homelessness. She currently serves on the research advisory boards of the New York City Department of Homeless Services and the National Alliance to End Homelessness.
<b>Dani Coffey, Policy Analyst</b>	Regional Municipality of Durham	Whitby, Ontario, Canada	The Durham region is offering an important lens towards how efficiencies and accommodations can be made to better serve homeless youth through income supports, housing access and family supports. Leadership through this work has emerged through the municipality. Policy changes and enhancements at the local level are key to shifting the trajectory for youth homelessness prevention.
<b>Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Ph.D., Director of the Institute for Social Policy</b>	Housing, Equalities Research at Heriot-Watt University	Edinburgh, Scotland	Suzanne completed her PhD on youth homelessness at the University of Glasgow in 1998. She subsequently held a number of posts in the Department of Urban Studies at the University of Glasgow, including ESRC Research Fellow in Housing and Social Exclusion and, latterly, Lecturer in Housing and Social Policy. Suzanne specialises in research on homelessness and housing exclusion, and much of her work has an international comparative dimension.
<b>Jasmine Hayes, Deputy Director</b>	United States Interagency Council on Homelessness	Washington , District of Columbia, United States	The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness is responsible for coordinating and catalyzing the federal response to homelessness in the US.  By organizing and supporting leaders such as Governors, Mayors, Continuum of Care leaders, and other local officials, the drive action to achieve the goals of the federal strategic plan to prevent and homelessness-- and ensure that homelessness in America is ended once and for all. Jasmine has served

Who	Organization	Location	Rationale for Engagement
			as Policy Director for USICH, driving their work to prevent and end youth and family homelessness.
<b>Nora Landry, Policy Advisor</b>	Regional Municipality of Durham	Whitby, Ontario, Canada	The Durham region is offering an important lens towards how efficiencies and accommodations can be made to better serve homeless youth through income supports, housing access and family supports. Leadership through this work has emerged through the municipality. Policy changes and enhancements at the local level are key to shifting the trajectory for youth homelessness prevention.
<b>Kim Ledene, Director of Housing and Shelter</b>	Boys and Girls Club of Calgary	Calgary, Alberta, Canada	The Boys and Girls Club of Calgary has been on the leading edge of youth homelessness prevention and housing for many years. Their work with families, diverse populations of young people and the adaptation of important housing models (including Housing First for Youth) has been transformational for Canada. Kim Ledene is considered one of Canada's most accomplished and deserving youth homelessness thought leaders.
<b>David MacKenzie, Ph.D., Associate Professor</b>	Institute for Social Research, and Executive Director of Youth Development Australia	Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia	David MacKenzie is an Associate Professor at the Institute for Social Research, and Executive Director of Youth Development Australia (YDA). David has a strong record of research and development expertise in public policy, applied social research and evaluation, especially on youth policy and homelessness. David MacKenzie is a leading expert on youth homelessness prevention with specific focus on the Geelong Project (TGP). TGP is a ground breaking and evidence-based partnership that helps young people at risk of homelessness. TGP, which was established over 5 years ago, utilises a 'community of schools and youth services'

Who	Organization	Location	Rationale for Engagement
			model of early intervention for young people who are at-risk of disengaging from school, becoming homeless and entering the justice system.
<b>Matthew Morton, Ph.D., Research Fellow, Principal Investigator</b>	Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago	Chicago, Illinois, United States	Dr. Matthew Morton is a Research Fellow at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Morton has expertise in youth development, youth homelessness, evaluation of complex interventions, and evidence-based practice. He currently leads the youth homelessness agenda at Chapin Hall. Morton is Principal Investigator for Voices of Youth Count, a national research and policy initiative focused on building evidence to support action on ending youth homelessness, and the Youth Outcomes Project, an effort to improve outcomes and measurement across multiple domains in systems, services, and research related to youth homelessness.
<b>Natasha Slesnick, Ph.D., Professor,</b>	Human Development and Family Science, Department of Human Sciences, Ohio State University	Columbus, Ohio, United States	Natasha Slesnick is a professor of Human Development and Family Science and associate chair for research in the Department of Human Sciences at The Ohio State University. Her research focuses on intervention development with homeless youth and families. She has consulted with multiple organizations on the best strategies for intervening in youth homelessness. After opening a drop-in center for homeless youth in Albuquerque, New Mexico, she moved to Columbus, Ohio and opened her second drop-in center.
<b>Beth Watts, Ph.D., Research Associate at the Institute for Housing</b>	Urban and Real Estate Research, Heriot-Watt University	Edinburgh, Scotland	Beth is a Senior Research Fellow at <a href="#">L-SPHERE</a> , Heriot-Watt University. Her research focuses on homelessness, youth homelessness, rough sleeping and complex needs, social housing, and poverty. Her current work includes monitoring the impacts

Who	Organization	Location	Rationale for Engagement
			of welfare reform and the wider policy and economic context on UK homelessness and evidencing the impacts of welfare conditionality on young people, rough sleepers and social housing tenants.

*\* The list reflects only a segment of the experts/practitioners the authors sought to engage as part of the review. Given availability and timelines for the project, not everyone they had hoped to engage were able to give of their time and knowledge.*

## Author Details

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