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Addressing Youth Homelessness in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality TECHNICAL REPORT

**To: Innovative Solutions to Homelessness (Contribution Projects)—Employment and
Social Development Canada (ESDC)**

**From: Fred Deveaux, Executive Director
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Purpose:

This is the final Technical Report for the project “Addressing Youth Homelessness in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality” that was funded by the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness funding through Employment and Skill Development Canada.

Background:

The Partners:

The Cape Breton Community Housing Association (CBCHA) was established in 1977 and is a registered non-profit organization that is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. The mandate of CBCHA is to provide quality, community based support and outreach programs for adults living with mental illness and/or experiencing homelessness in a non-institutional environment. Under this mandate we currently operate two provincially licensed 9-bed Group Homes, one 4-bed Group Home, eight 3-bed Small Option Homes, an Independent Living Support Program (22 clients) and an Outreach Program in New Waterford, the Community Homeless Shelter, and the Housing First Program.

Pathways to Employment is a not for profit social enterprise that offers individuals with mental illness meaningful, supported employment and pre-employment training through three social businesses as well as employment with private businesses.

The Cape Breton Association of Youth Homelessness and Programs Initiative (CBAYHPI) is a volunteer Board of Directors that was instrumental in the development of Access 808, a drop-in centre for youth in CBRM. Members include representatives from Cape Breton University, Cape Breton Transition House, Public Health and Mental Health & Addictions from the Nova Scotia Health Authority, New Dawn Enterprises, Pathways Cape Breton, Cape Breton

Community Housing Association, Ally Centre Cape Breton, and Community Cares Youth Outreach.

Youth Homelessness in CBRM:

The Cape Breton Regional Municipality has a population of 97,938, an Unemployment rate of 14%, a youth unemployment rate of 25%, and a child poverty rate of 32.4%. CBRM does not have an Emergency Homeless Shelter dedicated exclusively for youth. Currently, homeless youth in CBRM can stay at either the Community Homeless Shelter (Adult Men) or the Transition House (Violence Against Women Shelter). As noted in CBRM's Vital Signs Report (2012),

“CBRM's youth population is under threat, as seen through relatively high rates of youth unemployment, crime and out-migration. This requires our immediate attention to realize CBRM's potential for community vitality and future development”.

Although there has yet to be a dedicated, homeless youth-specific research project in CBRM, other recent pieces of research point to a serious youth homelessness issue.

- A 2013-14 study by Cape Breton University found that of the 100 youth included in the report, 56% aged 16 to 24 who were clients of Access 808 were experiencing some form of homelessness (11% were absolutely homeless, 18% were couch surfing, 27% had temporary accommodations with family or friends).
- On April 15th, 2016, a Point in Time Count found 137 homeless individuals, 19% of whom were youth under the age of 24. This study was replicated on April 19th, 2018 and found 115 homeless individuals of whom 19% were youth under the age of 24.
- A Service-Based Count done in CBRM over 4 weeks in April, 2016, found that 304 individuals were experiencing homelessness with 38% of those being 29 years of age or younger. This study was replicated in April, 2018 and found 278 homeless individuals with 42% of those being under the age of 30.
- Last year, CBCHA's Homelessness Programs, which included Housing First for Youth, supported 60 homeless youth aged 24 years old or lower.

Despite these numbers, CBRM has just recently received funding for dedicated programming targeted to youth experiencing homelessness. The increasing rate of child poverty in CBRM points to an escalation in youth homelessness if further appropriate prevention and system planning are not soon developed and implemented. As stated in **The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016**,

“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.”

The Plan to Address Youth Homelessness in CBRM:

“Communities and all levels of government across Canada have begun to recognize that youth homelessness is distinct from adult homelessness and thus requires distinct solutions”. **The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016**, Stephen Gaetz et. al., Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016.

At the outset of this project, the partners committed to understanding the full scope of youth homelessness in CBRM and to develop and implement appropriate, distinct interventions that will measure outcomes for the duration of this project. Specifically, the partners committed to:

1. Developing a Youth Homelessness Community Plan through the creation of community-wide strategic partnerships, the development of research-based system planning, integration, and prevention focused supports for youth. The publication, ***A Way Home: Youth Homelessness Community Planning Toolkit***, by Alina Turner and the Canadian Observatory and Homelessness and the Homeless Hub will be used as a guide for the development of this plan.
2. Developing a youth-specific Housing First program using the publication ***A Safe and Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth***, by Stephen Gaetz of the Homeless Hub, 2014.

Developing a Youth Homelessness Community Plan for CBRM:

The partners to this proposal hired a Community Plan Coordinator in December, 2017 and who was directed by the Affordable Housing and Homelessness Working Group (AHHWG) and the CBAYHPI Board. The person was directed to develop the Community Plan through research, consultation, engagement, and facilitation using the **A Way Home: Youth Homelessness Community Planning Kit**. Specifically, the Coordinator was directed to develop a Community Plan (see attached Appendix A) that:

- Developed guiding principles that framed this work that is sensitive to the local CBRM context, the distinct needs of homeless youth, and is grounded in prevention strategies.
- Gathered data through evidence-based research that provides a full understanding of youth homelessness in CBRM through partnership and collaboration with appropriate local, provincial, and national agencies. This data gathering built on already well-established research networks in CBRM.
- Using this data, analyzed current needs and projected future needs for youth experiencing homelessness.
- Developed a complete inventory of local, provincial, and national youth organizations operating within CBRM including roles and responsibilities.

- Developed and implemented a consultation process and plan that included input from key agents such as: Youth (including key sub-populations that could include Indigenous youth, LGBTQ2S youth, rural youth, and recent immigrant youth), Government (municipal, provincial, federal), Service Providers, the Education System, and the Public.
- Clearly identified gaps in current youth services and system capacity.
- Explored best practices for youth-serving homelessness programming including an extensive Literature Review.
- Developed priority recommendations that considers projected results, costs, sustainability plan, and projected savings.
- Made recommendations to develop system planning and integration that includes development of coordinated access and assessment, the creation of a collaborative interagency service delivery system, the development of effective early intervention strategies, and entrenches rapid responsiveness to youth who become homeless.
- Made recommendations on implementation strategies that includes policy implications and risk management considerations.
- Clearly outlined targets and created a framework for measuring outcomes.
- Clearly outlined and implemented a dissemination plan that will included local media releases, a publication submission to both the Homeless Hub (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness) and the A Way Home National Coalition, local meetings, a community conference held on January 21st, 2019, a video, publication on the website cbcha.ca, and briefs to elected municipal, provincial, and federal elected officials.

This CBRM Community Plan for Youth Homelessness will be used as a platform to re-engage with all of the partners and consultative groups to begin the process of implementation. It will also be used to negotiate and request further funding for youth-specific supports and services from the provincial and federal governments.

Housing First for Youth:

“The question is not ‘Does Housing First work for youth?’, because it works for anybody. Rather, we need to ask, ‘How can Housing First be adapted to meet the needs of young people who experience homelessness?’” **Stephen Gaetz, A Safe & Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth**, Homeless Hub, 2014.

Housing First is a recovery-oriented program that involves rapidly moving individuals experiencing homelessness into stable housing and surrounding them with the proper supports to help them maintain that housing.

This project sought to develop a Housing First Program that is tailored to youth experiencing homelessness using **A Safe & Decent Place to Live** as a planning guide, and by developing

important strategic partnerships with existing organizations. As this guide indicates, “*A Youth-focused approach to Housing First must go beyond assisting young people merely to become independent, but rather, to enable them to make a successful transition to adulthood.*” Rather than simply being an extension of the adult Housing First Program, the youth-centred approach considered other issues and concerns. Along with assisting with finding suitable housing and financial assistance, youth in the program required a range of other social supports that included reconnecting with family where safe and appropriate, recreational activities, skill development and training, employment, and education, in addition to mental health and addiction supports.

The partners to this project agreed to oversee and implement a Housing First for Youth demonstration project that includes these youth-specific supports for 12 homeless youth in CBRM. The Program actually provided supports to 15 youth with further details below.

The Cape Breton Community Housing Association hired two front-line Housing First Support Workers to work under the direction of the current Housing First Team. These two workers provided direct interventions for 15 youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who were experiencing homelessness. These two workers operated under the already established program but tailored the Housing First approach to include five guiding core principles:

1. Immediate access to housing with no preconditions.
2. Youth choice and self-determination.
3. Positive youth development orientation.
4. Individualized and client-driven supports.
5. Social and community integration.

The two workers assisted homeless youth in accessing appropriate supports, including housing and financial supports, within the community and through the help of the many partners to this proposal. Wherever possible, the Youth were encouraged to re-engage with the formal education system and to return to schooling. The Youth also had the chance to access education and employment supports in partnership with Pathways to Employment which will be discussed in greater detail below.

Housing First for Youth Results:

The Following housing related outcomes were achieved through this project:

- Of the 15 participants, four were housed entering the pilot program and 11 had an average of 21 days in homelessness prior to placement
- Across participants, there is a range of two to 12 months spent in housing during the pilot year
- There was one re-entry into homelessness lasting four weeks, and one program exit
- Several clients relocated or were at imminent risk of losing housing (e.g., due to eviction), but re-entry into homelessness was avoided due to caseworker assisting them to find alternate accommodations

- Across participants:
 - 55 connections to community supports made or maintained
 - 13 reunifications with family members/friends/social networks
 - 10 total reconnections with educational opportunities in addition to CREW training
 - Eight connections with employment opportunities

Pathways to Employment Youth CREW – Creative Rewarding Education and Work:

Pathways to Employment hired a Coordinator to develop and implement a homeless youth-specific education and work program called Youth CREW. The Course and Curriculum Design are attached (see Appendix B).

Objective:

The program provided job experience/skills development for homeless youth with barriers to employment an opportunity to develop marketable job skills, strengthen life skills and explore options for the future. Participants in the program gained practical experience while earning money working in various social business initiatives run by Pathways to Employment. During these activities individuals received daily coaching, guidance, support and feedback from Pathways and Housing First staff, and worked on their essential skills through two phases of the project. They gained work experience, increased their confidence in their abilities, and were assisted in transitioning into the workforce or onto further educational pursuits.

Program Structure:

Homeless youth who were accepted took part in a 33-week program. Part 1 of the program was 24 weeks. During the 24-week activity/essential skill building component of the program, participants spent 3 days per week in a classroom setting learning from a curriculum that included: essential skills, career exploration, employment readiness, certification courses and financial literacy. The other 2 days a week were spent building on their skills, knowledge and experience by working in the Social Businesses. The Housing First Youth Workers were available to help facilitate attendance and to trouble-shoot any issues or difficulties that may arise.

Part 2 of the program was 9 weeks. Upon completion of the activity / essential skill building component and the Social Business Lines work experience, the project participants made the final transition into a community employment placement where they were supported individually by the Youth CREW Coordinator and the Housing First Youth staff. The Coordinator was directly responsible for ensuring the employment placements were a good fit for both participant and employer alike. Regular visits were made to ensure both the participant and employers were satisfied and comfortable in their position. Participants were placed with a local employer in a position with potential for ongoing employment in accordance with their individual employment plan.

After the initial two phases were completed some additional training was provided for the youth enrolled in the program. This training was specific to maintaining independent housing and focused on independent living skills development.

Youth Crew Results:

Program outcomes reported by staff:

- 15 participants started the program (12 in January 2018, three delayed entries)
- 11 participants completed Phase 1 of the program.
- The majority of participants:
 - completed courses such as Food Handlers, First Aid/CPR, WHMIS/OHS, and Naloxone training
 - Showed an increase in self-determination, social, cognitive, and life skills, social connections, job readiness, and confidence entering the workforce
 - Engaged in personal wellness and are sustaining a stronger sense of wellbeing
 - Made a change in lifestyle to meet their educational/employment goals
 - Are working toward educational endeavors
- 10 direct staff interventions were implemented to help maintain six participants in the program
- Nine participants completed Phase 2 of the program
- Five participants are employed or engaged in school post-program

Conclusions:

The overall results from this pilot project were encouraging. Most of the Youth who enrolled had great success in ending their homelessness and remaining housed through the duration of the project. In addition, the project prevented long-term exposure to homelessness for the Youth who enrolled and it is hoped the effects of this carry over into their adult lives. There were also many positive outcomes of the YouthCrew programming that have carried over into further pursuits of educational and employment opportunities. In all, this project highlighted the need for ongoing resources, supports, services and funding that is specific to the unique needs of youth experiencing homelessness.

APPENDIX A

Youth Homelessness in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality: A Community Plan (attached)

APPENDIX B

Pathways Youth Crew Curriculum and Course Design (attached)

