

## SOLUTIONS

# 27 Ending Youth Homelessness in Canada is Possible: The Role of Prevention

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What do we mean when we say we can end youth homelessness? Is it even possible? When making this assertion, we *do not* mean that there will never be young people in crisis who need emergency/temporary housing. Rather, *ending youth homelessness* means *eliminating* youth homelessness as a broad social problem that traps young people in an ongoing state of emergency, without access to permanent housing and necessary supports, and which leads to declining health and well-being, and most certainly an uncertain future.

Ending homelessness as a concept has gained traction internationally (Quilgars et al., 2011; FEANTSA, 2010; NAEH, 2002; 2012; USICH, 2010a; b). This is also true in Canada, where many communities and key national and regional organizations have declared this not only a possibility, but a priority<sup>1</sup>.

The thought of ending youth homelessness can feel like an impossible task given the overwhelming scope of the problem and its apparent complexity. However,

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1. This includes jurisdictions such as Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa, Victoria, the province of Alberta, as well as organizations such as the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, the Canadian Homelessness Research Network, etc.

a lot is known about effectively responding to youth homelessness. In this concluding chapter, we will focus on the role of prevention. And by prevention, we mean doing what we can to stop young people from becoming homeless in the first place, and when this is not possible, to ensure that the experience is short and that they do not become mired in homelessness or the street lifestyle.

While most people can easily comprehend the importance of prevention in reducing the harms of smoking, for instance, it is more challenging when thinking about preventing homelessness. What do we mean by prevention? What does prevention look like? This chapter summarizes some international research on effective prevention strategies, and identifies key factors that enable effective implementation. And, as we will see, prevention can mean many things. Preventive strategies can involve programming that strengthens protective factors amongst adolescents by enhancing engagement with school and building their problem solving and conflict resolution skills, for instance. Prevention also entails stopping the flow of young people from institutional care (child protection, mental health, corrections) into homelessness. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it means designing and implementing effective early intervention strategies so that when young people become homeless (or are at imminent risk) they are given supports that either help them return home or move into new accommodation (with supports) in a safe and planned way.

A review of systems level and program responses to youth homelessness in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States<sup>2</sup> reveals a wealth of innovative and effective programs, strategies and approaches that can be applied to the development and implementation of a Canadian model of prevention for ending youth homelessness.

The prevention framework for ending youth homelessness presented here<sup>3</sup> outlines key components that can be implemented at the national, provincial or community levels and is intended to shift the emphasis from managing youth homelessness, to prevention on the one hand, and rehousing on the other.

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2. The methodology for this chapter includes: A scoping review of academic literature on youth homelessness, its causes and conditions, as well as responses from the English speaking world. Grey literature was also examined. Second, policy documents that focus on responses to homelessness generally (and to youth homelessness in particular) in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States were collected, reviewed, compared and analyzed. Third, qualitative interviews were conducted with policy makers, decision-makers and service providers in a number of communities across Canada in order to understand current thinking on how to address youth homelessness.
  3. This chapter is a summary of research presented in the report: Gaetz, S. (2013). *Coming of Age – Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press. The content is reproduced with the permission of the author.

## Setting the Stage for Ending Youth Homelessness

Implementing a strategy to end youth homelessness invariably means doing things differently. Creating change means building on existing strengths, and being unafraid to implement new approaches and/or cease doing what clearly does not work, or is counter-productive (the criminalization of homelessness (O'Grady et al., 2011; this volume) is an example of the latter). Leadership and active participation by key stakeholders is essential to managing change.

So, how can we restructure and rebalance our response to youth homelessness? Broadly speaking, there are three main approaches to addressing homelessness. First, one can focus on *prevention*, which is to invest in supports and the coordination of services so as to reduce the likelihood that people will become homeless in the first place. This means working 'upstream' to identify those at risk of homelessness, and develop interventions that reduce the risk that young people will become homelessness.

The second approach, the *emergency response*, is the set of interventions available once someone becomes homeless. The goal here is to provide emergency supports in order to address basic and pressing needs for shelter and food, for instance, in order to lessen the immediate impact of homelessness on individuals and communities. Some communities have emergency shelters and supports designed specifically for youth, others do not. The 'emergency response' can also include the use of law enforcement.

The third response supports rapid transitions out of homelessness through the provision of appropriate *accommodation and supports*. The goal is to get people into housing and give them the supports needed (income, health care, etc.) to ensure they do not fall back into or languish in a state of homelessness. For young people, for whom staying with parents or caregivers may no longer be an option, it means ensuring a planned and safe exit via appropriate accommodation and supports (if necessary).

A mature and developed response to homelessness ideally involves all three approaches, with a stronger emphasis on prevention and strategies that move people quickly out of homelessness, supported by emergency services that bridge the gap.

While there are notable exceptions, most communities in Canada do not take such an integrated approach, but rather, put much of their energy and resources into the emergency response, if they are doing anything at all about youth homelessness. While emergency services are important and necessary, we cannot rely on this as our 'system' if the goal is to end youth homelessness. It can

be argued that an emphasis on the emergency response – shelters, day programs, law enforcement – merely manages the problem, rather than eliminates it (Gaetz, 2008; 2010). One might say that we have become all too comfortable with this approach; we believe that our current emergency response is effectively dealing with the problem, when really at best it is a stop-gap measure.

We also know that the longer young people remain homeless, the worse their problems become and the greater their challenge in moving off the street (Karabanow & Naylor, this volume; Saewyc, this volume; O’Grady et al., 2011; Public Interest, 2009). Several of the chapters in this book demonstrate how this can include worsening mental health (McKay, this volume; Kidd, this volume), hunger (Tarasuk & Dachner, this volume), addictions (Buccieri, this volume; Kirst & Erickson, this volume), involvement in crime (Baron, this volume), criminal victimization (Gaetz et al., 2010) and sexual exploitation (Saewyc, this volume), for instance. We need to question whether keeping young people in a “state of emergency” is really helping them? Is it enough to treat the symptoms while ignoring the causes?

Effective strategic responses attempt to reduce a problem, rather than simply manage it. In moving towards a more strategic and coordinated response to youth homelessness in Canada, a shift from emergency services (which may unnecessarily prolong the experience of homelessness) to prevention and accommodation (with necessary and appropriate supports) must be a priority. Importantly, this means doing what we can to stop the flow of young people into homelessness.

## **Changing Course: Integrating Prevention into a Broader Strategic Response**

The effectiveness of prevention is amplified when it is more broadly integrated into a coordinated strategic response. That is, in contrast to relying on agency-based prevention strategies, it is possible to approach the issue in a more strategic and integrated fashion. This is done by bringing together a range of services and approaches that work across the street youth sector, and ideally, engage with programs, services and institutions ‘upstream’ (that is, before a young person becomes homeless).

A review of integrated and strategic responses to youth homelessness from the UK, Australia and the United States identifies several core institutional components that are necessary to support a prevention strategy (Minnery & Greenhalgh, 2007; Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2002a; b; c; 2004; Communities and Local Government, 2005; Australian Government, 2008a; b; USICH, 2010a). These five key components are presented below.

## 1) Develop a Plan

The first step is devising and implementing a plan or strategy that is *inclusive* in its process, *strategic* in its objectives, sets real and measurable *targets for change*, is *clear* to all stakeholders and leads to *real changes* in young people's lives. The "10 Year Plan" approach, which originated in and has proven to be successful in the United States, has been adapted and applied in over ten Canadian communities, including most cities in Alberta. The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness' *A Plan Not a Dream* (2012) outlines key elements of a successful community plan to end homelessness; ideas that can easily be incorporated into a youth focused plan.

Any plan to end youth homelessness should include a statement of guiding principles and core values, for these shape how one responds to the needs of young people. As with the Ten Year Plan model, an effective youth homelessness strategy must have clearly articulated goals and objectives, timelines, responsibilities and benchmarks, as well as measurable targets. The right players must be engaged in the development and implementation of the plan, and importantly, young people must be involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation. It is important to include their voices in any quality assurance system.

## 2) Create an Integrated Systems Response

Central to an effective plan is the implementation of an integrated systems approach. That is, services within the homelessness sector need to be coordinated and integrated, so that different agencies and programs have clear roles and mandates, and work together as providers for the same clients. Systems coordination also has to extend beyond the homelessness sector to include mainstream services, whether health care, supports for those with addictions and mental health challenges, housing services, child welfare and corrections. ***The community-based services in the homelessness sector cannot alone solve homelessness.***

This is referred to as a "System of Care" approach. Originating in children's mental health and addictions sectors, the concept can be defined as: "an adaptive network of structures, processes, and relationships grounded in system of care values and principles that provides children and youth with serious emotional disturbance and their families with access to and availability of necessary services and supports across administrative and funding jurisdictions" (Hodges et al., 2006:3). So, as opposed to a fragmented collection of services, an integrated systems response requires that programs, services and service delivery systems be organized at every level – from policy, to intake, to service provision, to client flow – based on the needs of the young person. Integrated

service models are typically client-focused and driven, and designed to ensure that needs are met in a timely and respectful way.

### 3) Facilitate Active, Strategic and Coordinated Engagement by All Levels of Government, and Interdepartmental Collaboration

In countries that are showing success, there is recognition that partnerships are key to ending homelessness. This requires that all levels of government (including Aboriginal governments) be at the table, and engaged in the strategic responses. And within government, interdepartmental collaboration and responsibility must be seen as part of the solution. Homelessness is a “fusion” policy issue, and must necessarily involve health, corrections and justice, housing, education and child welfare, for instance. Communities cannot necessarily address all of the factors involved (health and mental health, child protection, corrections, affordable housing supply, etc.) without the direct engagement of higher levels of government. Finally, it is essential that governments create a policy and funding framework that allows for such change. A great plan means nothing if adequate resources are not made available, and if funding practices do not support and enable change.

### 4) Adopt a Youth Development Orientation

The needs of young people who become homeless are substantially different from those of adults (see the introduction to this book). Street youth, unlike homeless adults, leave homes defined by relationships (both social and economic) in which they were typically dependent upon adult caregivers. Becoming homeless then does not just mean a loss of housing, but rather it means leaving *home*; an interruption and potential rupture in social relations with parents and caregivers, family members, friends, neighbours and community.

For these reasons and others, an effective strategy to end youth homelessness must be distinct from the adult sector, and must focus on addressing the needs of adolescents and young adults. Homeless youth – especially those under the age of 18 – typically lack the experience and skills necessary to live independently. Just as importantly, many homeless youth will be in the midst of important physical, cognitive, psychological and emotional development. As such, we need to build youth homelessness strategies that prioritize healthy adolescent development, and shift the goal of the work from a transition to *independence*, to a successful transition to *adulthood* and *well-being*.

Finally, we need to take diversity into account, and acknowledge that the needs of young women are profoundly different from those of young men (Buccieri, this volume). Sexual and racial minorities face discrimination that

mainstream youth do not (Abramovich, this volume; Springer, this volume). Young people from new immigrant and Aboriginal communities face special challenges (Baskin, this volume). A successful strategy must ensure that diverse needs are met. One size does not fit all.

## 5) Incorporate Research, Data Gathering and Information Sharing

It should go without saying that research and evidence ought to influence any significant social or economic problem within our society. In communities that have the most successful response to homelessness, there is a growing respect for the role of research, evidence and data management. Research, such as that presented in this book, can impact on the solutions to homelessness by providing a deeper understanding of the problem, strong evidence for solutions, and promising practices from elsewhere that can be replicated and adapted locally.

Integrated data management systems are seen as essential to supporting systems approaches. [Homelessness Management Information Systems](#) (HMIS) have been developed for the homelessness sector and enable the coordination of services, tracking of clients and impact measurement of service delivery models. In Canada, a newly updated version of the [Homeless Individuals and Families Information System](#) (HIFIS) is currently being rolled out, and has many of the same capabilities for supporting service integration. It is designed to “enhance services providers’ ability to manage their operations and collect information about the population using shelters, such as: client bookings, provision of goods and services, housing placement, and case management and will be made available for free” (Government of Canada, 2013).

## Preventing Youth Homelessness: What Do We Know, What Can We Do?

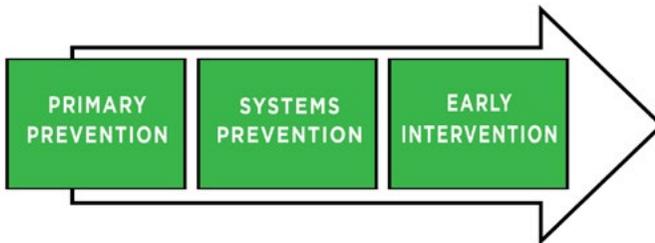
Preventing youth homelessness means stopping young people from becoming homeless in the first place. While it is safe to say that many Canadians now understand that homelessness prevention is a good idea, it is often harder to pin down exactly what this means or what it looks like. Countries that have demonstrated greater success in addressing youth homelessness, such as the UK and Australia, invest heavily in prevention. This requires a coordinated and strategic systems approach that necessarily engages, includes and mandates action from mainstream systems and departments of government, as well as the homelessness sector. No solution to youth homelessness can or should depend only on the efforts of those in the homelessness sector.

The evolution and conceptual framing of prevention-based approaches are built

upon experimentation, innovation and research, and have been underpinned by important legislative and policy shifts. In the UK, Hal Pawson has written extensively on the meaning of prevention and the roles and responsibilities of different sectors in implementing a successful strategy (Pawson, 2007; Pawson et al., 2006; 2007). Legislation such as the Homelessness Act (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2002a) and the Children’s Act (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2004) has emphasized the need for a prevention focus. Evaluative studies of youth homelessness prevention programs, such as the Safe in the City program, have offered evidence-based insights into what works (Dickens & Woodfield, 2004). Quilgars’ extensive research has added additional conceptual knowledge, as well as an evidence base that identifies and highlights program effectiveness (Quilgars et al., 2008; 2011). In Australia, MacKenzie and Chamberlain<sup>4</sup> (2004; 2006; National Youth Commission, 2008) have articulated the importance of family connections and mediation, early intervention and the role of schools. The extensive program development and evaluation of Australia’s Reconnect program (to be discussed in greater detail below) has also contributed to understanding youth homelessness prevention and the role of schools (Evans & Shaver, 2001; Ryan & Beauchamp, 2003). In the US, Culhane et al., (2010) have written a seminal document for the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness outlining the meaning of homelessness prevention, as well as the challenges to program implementation and outcomes measurement. These resources are influential in shaping strategic responses, and point the way towards a preventive approach to youth homelessness in Canada.

The framework presented here focuses on three interconnected domains related to youth homelessness prevention: *primary prevention*, *systems prevention*, and *early intervention*. As will be seen, prevention necessarily involves addressing the personal and structural factors that contribute to a young person’s homelessness.

Diagram 1: A Framework for Preventing Youth Homelessness




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4. McKenzie and Chamberlain helped direct the National Commission on youth homelessness.

## 1) Primary Prevention

It is commonly understood that it is preferable to prevent any social or health problem from occurring than it is to reverse it after it has occurred. The goal of primary prevention is to address the root causes of homelessness and protect individuals and families well before there is a high risk of becoming homeless. The main responsibility for the primary prevention of youth homelessness lies well outside the homelessness sector, and includes those institutions and sectors that can potentially have a significant impact on the lives of children, youth and families.

Youth homelessness prevention addresses the structural factors that contribute to youth and family homelessness, including poverty, lack of affordable housing, racism (Baskin, this volume; Springer, this volume), homophobia (Abramovich, this volume) and other forms of discrimination, lack of educational engagement and achievement and addictions and mental health issues within the household.

A preventive strategy should enhance **protective factors** and **resilience** for young people. Protective factors include individual qualities and personality traits that help someone persevere in the face of stress, traumatic events or other problems (Smokowski et al., 1999; Crosnoe et al., 2002; Bender, 2007; Gilligan, 2000; Ungar, 2004). Protective factors help reduce or mitigate risk, and ultimately contribute to health and well-being and may include decision-making and planning skills, as well as higher levels of self-esteem (Lightfoot et al., 2011), positive family and peer relations, engagement in school and other meaningful activities, and lower levels of drug use or criminal involvement (Thompson, 2005). Protective factors can contribute to and enhance resilience, which

*is the likely outcome of a child's both having qualities that are inherently protective (e.g. intelligence and positive coping skills) and having access to resources and networks of support that promote and help maintain a process of healing and psychological wellness. (Herrenkohl, 2008:94).*

Prevention strategies that involve families, schools and communities, enhance protective factors in youth by building problem solving skills, supporting engagement in meaningful activities, strengthening educational and community engagement, and reducing family conflict.

### **The Role of Families**

It should go without saying that family does matter in the transition process from youth to adulthood. However, since histories of family conflict and/or abuse are so prevalent amongst street youth, the sector often ignores family as part of the solution to youth homelessness (Winland et al., 2011; Winland, this volume). In fact,

many services operate on the assumption that young people need to be protected – and isolated – from their families. Families are framed as ‘part of the past’, rather than as resources that young people can and should draw on as they move forward.

Youth homelessness prevention must necessarily focus on the harms that undermine families and healthy childhood and adolescent development and encourage proactive work with families in order to address the factors that lead to conflict, and more seriously, abuse. While those who are ‘chronically disconnected’ may have few familial resources to draw on, it can be argued that for the majority of youth there is an opportunity to draw non-abusive family members in as part of the solution.

### **The Role of Schools**

Virtually every young person who becomes homeless was once in school. Moreover, educators are often the first adults outside of the family to suspect and/or become aware of underlying problems that may lead to youth homelessness. Whether this means bullying, educational disengagement, signs of abuse, trauma and/or family conflict, teachers are often able to identify young people at risk. The problems begin when teachers lack the knowledge base, resources or supports to intervene.

The prevention strategies that address youth homelessness in Australia and the UK recognize the central role that schools play in young people’s lives. In communities across both countries, a number of programs and resources that are delivered by non-profit organizations in schools and community centers receive government support. In Australia, the government funded Reconnect Program delivers education and prevention services to young people in schools (more on this later). In the UK, community-based organizations develop and implement programs within a prevention framework that is supported and funded by the central government. Importantly, this prevention work begins in schools and targets youth *before* they turn 16.

Finally, there are preventive programs designed to provide information about homelessness, help people work through and identify risks (both students and teachers), and inform them of available supports if ever there is a crisis. The presence of agencies in schools also provides teachers with key points of contact when they suspect something is wrong. In their review of preventive strategies in the UK, Quilgars et al., (2008), argued that such programs provide a means to:

- increase young people’s awareness of the ‘harsh realities’ of homelessness and dispel myths about the availability of social housing;
- challenge stereotypes about homeless people, particularly regarding their culpability;

- educate young people about the range of housing options available to them after leaving home and raise awareness of help available;
- emphasize young people's responsibilities with regard to housing;
- teach conflict resolution skills that may be applied within and beyond the home and school (Quilgars et al., 2008:68).

The **Homeless Hub** website offers a range of free resources for primary, intermediate and secondary teachers. This includes lesson plans across a number of subject areas, backgrounders, supplementary resources such as videos, and resources for students. It is worth considering how these resources might be used (and expanded) as part of a broader school-based prevention strategy. (<http://www.homelesshub.ca/Education/>)

## II) Systems Prevention

Stopping the flow of young people from state care into homelessness should be part of any youth homelessness strategy. Many young people become homeless upon leaving the care of child protection services or when discharged from corrections and/or mental health services, without adequate plans for housing and other supports.

### **Transitions from Child Protection**

Research consistently points to the high percentage of homeless youth who have had some involvement with child protection services, including foster care, group home placements or youth custodial centres (Baskin, this volume; Dworsky & Courtney, 2009; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Gaetz, 2002; Gaetz, O'Grady & Buccieri, 2009; Karabanow, 2004; Karabanow & Naylor, this volume; Raising the Roof, 2008; Serge et al., 2002). For instance, in three separate studies, the percentage of homeless youth who reported previous involvement with foster care or group homes ranged from 41 to 43 percent (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Gaetz, 2002; Gaetz, O'Grady & Buccieri, 2010).

It is both the experience of being in child protection, and the transition from protection to independence that account for many of these problems. Some young people choose to leave because of bad experiences and inadequate support in group homes or in foster care. Other youth simply 'age out'<sup>5</sup> of the foster care system and are left to fend for themselves, lacking necessary resources and family support. Many leave care with underdeveloped independent living skills, inadequate

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5. In Canada, child protection legislation is a provincial responsibility, and there are significant jurisdictional differences meaning that the actual age at which the State remains responsible for young people in care varies from province to province. In Ontario, for instance, young people 'age out' at 18, but can also voluntarily withdraw from care at 16.

education, lower levels of physical and emotional well-being and lack of supports and resources that we know young people rely on when moving into adulthood (Courtney et al., 2001). Difficult transitions from care often result in a range of negative outcomes, including, lack of educational engagement and achievement, involvement in corrections, lack of skills and potentially, a life of poverty.

As Nichols addresses in this volume, ineffective discharge planning and supports, as well as a lack of institutional coordination means that many young people leaving care 'slip through the cracks', and fall into homelessness (Nichols, this volume). It is also true that in many jurisdictions, child protection legislation has not kept pace with the social and economic changes that make it much more difficult for young people to live independently at an early age. Child protection services that cut off support for young people at the age of 18 or even 21 leave young people in jeopardy and at risk of homelessness.

In Canada, child protection is a provincial responsibility, with legislation and practice varying from province to province. Indeed many provinces continually update their legislation. The recent Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario's Child Welfare System outlines a number of key recommendations by former crown wards for updating provincial legislation (Youth Leaving Care Working Group, 2013). Irwin Elman, director of the Office for the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, argues that effective reforms, including extending the age of child welfare support to 25, would cost about 26 million dollars, but see a savings of 132 million dollars over 40 years (Monsebratten, 2013).

### **Leaving Corrections**

We know from extensive research that young people who are homeless are on average more criminally involved than domiciled youth (Baron, this volume; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Tanner & Wortley, 2002), and at the same time, receive much more police attention regardless of their criminal involvement (O'Grady et al., 2011; this volume). Many become involved with the criminal justice system, either as juvenile offenders or as adults. A growing body of Canadian research focuses on the bidirectional relationship between homelessness and prison (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2006; 2009; Novac et al., 2006; 2007; Kellen et al., 2010), meaning that people who are homeless are more likely to become imprisoned, and are over-represented in the prison population. Additionally, because of the inadequacy of discharge planning and reintegration policies and practices, both for those who are convicted and those awaiting trial on remand, many ex-prisoners are discharged directly into homelessness.

While research shows that attention to discharge planning and support for reintegration to independent living for people leaving corrections has ben-

efits in terms of reduced recidivism, increased public safety and reduced homelessness (Harrison, 2001; Visher & Travis, 2003; Petersilia, 2001a; b; Travis & Petersilia, 2001), the evidence often collides with ‘get tough on crime’ policies that achieve the opposite (this is particularly important in the Canadian context, where we are implementing policies that follow from the mistakes made in the United States from the 1970s to 1990s).

Ensuring access to safe, affordable housing for young people discharged from prison not only improves their life chances, but also builds better, safer communities, as recidivism rates decline. In other words, providing housing for released young offenders is both a housing and crime reduction issue. In Canada, Wood’s Homes and the Calgary John Howard Society are piloting an innovative program for young offenders that incorporates a Housing First philosophy (Gaetz, 2013).

### **Discharge Support from Hospital and Mental Health Facilities**

Those who work in the homelessness sector are well aware that individuals are often discharged from hospitals and mental health facilities into homelessness. There are two main consequences to this. First, the mental health and well-being of such individuals is likely to worsen, and second, staff in emergency shelters and day programs are not well equipped to provide necessary and appropriate supports for people in such situations. As Forchuk suggests, emergency shelters – even well run shelters – are “not appropriate places for recovery from mental illnesses” (Forchuk et al., 2006:301). Many of the problems we associate with shelters – lack of privacy, low resident/staff ratios, exposure to drugs and the sex trade, and in some cases overcrowding – can exacerbate problems for psychiatric survivors. Unfortunately this happens all too often. In their study of people discharged from psychiatric wards in London – a mid-sized Canadian city – they found that 167 of 1,588 (10.5%) individuals within a single year were discharged with no fixed address (Forchuk et al., 2006). Structural factors, including a trend towards shorter hospital stays, and a dramatic reduction in the availability of affordable housing in most Canadian cities, contribute to this situation.

Research from Canada and the United States suggests that reforms and interventions can dramatically reduce the risk of homelessness for those discharged from mental health facilities, with a resultant improvement in mental health and well-being (Forchuk et al., 2008; 2011; Herman et al., 2011; Kasproff & Rosenheck, 2007; Goldfinger et al., 1999; Susser et al., 1997). A randomized control trial by Herman et al., (2011) demonstrates that Critical Time Interventions (CTI) can: “prevent recurrent homelessness and other adverse outcomes following discharge in two ways: by strengthening the individual’s long-term ties to services, family, and friends; and by providing emotional and practical support during the critical time of transition” (Herman et al., 2011:2).

In a London, Ontario pilot study, patients at risk of being discharged with ‘no fixed address’ were provided with a timely intervention (Forchuk et al., 2008; 2011), including: 1) assessment and immediate response to client need (it is argued that a determination of risk of homelessness should be made upon admittance); 2) goal planning and advocacy to coordinate supports; 3) assistance in finding affordable housing, 4) a streamlined process (including fast tracking) so that individuals could receive government benefits to pay for first and last month’s rent.

### III) Early Intervention

The importance of early intervention cannot be underestimated. This is true not only when considering discharge from institutional settings, but in other contexts, as well. Early intervention means **identifying and addressing the physical, emotional, material, interpersonal, social and educational needs of young people who are at imminent risk of, or who have just become homeless.** This is the point at which prevention and emergency services intersect, for early intervention strategies can take place before a youth becomes homeless (when one is at imminent risk) or immediately after. So, while some of these interventions will be delivered by emergency services, they are considered preventive in that the goal is to provide proper supports so that a person’s experience of homelessness is as short as possible, and hopefully non-recurrent.

The goal of early intervention is to address the immediate risk of homelessness, provide young people and their families with necessary supports and importantly enhance resilience while reducing the potential for negative outcomes. For those who do indeed leave home, early intervention also means reducing the risk of protracted homelessness (more than a month).

Diagram 2: Early Intervention Framework

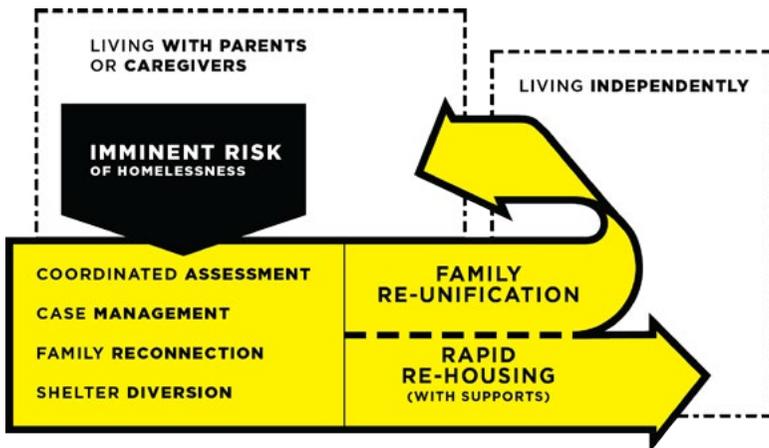


Diagram 2 identifies four key and interrelated strategies of early intervention, including: Common Assessment, Case Management, Family Reconnection and Shelter Diversion. Together these interventions are designed to reconcile and support relationships so that young people can move home or in with other family members, and when this is not possible (for safety reasons), help them move into independent (and supported) accommodation in a safe and planned way. The goal is to intervene before a young person is forced to leave their community and find themselves on the streets or in an emergency shelter. Once on the streets, a young person may be drawn into the street lifestyle, and become entrenched in their homelessness.

### a) Coordinated Assessment

Coordinated Assessment (also known as Coordinated Intake, and Common Assessment in the UK) is key to delivering integrated and focused early interventions for young people at risk of homelessness. It is a standardized approach to assessing a young person's current situation, the acuity of their needs and the services they currently receive and may require in the future, and takes into account the background factors that contribute to risk and resilience, changes in acuity, and the role parents, caregivers, community and environmental factors play on the young person's development. The National Alliance to End Homelessness argues that coordinated assessment supports a more efficient and effective homelessness response by:

- Helping people move through the system faster (by reducing the amount of time people spend moving from program to program before finding the right match);
- Reducing new entries into homelessness (by consistently offering prevention and diversion resources upfront, reducing the number of people entering the system unnecessarily); and
- Improving data collection and quality and providing accurate information on what kind of assistance consumers need (NAEH, 2012).

The key to coordinated assessment is to employ it system-wide, having all agencies use the same assessment framework and instrument in order to standardize current practices and provide comprehensive and consistent client information. This can reduce duplication of assessments and enable effective case management, such that clients get timely access to the most appropriate services based on need. Common assessment also enables the pooling of information in order to facilitate systems coordination. Since the information is shared, this means that young people will not have to retell their story multiple times.

Coordinated Assessment is often supported by some form of **centralized intake** or a single point of entry, which could be the first emergency shelter someone shows up at, a dedicated assessment facility, or through a dispersed model (Gardner et al., 2010). Given advances in technology, the basic principles of “Single Point Access” could be provided in a more decentralized fashion through web-based supports and/or a more diverse range of agencies and services. Such an approach would require a common assessment framework, a shared data management system and a communication and promotion strategy, and ideally would be made available through schools, community centers and other places frequented by young people.

There are available resources to support the development of coordinated assessments, both from the United States and the UK. The NAEH has developed a **Coordinated Assessment toolkit** to help communities plan for, implement, and evaluate a coordinated assessment system. The toolkit is designed to allow individual communities to modify and tailor the tool to fit their individual needs. In the United Kingdom there are also a number of resources to support the development and implementation of their **Common Assessment Framework (CAF)**.

## b) Case Management

As part of an early intervention strategy, case management is a comprehensive and strategic form of service provision whereby a case worker assesses the needs of the client (and potentially their family) and, where appropriate, arranges, coordinates and advocates for delivery and access to a range of programs and services designed to meet the individual’s needs. The National Case Management Network of Canada (NCMN) defines case management as a:

*[...] collaborative, client-driven process for the provision of quality health and support services through the effective and efficient use of resources. Case management supports the client’s achievement of safe, realistic, and reasonable goals within a complex health, social, and fiscal environment (National Case Management Network of Canada, 2009:8).*

A client-centered case management approach ensures that the young person has a major say in identifying goals and service needs, and that there is shared accountability. The goal of case management is to empower young people, promote an improved quality of life, reduce the risk of homelessness and/or help young people achieve housing stability by facilitating timely access to the necessary supports.

Case management is well established in social work and health care, and there are many different approaches and practices. Case management can be short term (as

in the Critical Time Intervention) or long term and ongoing, dependent upon an identified need for crisis intervention related to problematic transitions, or for supports around chronic conditions. Critical Time Intervention (CTI) models are key to early intervention practice in that they are designed to prevent recurrent homelessness and help people transition to independence (Baumgartner & Herman, 2012; Schutt et al., 2009; Herman & Mandiberg, 2010). This is achieved through:

*strengthening the individual's long-term ties to services, family, and friends; and by providing emotional and practical support during the critical time of transition. An important aspect of CTI is that post-discharge services are delivered by workers who have established relationships with patients during their institutional stay* (Critical Time Intervention, 2009).

A case management approach, then, necessarily works best within a system of care approach, where links are made to necessary services and supports, based on identified client need. In reviewing case management as a key component to ending homelessness, Milaney (2011a; b; 2012) identified it as a strengths-based *team* approach with six key dimensions:

1. Collaboration and cooperation – a true team approach, involving several people with different backgrounds, skills and areas of expertise;
2. Right matching of services – person-centered and based on the complexity of need;
3. Contextual case management – interventions must appropriately take account of age, ability, culture, gender and sexual orientation. In addition, an understanding of broader structural factors and personal history (of violence, sexual abuse or assault, for instance) must underline strategies and mode of engagement.
4. The right kind of engagement – building a strong relationship based on respectful encounters, openness, listening skills, non-judgmental attitudes and advocacy.
5. Coordinated and well-managed system – integrating the intervention into the broader system of care, and
6. Evaluation for success – the ongoing and consistent assessment of case managed supports.

### c) Family Reconnection

The goal of family reconnection is to mobilize family relations as a 'natural' resource that can help prevent youth homelessness, rapidly rehouse those who become homeless, and secure stable housing for youth who have been homeless over a long period of time. The underlying ethos of a 'family reconnection' approach is

that family is important to almost everyone and that by reconciling damaged relationships, family can play a role in helping street youth move forward with their lives. For the majority of young people who are homeless (those who are 'temporarily disconnected' or 'unstably connected'), this is a particularly important kind of intervention to consider as part of every case management plan.

Until recently, the possibility and potential of reconnecting with family has, unfortunately, rarely been prioritized in the Canadian response to youth homelessness, and in fact, has often been ignored (Winland et al., 2011; Winland, this volume). Emergency services tend to focus on providing refuge for young people, and helping them reach self-sufficiency and independence. This is perhaps not surprising, nor entirely unreasonable, given that so many homeless youth flee households characterized by physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse, and or the child protection system. In such a context, family is often seen as part of the young person's past<sup>6</sup>, and moving home may be neither desirable, nor possible.

While it is easy to dismiss the role of family in the lives of young people who have had difficult pasts, we need to be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak. In reframing our understanding of the potential role of families in the lives of street youth, we need to consider that the families defined as problematic may themselves be complex and diverse in composition. So, while a young person may experience conflict (even violence) with one or more members of their family, there may potentially be important, supportive and/or redeemable relationships with other family members; individuals that can play an important role in a young person's transition to independence. It is also important to consider that relationships characterized by conflict are not always irreconcilable, and that many underlying conflicts can be addressed with the right supports and interventions. The point is that even when conflicts lead to young people leaving home, we should not forego the possibility that those conflictual relations can improve (Winland et al., 2011; Winland, this volume).

While there are very innovative and successful programs in Canada that focus on reconnecting homeless youth with their families (Kelowna, Calgary and Halifax, for instance), one of the best known is Eva's Family Reconnect program in Toronto, which assists young people aged 16-24. Eva's Family Reconnect offers individual and family support for youth in order to address and potentially resolve family conflict through individual and family counseling, referrals to other agencies and services, psychiatric assessments, psychological assessments for learning disabilities, as well as accompaniment and advocacy (Winland et al., 2011). This

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6. In implementing any family reconnection strategy the ultimate guiding principle is necessarily the protection and safety of the young person.

orientation towards family connection has been adapted and integrated across all eight Boys and Girls Club of Calgary programs for homeless youth.

The effectiveness and underlying logic of program-based family mediation and reconnection models suggests that a more ambitious application of the basic tenets of the program is possible when implemented more broadly at a 'systems level'. That is, in contrast to developing an agency-based program or response, it is possible to approach the issue from a more integrated early intervention system approach that includes common assessment, centralized intake and case management, and in doing so brings together a range of services and approaches that work across the street youth sector, and ideally, engage with programs, services and institutions 'upstream' (that is, before the young person becomes homeless). No young person should access emergency shelters and supports without undergoing an assessment to determine the potential for family reunification.

Scaling up family reunification programming can thus be seen as a key preventive approach to youth homelessness. There are several key features to an integrated, systems level approach to family reconnection.

- Systems level approaches require strong institutional support by all levels of government, ensuring that family reconnection programming is widely available across jurisdictions. In other words, young people should have access to such interventions wherever they live.
- Programming requires systems-based cross-sectoral collaboration between child protection services, the education system, the mental health sector, housing, settlement and corrections, for instance.
- A prevention and early intervention model requires an integrated jurisdictional approach with strong communication links, so that appropriate and timely interventions can take place.
- Finally, an intervention program such as family reconnect must be widely available – and in some ways targeted – to young people who are *under* the age of 16.

In both Australia and the UK, family reconnection is not simply a program model, but more significantly is seen as a philosophy underlying their response to youth homelessness. The key here is that family intervention is built in to their integrated systems approaches, and in the case of Australia, has been scaled as a national program. Both of these examples point to the possibility of moving beyond a program based model, to an integrated systems approach in Canada<sup>7</sup>.

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7. For more detailed accounts of these program approaches, refer to Winland et al., 2011:62-72, and Gaetz, 2013.

In Australia, the goal of the “[Reconnect Program](#)” is to work in schools with young people between the ages of 12-18 who are identified as ‘at risk’ of homelessness and help them to stabilize their living situation, and “improve their level of engagement with family, work, education and training in their local community” (Australian Government, 2013). The program is a classic example of a systems level approach to early intervention, in that it is widely available across the country, and works across institutional jurisdictions to provide young people who become – or are at risk of becoming – homeless with the supports they need to stay at home, or find alternative supportive living arrangements. There are over 100 reconnect programs, and some specialize in services for sub-populations, such as Aboriginal youth, refugees and new immigrants, and lesbian, gay and bisexual youth. While funded by the central government, these programs nevertheless operate through a network of community based early intervention services that share the goal of helping youth stabilize their current living situations, as well as improve their level of engagement and attachments within their community (Australian Government, 2009).

In the United Kingdom, family reconnection is a feature of their strategic and integrated approach to youth homelessness and is based on the philosophy that for most youth life chances generally improve the longer they stay with their families, and the more ‘planned’ their transition is to living independently.

*Key elements of ‘what works’ include flexible and client-centered provision, close liaison with key agencies, and building in support from other agencies when necessary. The need for timely intervention was also highlighted, as was the need for active promotion of the availability of the service and early contact with clients on referral (Pawson et al., 2007:14).*

Reflecting the ‘partnership’ approach of the UK strategy, local governments are expected to develop interventions that are delivered in collaboration with key partners including Children’s Services, the youth service and not-for-profit sectors, and importantly, schools. This collaborative, cross-sectoral approach is seen as necessary in supporting young people and their families and to prevent homelessness. Most of these programs operate on a referral basis, and common elements of such programs include optional family mediation, parenting support and housing options counseling. While the goal is to resolve family disputes, there is also recognition of the necessity of finding suitable accommodation for young people who are leaving home and who do not intend to, or cannot return.

The family-based prevention programs in the UK have also been evaluated. A cost-benefit analysis by DePaul UK projected that an investment in prevention-based early intervention strategies would save on average £9,493 (\$14,838 CAD) per youth (Insley, 2011a).

#### d) Shelter Diversion

Shelter diversion refers to the provision of alternative temporary housing options, supports and interventions designed to reduce the likelihood that young people who become homeless will have to leave their communities and/or rely on emergency shelters. There are compelling reasons to consider strategies that help young people avoid this seeming eventuality. Because most small communities lack emergency shelters, moving to one often means not only leaving home, but leaving – and losing – one’s community. This invariably has a negative impact on an individual’s social capital, in that the natural resources and supports (family, friends, teachers and other adults) that might help someone move forward and avoid longer term homelessness become strained and weakened. A second thing to consider is that most emergency shelters for youth bring together a mix of young people, some who are new to the streets and some who have been on the streets for years and have very complex challenges relating to mental health, addictions, criminal involvement, etc. The challenges for shelter staff are considerable, and reducing exposure of young people who are new to the streets to crime, sexual exploitation, violence and addictions can be a difficult challenge. There is every reason to want to help young people avoid becoming mired in street youth culture. Third, because many young people who use shelters are fleeing difficult, conflictual and potentially traumatic situations, life in an emergency shelter may be experienced by some as ‘freedom’ and a relief. Without adequate support to address the underlying issues that created the crisis, or help moving into housing with appropriate supports, it is all too easy for young people to become stuck in the street youth lifestyle, surrounded by other youth who may offer companionship and support, but who have week capacity to really help them move forward with their lives.

The underlying goal of shelter diversion, then, is to help young people stabilize their lives and prevent longer term homelessness. This is best done by providing young people with locally-based supports, drawing on the resources that exist in the community, and by giving young people temporary housing options (with extended family, friends, religious institutions, etc.), thus allowing time to work through the problems that led to homelessness, ideally with case management support.

A program model for shelter diversion should integrate other elements of early intervention, including common assessment, case management and family reconnection. Again, as part of a ‘system of care’, there should be an effort to develop the program drawing on mainstream supports in the education and health care systems, for instance. We need to do what we can to keep young people in their communities and close to home (if it is safe to do so) where they can draw on their natural supports.

An effective model of shelter diversion that could be adapted more broadly in Canada is referred to as *respite accommodation*. The goal of respite housing, which is well established in the UK (sometimes referred to as ‘Time Out’ housing) and is becoming more popular in the United States through Host Home programs, is to provide young people with temporary, short term accommodation with lots of supports. It is considered particularly appropriate for young people under the age of 18, is intended as an alternative to the youth shelter system, gives young people a break from their family, or temporary shelter while looking for a place to stay, and also helps young people avoid getting caught up in street youth culture. The actual service delivery model and approach to accommodation can take different forms – it can involve small, purpose built facilities (similar in some ways to shelters), but more often, young people will be placed in households that have a spare room.

In North America, **Host Home** programs have been implemented in many jurisdictions. The State of Minnesota has developed Host Home programs in many areas of the state and significantly, in the Twin Cities they have a program targeting LGBTQ youth. It is a particularly effective model in rural areas – especially those that lack emergency shelters because it allows young people to remain in their community (Baker Collins, this volume).

The development of respite housing stems from the knowledge that young people sometimes become homeless because unresolved family conflict can erupt into a crisis. Temperatures rise, angry words are said, and parents ask the young person to leave or conversely, the youth makes the decision to leave home. In such cases (and in particular where there may be family conflict, but no history of physical, sexual or emotional abuse) a ‘time out’ space is needed, where young people and their families can work on repairing relations so that the youth can return home, or conversely, provides them with accommodation while they work out longer term housing support. Respite accommodation, then, is designed to provide:

*safe, high quality accommodation for a short period of time to give them and their families a ‘breather’, and provide a supportive environment for all parties to rebuild their emotional resilience and renegotiate relationships* (Quilgars et al., 2011:8).

Nightstop is a good example of an effective respite housing program, in the UK. Depaul UK operates 40 Nightstop services, working with over 500 volunteer hosts. Young people aged 16-25 are able to stay with an adult or family for up to twenty-one days.

*Nightstop provides an opportunity for a young person who is homeless to stay with a volunteer, in their home, whilst family reconciliation work is undertaken and/or more settled accommodation secured. Young people are given their own room, a toiletry pack and can have their clothes washed if needed. They are also given an evening meal and breakfast. They are normally asked to vacate the host's property during the day; at what time is a decision for the individual hosts (Insley, 2011b:7).*

An evaluation of the housing outcomes revealed that after staying at Nightstop, 21% of the youth returned to their families, 36% moved into supported housing, 14% obtained private accommodation, 11% moved into social housing, and 14% moved in with a friend (Insley, 2011b).

An interesting shelter diversion program in Canada that brings together many of the elements of prevention discussed here is the Youth Reconnect program, located in the Niagara region of Southern Ontario. The goal is to help young people stay in their communities, and prevent them from eventually migrating to larger cities, by which time their exposure to a range of risks, including addictions, hunger, crime (Gaetz et al., 2010) and sexual exploitation, make moving on with their lives that much more difficult. “The initiative helps clients’ access resources and increases their self-sufficiency, by assisting adolescents to maintain school attendance, secure housing and develop a social safety net in their home community” (RAFT, 2012:1).

The program targets young people between the ages of 16 and 19, who are referred by high schools, community partners, social service agencies and police services. The young person is then met by a reconnect worker to assess their needs and develop a community-based plan of action designed to draw on local supports, enhance protective factors, reduce risk and stay in school.

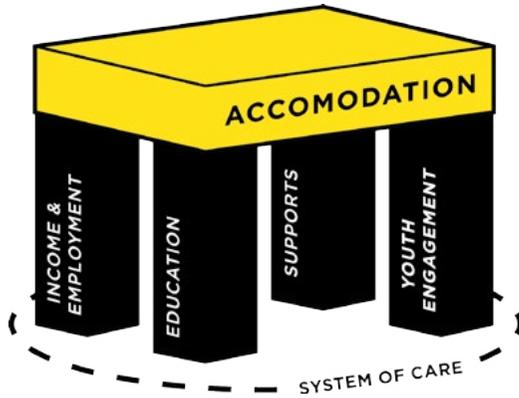
*By creating a localized support network and keeping youth within their home communities, the youth reconnect initiative is able to help youth remain connected to their communities, with the support they need, instead of forcing youth to relocate to a larger urban area, where they are more susceptible to engaging in high risk behaviours (RAFT, 2012:2).*

## For Those Who Cannot Return Home...

When young people leave home and moving back is not an option, the ultimate goal should be to support their to move into more permanent accommodation in a safe and planned way. This must be done with recognition that the needs of young people are diverse enough to require a range of housing

options. The second and equally important point is that any effective approach to the provision of accommodation must be situated within a solid understanding of the needs of a developing adolescent. That is, programs must offer more than shelter, and an opportunity for ‘independence’. A more comprehensive model of accommodation and supports should be built upon four pillars, which are embedded within a broader system of care.

Diagram 3: Accommodation as Part of a System of Care



**Income and Employment**

In Canada, most young people experience great challenges in earning sufficient income to live independently, as they are often trapped in low-wage job sectors, where full time permanent employment is rare. When a young adult with inadequate education is able to enter the formal labour market, it usually results in precarious employment, often on the margins of the economy. It is for this reason that over 42% of young Canadians between the ages of 20 and 29 continue to live with their parents (Statistics Canada, 2012a).

All of this suggests that a key task of responding to youth homelessness is to enhance the employability of youth through effective job training and employment programs. However, traditional models of employment training that focus narrowly on skills development and motivation will be unlikely to meet the needs of young people who have experienced homelessness. It also means that even when young people are employed, they may need additional income supports. In Canada, there are several inspiring examples of programs designed specifically for homeless youth, including the highly successful Choices for Youth in St. John’s, Newfoundland, a ‘green jobs’ employment and accommodations program, and BladeRunners in Vancouver, which provides Aboriginal youth with training opportunities in the construction and cultural industries. There are also examples of effective strategies to engage the corporate sector in the provision of employment opportunities for homeless youth (Noble, 2012; Noble & Oseni, this volume).

**Education**

Educational engagement and achievement should be at the centre of accommodation and support models. Unfortunately, education is often an afterthought

when young people become homeless; something that is part of the young person's past. We know that a high percentage of homeless youth do not completed high school – up to 65% (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Gaetz, O'Grady, Buccieri, 2010). We also know that in Canada, education matters now more than ever, and that early school leavers face a competitive disadvantage in the marketplace (Sum et al., 2009; Statistics Canada, 2010; 2012b; c). For instance, during the recent economic downturn in 2008/2009, the unemployment rate amongst dropouts was more than twice as high (23.2%) as it was for high school graduates (11.9%) (Statistics Canada, 2010). While the rise of 'credentialism' (Côté & Bynner, 2008) has resulted in a steady decline in drop out rates in Canada (7.8% in 2011-2012) (Statistics Canada, 2012b), the drop out rate for homeless youth remains incredibly high at over 65% (Gaetz, O'Grady, Buccieri, 2010). Though homeless youth experience incredible barriers to obtaining education, we do know some of the factors that promote school engagement (Liljedahl et al., this volume). For a long term and sustainable solution to youth homelessness, we must broaden our focus from youth independence, to re-engagement in school.

### **Case Management and Supports**

As is the case with early intervention, young people, once housed, may need continued case management. Required supports should be driven both by the nature of the young person's needs, but also their desires. This may include transitional supports (funds to pay for rent, furniture, help obtaining a lease, bank account, etc.), life skills and for some, supports with mental health and addictions issues. A client-driven, flexible and open ended model is encouraged (Rosengard et al., 2007), where young people work with a counselor or case manager to develop a plan and identify their goals, as well as the activities, resources and supports that will help them achieve those goals.

### **Youth Engagement**

When one talks about supporting a young person's transition to adulthood, there is a concern not only for their achievement, but equally important, their well-being. All adolescents and young adults need to feel connected, and believe that they matter. One of the things that supportive parents and families do is help nurture positive relationships and connections between youth and the members of their community. Youth engagement also includes activities that are meaningful and fulfilling, whether leisure-based (sports, the arts) or different forms of civic engagement. So when we talk about meaningful engagement, there is an opportunity to nurture a sense of belonging, which is a critical component to helping young people feel accepted, competent, valued and part of something beyond one's self (Schonert-Reichl, 2008).

In other words, providing young people with a roof over their heads, income

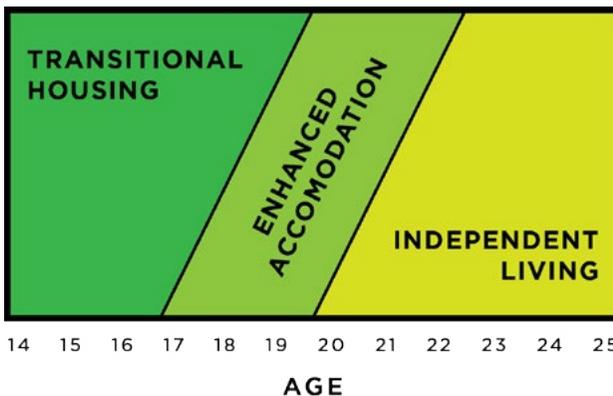
and supports is not necessarily enough. The outcome of efforts to house youth should not result in a young person sitting alone in an apartment, bored, isolated and without meaningful relationships. This is particularly important to consider because for young people deeply involved in street life, finding accommodation can ironically mean yet more losses, as young people leave friends behind (often by choice) (Karabanow & Naylor, this volume).

### Models of Accommodation

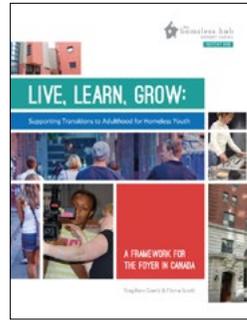
When considering models of accommodation for young people, it should be stated up front that there is no single or ideal housing option that will meet the needs of all youth (Millar, 2009; 2010; Eberle et al., 2007). An effective response to youth homelessness should give young people choices and options based on their age, experience, level of independence and need. Based on a range of factors, and depending on the individual, some housing options will be more appropriate than others. Some young people may require high levels of support, and are suitably housed in more institutional congregate facilities, with common areas and adult support present 24 hours a day. Youth who are chronically disconnected, with few family supports and a history of institutional involvement (child protection or corrections) may have high support needs, but not be ideally suited to an institutional congregate setting. Older youth who are ‘temporarily disconnected,’ but who have independent living skills and low support needs may simply require assistance in obtaining their own housing, with very little additional supports. A large number of young people will fit somewhere in between these circumstances.

Ideally, then, there should then be a range of housing options for young people. Diagram 4 demonstrates three broad (and overlapping) accommodation and support options for young people.

Diagram 4: Accommodation Options for Homeless Youth



The **Foyer** is a transitional housing model with a strong track record in the United Kingdom and Australia, and is one that can easily be adapted to the Canadian context. The CHRN report on Foyers (and accompanying tool kit) lays out in great detail what a Foyer is, what the research says about its effectiveness as a model of accommodation and supports, and how we can develop it here. What makes the Foyer an effective model of transitional housing is that it is designed to meet the needs of developing adolescents and young adults. Young people can stay for extended periods, in order to develop life skills, stay in school, nurture positive relationships and participate in meaningful activities. It is a model of accommodation and supports built to nurture the transition to adulthood in a safe, respectful and meaningful way.



**FOYER REPORT:** [www.homelesshub.ca/foyer](http://www.homelesshub.ca/foyer)

**FOYER TOOLKIT:** [www.homelesshub.ca/foyer toolkit](http://www.homelesshub.ca/foyer toolkit)

The first is *transitional housing*, which for many young people is a fitting option because they may not be ready for independent living (Novac et al., 2004). That is, they lack the skills, confidence, maturity and experience to move immediately into independent living. Transitional housing is typically time limited, but is accompanied by a range of supports to help young people prepare for independent living.

The **Foyer** represents an interesting and effective model of transitional housing for youth (Gaetz & Scott, 2012). There is considerable research and evaluation that demonstrates the effectiveness of the model, which combines a longer period of tenancy with a focus on education, the building of life skills, youth engagement and efforts to socially integrate young people into the community. A recent Homeless Hub report, “Live, Learn and Grow” (Gaetz & Scott, 2012), articulates a model for the broader adaptation of the Foyer model in the Canadian context.

At the other end of the spectrum, and certainly the goal of all models of accommodation and supports for young people, is *independent living*, where young people obtain and maintain their own permanent housing in either the social housing sector or private market, and their use of supports and services is minimal. Many young people will need supports in order to get into housing in the first place, but their needs will lessen once they are housed, and as they grow older. Other young people may need ongoing or floating support.

An intermediary level between transitional housing and independent living can be referred to *enhanced accommodation*. This describes a situation wherein young people obtain their own accommodation in a non-institutional environment, but may require some level of ongoing support, whether financial, social or health related.

As Housing First grows in popularity, several places in Canada – including Toronto, Halifax, Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton – are experimenting with its applicability for young people. For instance, in Calgary both the *Boys and Girls Club* and *Woods Homes* have implemented Housing First programs for youth, with promising results after the first year (minimum 85 per cent housing retention rate). However, the chapter by Forchuk et al. (this volume) on a youth-focused Housing First program in London, Ontario suggests that while many young people thrive in a Housing First context, it does not work for everyone. Those with mental health and addictions issues (or a combination of both) sometimes find the choice and independence offered by the model too much to handle, and a ‘set up for failure’ (Forchuk et al., this volume). That is, some young people find independent living to be isolating and may enable drug use, and therefore prefer to address other developmental/health issues prior to independent living. Forchuk and her team conclude that a ‘one size fits all’ approach proposed by some advocates is actually quite limiting and ignores the incredible variability in needs and circumstances of young people who are homeless.

## Conclusion

There are indeed solutions to youth homelessness, and prevention can and should be central to these solutions. The review of programs and practices from around the world reveals that innovation combined with passion can lead to good results. Many Canadian communities and provincial governments are now interested in moving towards strategic responses to addressing the problem; understanding how we can stop the flow of young people from child protection, mental health facilities or juvenile detention into homelessness; identifying a stronger role for schools as part of the solution; helping strengthen families, and offering young people a way back home. We also understand that many young people can no longer return home, and in some cases have no home to go to. For these young people, we need strong models of accommodation and supports that will help them move forward with their lives.

Underlying all of this is the need to make some broader changes in Canadian society. We need to ensure that there is an adequate supply of affordable housing. We need to ensure that young people have the opportunity to earn a suf-

ficient income to pay the rent, purchase food and have fulfilling lives. We must ensure that every young person has the opportunity to go to school and fulfill his or her dreams. And finally, we must push for a society where young women, LGBTQ youth and those who experience racism are not discriminated against and held back, but where all young people can unleash their potential.

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## Youth homelessness is a seemingly intractable problem in Canada.

In communities across the country, people are increasingly aware of the sight of young people who are without a home, sleeping in parks, sitting on sidewalks or asking for money. What do we know about these young people, and what should we do?

*Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice* aims to fill a gap in the information available on this important issue by providing an easily accessible collection of the best Canadian research and policy analysis in the field.

If we are going to solve youth homelessness in a meaningful way, we need solutions that are informed by the best research. This book has been written with this in mind. In this volume, leading Canadian scholars present key findings from their research on youth homelessness. In an effort to make this research accessible as well as relevant to decision-makers and practitioners, contributing authors have been asked to address the 'so whatness' of their research; to make clear the policy and practice implications of their research so as to better inform the efforts of those working to address youth homelessness.

The contributors to this book are committed to supporting the development of more effective solutions to youth homelessness. Not only can we do things differently, we need to. And research on youth homelessness can help make a difference.