

# Coming Up Together

A Research Report Prepared for the  
Homelessness Partnering Strategy



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## Acknowledgements:

This research report is a summary of the Coming Up Together (CUT) conference, prepared for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) Division of Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). The recommendations are that of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of ESDC.

The report was authored by PhD students Cora MacDonald and Genevieve Johnston, and Associate Professor, Dr. Jacqueline Kennelly, Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University.

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## Coming Up Together: A Research Report Prepared for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy

By Cora MacDonald, Genevieve Johnston and Jacqueline Kennelly

This is divided into two major sections. **Part A** provides a detailed overview of the CUT conference, including its objectives, attendees, plenary panels, breakout sessions, engagement sessions and the youth stream. **Part B** provides a summary of the lessons learned, promising practices and service, and policy recommendations that emerged from the conference.

Coming Up Together 2018 Conference  
[www.coming-up-together.ca](http://www.coming-up-together.ca)

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# Executive Summary

## **Background**

Youth homelessness in Canada is an ongoing crisis, with 35,000 to 40,000 youth experiencing homelessness across the country in any given year<sup>1</sup>. The siloing of different sectors and services has led to a lack of coordinated responses to this complex issue.

In order to stimulate inter-sectoral discussion and planning strategies to prevent and end youth homelessness in Canada, the CUT Conference, convened by Dr. Jacqueline Kennelly with the help of a multi-sector steering committee and youth stream planning team made up of youth with lived experience of homelessness, brought together 200 stakeholders in the field of youth homelessness from the policy, service provision, and academic sectors across Canada and internationally.

Conference objectives were to facilitate knowledge exchange between the sectors; establish regional, provincial, national and international linkages; enhance sector capacity; and move policy agendas forward.

## **Conference Structure**

The three-day conference took place from February 20-22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, at the University of Ottawa. Conference events included:

- A dedicated youth stream planned and led by youth with lived experience, with practical sessions intended to share knowledge on issues important to youth who are at risk or experiencing homelessness
- A youth engagement session with the HPS, co-facilitated by two young people with lived experience, to consult youth about promising practices for creating innovative, intersectional, and youth-informed approaches to community planning<sup>2</sup>
- A World Café on provincial approaches to youth homelessness, hosted by A Way Home Canada
- Opening and closing plenary sessions each day bringing together policy representatives, service providers, youth with lived experience, and researchers
- Breakout sessions, including workshops, paper presentations, and panel discussions which were led by service providers, youth, researchers and policy leaders from across Canada, with contributions from the U.S. and the U.K.
- A Performing Arts Showcase organized and performed by youth with lived experience
- A Visual Art Show and sale of artworks created by youth with lived experience
- Walking tours led by youth with lived experience, to give conference attendees a glimpse of a day in the life of a homeless young person in Ottawa
- A Memorial Spirit Flag art space and display to remember young people who have lost their lives as a result of homelessness and street-involvement

# Main Findings and Policy Recommendations

Over the span of the conference, four major themes emerged that are essential for ending and preventing youth homelessness in Canada:

## **1. *Troubling the construction of youth homelessness:***

The ways in which we, as a society, frame the idea of the ‘homeless youth’ has major practice and policy implications. Service providers and policy makers need to be attentive to the stereotypes that are attached to youth homelessness, including in particular the assumption that their homelessness is an individual, rather than systems-level, failure. We also need to be attentive to who gets left out of service provision and policy when we overlook those who may not fit popular stereotypes about homeless youth, including newcomer youth, young women, LGBTQ2S+ youth, and Indigenous youth.

## **3. *Prevention frameworks for ending youth homelessness:***

Prevention and early intervention are essential strategies for assisting youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Reactive responses condemn youth to hardship, trauma, and social stigma. Proactive responses to youth homelessness mean prioritizing early intervention programs within public institutions and systems, including education, child welfare, and criminal justice, through identifying youth at risk and offering wraparound supports through a coordinated systems approach. Demographics such as Indigenous, LGBTQ2S+, and racialized youth, as well as youth exiting care, require tailored interventions that offer culturally appropriate, safe, and inclusive supports. All levels of government must be engaged in upstream approaches to homelessness prevention through various ministries, departments, and institutions, including health, education, child protection, criminal justice, housing, employment and training.

### *Further Reading*

<sup>1</sup> Gaetz, Stephen and Melanie Redman. (2016). *Federal Investment in Youth Homelessness: Comparing Canada and the United States and a Proposal for Reinvestment*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.

<sup>2</sup> Johnston, G. and MacDonald, C. (2018). ‘Integrating youth first voices into community-based planning: A report of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy’s youth engagement at the Coming Up Together Conference’.

## **2. *Human rights approaches and service delivery models:***

This framework for ending and preventing youth homelessness treats housing as a fundamental human and legal right for all youth in Canada. Service providers observed that adopting this model on a policy level reduces the precariousness of housing supports for youth by treating housing as a guaranteed right, rather than a privilege or reward for engaging with treatment or employment interventions. Recommendations were made for the Government of Canada to implement housing as a human right, whereby local authorities, with the support of provincial and federal governments, are required to provide assistance to those at risk of and experiencing homelessness. This strategy has been implemented with success in England, Ireland, and Wales.

## **4. *Meaningful youth engagement:***

40 young people with lived experience of homelessness attended the conference. In partnership with the HPS, CUT was able to provide financial support to 16 young people with lived experience of homelessness from youth-serving organizations across Canada to attend the conference. These young leaders, together with many other youth attending the conference, emphasized the importance of policy, research, and services that say “nothing about us, without us”. Youth themselves are the true experts on their own experiences and are well positioned to contribute to innovative, insightful strategies for addressing youth homelessness if given the opportunity. Barriers that prevent youth engagement, such as a lack of compensation for participation, and a lack of opportunity for ongoing relationship building, engagement and input, must be addressed. On a policy level, this requires compensating youth with honoraria, food, and bus tickets when they are asked to participate, and reporting back to youth participants about how their ideas and input are being implemented at community, provincial, and national levels. The creation of long-term engagement opportunities, such as youth councils, are essential tools for encouraging youth leadership and participation, as well as ensuring accountability and oversight in implementing youths’ recommendations for policy and service provision.<sup>2</sup>





## Part A: Overview and Description of Coming Up Together 2018 Conference

### Context: The Canadian Crisis of Youth Homelessness

Over the course of the year between 35,000 and 40,000 young people experience homelessness in Canada, and on any given night at least 6,000 are homeless (Gaetz and Redman 2016). Indigenous and LGBTQ2S+ youth are over-represented amongst homeless populations. Urban Indigenous peoples, including youth, are eight times more likely to experience homelessness than the general population, and are estimated to make up between 20% and 50% of homeless populations in major urban centres in Canada, while LGBTQ2S+ young people are estimated to make up 20% to 40% of urban homeless youth populations (Gaetz, Dej, Richter, and Redman 2016). Since homeless counts are known to under-represent the actual numbers of people who are homeless (Cloke, Milbourne, and Widdowfield 2001), missing, for instance, young people who are 'couch surfing,' staying with relatives, or in temporary accommodations outside of the shelter system, the number of homeless youth across the country is likely higher.

The social and personal costs of youth homelessness are extraordinarily high. Homeless youth suffer higher degrees of physical and mental health problems, are at higher risk of HIV infection, are more likely to be malnourished, encounter frequent and extreme forms of violence and victimization, are much more likely to be subject to criminalization, and have extremely high mortality rates (Antoniades and Tarasuk 1998; Baron 2003; Boivin et al. 2005; DeMatteo et al. 1999; Kennelly 2011a; Kennelly 2015b). More than half of Canadian homeless youth spend time in jail, at a very high cost to the state. Shelter costs for homeless youth in Canada are between CDN\$30,000 and CDN\$40,000 per year; the cost of penal detention runs closer to CDN\$100,000 per year (Karabanow et al. 2016). Involvement in the criminal justice system has long term consequences for young people in terms of employability, mental health, and educational outcomes, further marginalizing youth (Aizer and Doyle 2013; John Howard Society of BC 2013). Overall, the estimated economic impact of homelessness on Canadian taxpayers is between \$4.5 billion and \$6 billion dollars per year, a total that takes into account direct costs such as shelters and services as well as indirect costs such as increased use of policing, the health care system, and the criminal justice system (Gaetz 2012).

## **Overview of *Coming Up Together: Towards Ending and Preventing Youth Homelessness in Ontario, Canada, and Beyond***

Between February 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, more than 200 academics, policy makers, service providers, and young people with lived experiences of homelessness gathered at the University of Ottawa to attend the 'Coming Up Together: Towards Ending and Preventing Youth Homelessness in Ontario, Canada, and Beyond' Conference, convened by Dr. Jacqueline Kennelly of Carleton University.

Dr. Kennelly collaborated with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, A Way Home Canada, A Way Home Ottawa, the Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa, the Centre for Research in Community and Educational Services at the University of Ottawa, the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition, graduate research assistants, and a youth advisory committee. Conference organizers also benefited from the advice of the City of Ottawa's Housing Services branch, the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy,



Figure 1: Audience members listening to the opening plenary panel at the Coming Up Together conference, Feb 20, 2018.

### **Goal**

We believe that all young people have the right to be safely housed and to have the appropriate supports in place to ensure their successful transitions to adulthood. Our experience working with and alongside young people who are homeless has made it clear that despite great work being done in the communities, these basic rights are not being met for all Canadian youth.

One of the barriers to change is a lack of coordination and communication between different sectors who are impacted by, responding to, and researching youth homelessness, and the resultant 'silo effect' that can hinder effective responses to such a complex social issue. The Coming Up Together conference was convened to break down silos and foster cross-sectoral communication that leads to concrete solutions.



# Objectives

The three major objectives of the CUT conference were (i) to facilitate knowledge exchange between diverse sectors; (ii) to establish regional, provincial, national, and international linkages; and (iii) to enhance sector capacity and move forward policy agendas on addressing youth homelessness.

[Heidi Walter](#) @HeidiHkwalter Feb 22

Thank you Coming up Together for an incredibly inspiring conference. We came together and change will happen! @2018Cut – at University of Ottawa | Université d'Ottawa – uOttawa

## **(i) Facilitate Knowledge Exchange**

As the first Canadian conference to focus exclusively on youth homelessness, leading Canadian and international researchers on youth homelessness, managers, and frontline staff of the service organizations that are in daily contact with homeless youth, policy makers from across Ontario and Canada who are working towards ending youth homelessness in their respective locales, and young people who are their own experts on what it means to experience homelessness gathered to access, exchange, generate and mobilize knowledge about innovative systemic solutions to youth homelessness in Ontario. Knowledge exchange between and within the sectors was fostered through a unique cross sectoral planning committee, innovative plenary panels, a dedicated youth stream, feedback sessions, and publicly available outputs, like the live streaming and archiving of the plenary panel videos (available at [www.coming-up-together.ca/plenary-videos](http://www.coming-up-together.ca/plenary-videos)).

[Cheyanne T. Ratnam](#) @CheyRatnam Apr 24

Amazing for #AWayHomeToronto to be contacted by other areas in #Canada. Received correspondence from #NovaScotia (who got my info at @CominUpTogether). Looking 4ward to sharing the way I have developed the engagement structure and process for AWH. #homelessness #onpoli #cdnpoli

## **(ii) Establish Regional, Provincial, National, and International Linkages**

More than 200 conference participants travelled from communities across Ontario, Canada, and internationally to participate. In total, 40 young people who were currently homeless or had experiences of homelessness attended the conference as invited speakers, attendees and/or presenters. Twelve Ontario communities were represented by attendees affiliated with academic institutions, youth serving agencies, not-for-profits, charities, and government. From outside Ontario, six additional Canadian provinces and one Territory were represented (Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and the North West Territories). Through collaboration with Employment and Social Development's Homelessness Partnering Strategy, Coming Up Together established partnerships with eight youth-serving organizations in five different provinces and one Canadian Territory (Newfoundland, Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and the Northwest Territories) to provide financial support for 16 young people with lived experience to travel to Ottawa and attend the conference. Linkages were established so that those who are impacted by, responding to, and researching youth homelessness in Ontario, across Canada and internationally could learn from one another about effective strategies for addressing youth homelessness.

## **(iii) Enhance Sector Capacity and Move Forward Policy Agenda**

To move forward policy at the federal, provincial, and municipal level, key policy representatives at each level of government were invited to attend an afternoon feedback session hosted by A Way Home Canada, entitled 'Where do we go from here?' and participate in the final plenary panel identifying innovative solutions to ending and preventing youth homelessness. The insights from this session have been developed into a report, which has been shared by A Way Home Canada with CUT attendees for feedback.

[Dave K. French](#) @DaveKFrench Feb 21

The dialogue starts with how WE define an end to #youthhomelessness & ends with understanding OUR collective efforts towards a prevention & sustained exits agenda. Grateful to have this opportunity & to share this space with these inspired minds. @CominUpTogether #2018CUT



Figure 2:  
Audience members  
listening to plenary panel  
at the Coming Up Together conference,  
Feb 21, 2018.



## ***Plenary Panels:***

The conference was opened and closed each day by a plenary panel of speakers representing the different sectors. The six plenary topics and invited panelists were generated in consultation with the conference steering committee.

Figure 3: Clare Nobbs from Egale Canada speaks on *Housing as a Human Right* plenary panel about LGBTQ2S+ youth shelter in Toronto.



## **a) Plenary topics:**

- Housing as a Human Right
- Over-represented Demographics
- The Social Construction of Youth Homelessness
- Meaningful Youth Engagement
- Prevention Road Map for Ending Youth Homelessness
- Solutions to Youth Homelessness

For the complete schedule and descriptions of each plenary panel and breakout session, please see [www.coming-up-together/program/](http://www.coming-up-together/program/)

Plenary panels (excepting the final plenary) were live webcasted and archived on the conference website at <http://www.coming-up-together.ca/plenary-videos/>

## b) Breakout Sessions:

Conference attendees could choose between four simultaneous streams organized thematically in the daily breakout sessions. In total the conference programme included 30 workshops, presentations, and panels which were solicited through Calls for Presentations. Discussions in break-out sessions were led by approximately 100 presenters representing more than 70 different youth serving agencies, non-for-profit organizations, academic and research institutions, and public sector departments.

The breadth and scope of the content covered during the breakout sessions was wide, but is encompassed under the following themes (listed alphabetically). A brief description of each breakout session (including the geographical area addressed in the presentation) is listed below.

### ***Academic-Community Collaborations***

- Ottawa: Peer research and perspectives on service provision
- New York City, NY: Investigating park bench world making for queer, trans and genderqueer youth in New York City
- Rural and urban Canada: Activist-informed approaches to understanding educational barriers

### ***Collaborative Interventions***

- Hamilton: Community-driven triage and support programs for drug using street-involved and homeless youth
- Ottawa: Mental health early interventions for at-risk and homeless youth



Figure 4: Art workshop led by Ottawa Inner City Ministries, as part of the Youth Stream of the Coming Up Together conference.



### ***Creative Interventions***

- Canada: Supporting the animal-human bond through strengths-based approaches
- Edmonton: Art as prevention tool, contesting exploitative labour through sports-based interventions
- Halifax and Toronto: Using participatory arts methods to tell stories; ethical and methodological challenges for researchers
- Montreal: Community gardens and photovoice as tools to implement food security
- Ontario: Innovative youth housing through mobile wraparound systems for youth in transition.

### ***Employment Interventions***

- Newfoundland: Leveraging social enterprises to create flexible employment opportunities for at-risk and homeless youth.

### ***Engaging Young People in Social Change***

- Canada: Panel discussion on the need to go beyond a basic needs approach to homelessness to recognize the importance of intellectual, cultural and political participation in the lives of homeless youth
- Canada: Elections Canada workshop on understanding voting barriers for service providers and learning from youth about how to address these issues
- U.K.: Peer advice on transcending engagement barriers through participatory action research.

### ***Gender and Sexuality***

- Toronto: Trauma-informed care and specialized housing supports for women who experience sexual exploitation, housing supports for women with mental health issues
- Canada: Understanding sexual health behaviors and concerns of homeless youth
- Canada and United States: Recognizing libraries as LGBTQ2S+ allies through their role in providing programming, community building and personal support.

### ***Harm Reduction***

- Canada: Normalizing harm reduction for homeless youth who use drugs through peer leadership
- Toronto: Fostering self-care, community care and social justice through creative engagement tools for youth who use drugs.

### ***Housing First for Youth in Practice***

- Calgary: Specialized Housing First programming for Indigenous and LGBTQ2S youth
- Guelph: Coordinated entry systems and by-name lists
- Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto: Lessons learned from early implementation of Housing First for Indigenous youth, youth exiting care, and youth experiencing long-term homelessness
- Ottawa: Hiring Peer Supporters, offering wraparound support for high acuity youth
- Peterborough: Supporting youth and creating opportunities for community engagement.

Figure 5: Volunteer participating in Naloxone Administration training.





## ***Human Rights and Homelessness***

- Ottawa: Youth-led training for better service delivery
- Reno, NV: Equality of opportunity and the right to a home

## ***Indigenous Perspectives and Cultural Approaches***

- Edmonton and Winnipeg: The importance of creating warm, caring spaces at youth-serving organizations
- Hamilton: Creating safe spaces by connecting the Indigenous Circle of Courage and Housing First for Youth and offering safe, affordable housing solutions for youth exiting care and fleeing domestic violence
- Northwest Territories: Land programming to empower and reconnect Indigenous youth with their communities and cultural traditions
- Winnipeg: Honoring reconciliation through ending youth homelessness

## ***Municipal Perspectives***

- Hamilton: Housing supports through community collaborations, early intervention in youth shelters to prevent street involvement
- Kingston: Housing First and community collaboration focused on supporting youth in scattered sites and in supportive housing programs
- Toronto: Collective planning and developing systems-level responses through Toronto's Youth Homelessness Strategy framework

## ***Pathways In and Out of Homelessness***

- Canada: The need for primary prevention through addressing structural inequalities
- Peterborough: The need to strengthen relationships between homelessness sector and the criminal justice and child welfare systems

## ***Prevention Strategies***

- Canada: The Upstream Project - conducting Student Needs Assessments and matching vulnerable students with wraparound supports
- Edmonton: Fostering engagement, empowerment, and resiliency through bridging school and out of school care
- Ottawa: Addressing systemic barriers to education for vulnerable populations in Ottawa through free one-on-one tutoring
- Ottawa: Prevention through free literacy and basic skills training at Frontier College
- Ottawa: Using social enterprise as a prevention tool through skill development and confidence-building

## ***Supporting Youth with Disabilities***

- Canada: Collaborative theatre project between academics, grad students, community partners and youth with lived experience of homelessness and disability to reimagine better service provision for this demographic

## ***Systems Coordination***

- Kamloops: Community planning as a tool to create a centralized housing and supports intake system
- Newfoundland: Integrative approaches to policy and programming
- Washington, DC: Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement through the adoption of common assessment tools

## ***Youth in Transition***

- City of Toronto: Querying 'successful' transitions that leave youth in a state of chronic precarity
- Edmonton: Developmentally appropriate housing, supporting family reconnection, bridges between child welfare, income supports, corrections, mental health and addiction
- Greater Toronto Area: stabilizing transitions for youth with mental health concerns through participatory engagement, transitional case management, mental health intervention and peer support
- Hamilton: Breaking cycles of poverty through education and child-minding supports for young mothers in transitional housing

Figure 6: Youth Services Bureau (YSB) Youth Action Team presentation on peer support.



### C) Lunch Time and Evening Activities:

- Screening of Dr. Alex Abramovich's short film *Nowhere To Go: A Brokered Dialogue* examining LGBTQ2S+ youths' experiences of homelessness.
- Forum theatre performance examining the intersection of disability, education, and employment among homeless youth from Toronto, Hamilton and Niagara.
- Walking tours of the city led by young people who have experienced homelessness in Ottawa. The walks explored the criminalization of public space, the effects of gentrification, survival sex and resilience.
- Youth Visual Art Showcase, available throughout the conference. All art was for sale, and all proceeds went to the young artists who had created the piece.
- Youth Musical Arts and Poetry Showcase, hosted by the Youth Planning Committee.

Figure 7: Youth Visual Art Showcase at the CUT conference.





#### ***d) Dedicated Youth Stream:***

Early in the development of the conference, we identified the need to appeal to homeless or formerly homeless young people through dedicated youth content and events. Designed by the conference youth planning committee, which was made up of young people with lived experiences of homelessness, the conference's dedicated youth stream provided information, training, and resources for the 40 young people who are currently or were formerly homeless who attended CUT from across Canada. Workshops were solicited to address issues that are relevant to young people currently facing homelessness or recently housed, including harm-reduction

strategies, knowing your rights (e.g. with police, tenants' rights, etc), democratic participation, and programs available to youth in Ottawa including peer-support, arts programming and a free veterinary care clinic. A low-stress hangout space was also available for young conference attendees (30 and under) to access throughout the conference. The space provided opportunities for young people to connect and escape the hustle and bustle of the conference. Supports made available for young people attending the conference included Naloxone kits, a winter clothing bank, and on-site mental health support workers.



Figure 8: A member of the Coming Up Together youth team, Charlotte Smith, leads conference participants on a walking tour of Ottawa from her perspective as a young person who experienced homelessness in the city.



**e) Youth Homelessness Memorial Spirit Flags:**

Throughout the conference, attendees could create Memorial Spirit Flags to recognize and memorialize the lives of young people who have died unnecessarily and tragically because they did not have adequate housing or supports. Scyndy Ross, an artist and member of the CUT Youth Stream planning team, was already collecting names for a memorial that would honour and remember these friends and loved ones when she joined the Youth Stream team. The Youth Stream planning team then worked together to develop the idea of a physical memorial, and created the first Memorial Spirit Flags. In total, 97 flags were created by conference attendees by the end of the three day conference. Efforts are currently underway to help the Memorial Spirit Flags travel to other communities, where they can continue to be created and used to raise awareness and mobilize grassroots and political change on the issue of youth homelessness.



Figures 9 and 10: Youth Homelessness Memorial Spirit Flags, created at the CUT conference. Photos taken at community launch event organized for the Spirit Flags after the CUT conference, on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018.



## f) Engagement Sessions:

*“Where do we go from here?  
Working together to refine provincial  
approaches to youth homelessness”  
– Hosted by A Way Home Canada*

A Way Home Canada facilitated a World Café engagement session with conference participants. The objective of the session was to bring conference attendees together to discuss how to move beyond existing challenges and seek solutions collectively. Discussions centered on what is known about the causes and conditions of youth homelessness, what we need in order to prevent and end youth homelessness, and solutions for change. A Way Home Canada compiled what was heard during this session into a resource document and circulated it to participants for feedback following the conference. The resource will serve to guide A Way Home’s ongoing work to support the alignment of priorities and resources nationally, within communities and across provinces and territories and will be shared with our provincial and territorial government partners.

*Integrating youth first voices into  
community-based planning – CUT  
Youth Planning Team and the HPS*

A representative from the HPS met with young Canadians, in order to strategize and develop more intersectional approaches to ending and preventing youth homelessness in Canada. The session was co-facilitated by two youth with lived experience. During this session, young people were consulted about best practices for integrating the voices of young people into community planning processes for ending and preventing youth homelessness. The feedback youth provided is outlined in the report, *‘Integrating youth first voices into community-based planning: A report of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy’s youth engagement at the CUT Conference’*.

Figure 11:  
Youth representative,  
Choices for Youth  
(NFLD).



## Part B:

### Identifying Priority Areas, Lessons Learned, Promising Practices and Recommendations

#### Introduction

The content presented in conference plenary panels, breakout sessions, youth stream workshops, and consultations generated a number of important priorities and outcomes for ending youth homelessness in Canada. Four overarching themes emerged, encompassing the feedback and priorities identified by conference participants and contributors:

1. Troubling the construction of youth homelessness
2. Human rights approaches and service delivery models
3. Prevention frameworks for ending youth homelessness
4. Meaningful youth engagement

In the sections that follow, we discuss each of these priority areas. We begin with providing some necessary background to understanding the **context** of the identified priority. Next, we summarize the important **lessons learned** from the conference sessions, identify **promising practices** from across Canada and beyond, and offer **recommendations** for future service and policy directions.

Figure 12: Dr. Naomi Nichols from McGill University speaks on Housing as a Human Right plenary panel about universal access to housing.



“One reason, and maybe the central one, that we have not as a country committed to ensuring that all people actually do have access to safe and appropriate housing, is because people remain morally and ethically, even if secretly, committed to the idea that housing is something that people earn”

– Dr. Naomi Nichols, McGill University



# 1. Troubling the Construction of Youth Homelessness

## **Context**

Rather than being understood as the result of systemic patterns of inequality, homelessness is often viewed as an individual circumstance. People experiencing homelessness are then perceived as indolent, immoral and inferior. These assumptions can have profound effects on how people feel about homeless youth and how youth feel about themselves. Speakers on the conference plenary panel, Constructing and Deconstructing Youth Homelessness, unpacked how these constellations of meanings contribute to the image of a homeless young person and shared ways that we can challenge myths about homelessness and improve young people's sense of self-worth.

## **Lessons Learned**

1. *The terminology and language used to describe homelessness is reductive*

The terminology and labels used to describe homelessness in institutional, academic and political settings reduces young people to a number of individual, relational, and systemic factors seen to be causing or underscoring their experience of homelessness. These factors do not encompass the complex and multilayered experiences of homelessness.

2. *Popular constructions and images of homelessness are not representative*

Popular representations of homelessness reinforce constructions about what a homeless person looks like and what the experience of homelessness entails. The most common representation is of young people living in extreme poverty, indicated by their poor hygiene and unkempt appearance, and who are living on the street and/or in shelters. This representation does not reflect the majority of young people accessing services or Indigenous youth, LGBTQ2S+ youth, women, or newcomer youth (among others) who are at increased risk of experiencing 'hidden' homelessness and therefore not accessing services. Additionally, popular constructions of homelessness may deter young people who do not feel they 'fit the mold' from seeking services and support.

3. *Homelessness is not a distinct social problem*

Precarious labor markets, systems of gender inequality and homophobic violence, and historically situated patterns of exclusion and oppression such as colonialism contribute to why a young person experiences homelessness. Rather than framing homelessness as a distinct social problem that can be addressed through specialized interventions, the solutions to homelessness must necessarily critique the systems of power and oppression that organize society.

“Homelessness is being talked about as though it is a technical malfunction in an otherwise unproblematic and well-ordered society. . . I think that this is a big problem and contributes to the production and reproduction of homelessness in a very real way”

–Dr. David Farrugia, University of Newcastle, Australia

# Promising Practices:

## *I. Targeted outreach, data collection, and programming*

By targeting individuals and groups not likely to access services, through engagement, research design, and programming, we can learn more about the full scope of homelessness, include the perspectives of young people who have not been the focus of previous efforts, and better meet the needs of all young people - not just those who traditionally access services.

One example of an approach to research that took seriously the problems of the social construction of youth homelessness was presented at the CUT conference by peer youth researchers alongside Dr. Kennelly. The report they co-produced, entitled Building Bridges: Perspectives on Youth Homelessness from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, Newcomer, and LGBTQ2S+ Youth in Ottawa, addresses the unique needs of these sub-populations and make recommendations for improved service responses. The report is now publicly available at:

<http://homelesshub.ca/resource/building-bridges-perspectives-youth-homelessness-first-nations-inuit-and-métis-newcomer-and>

“The questions that we ask matter, not only can these questions help collect important data, but they can also help people feel welcome and they can help people feel safe”

– Dr. Alex Abramovich,  
Independent Scientist,  
Institute for Mental Health Policy Research (IMHPR)

## *II. Inclusive intake processes and assessments*

Doing ethical research, service delivery, and policy work involves ensuring that we ask questions that capture people’s experience and identities. Inclusive intake measures are tools which can be used to account for young people’s multiple identities and a range of experiences by expanding the language used and challenging popular assumptions about the meanings of homelessness.

## *III. Public engagement and education*

Educating the public about the broader systems of poverty and privilege that shape our society, the range of individuals and groups likely to be impacted by homelessness, as well as the homelessness spectrum can help to challenge dominant and problematic constructions which contribute to the production and reproduction of homelessness in society.

During the CUT conference, researcher Cynthia Puddu displayed photos from her collaborative photo-voice project with Edmonton-based young people, which aims to destigmatize homelessness and share young people’s perspectives on Edmonton’s downtown revitalization process. More information on this project can be accessed at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/vicki-lynn-moses-cynthia-puddu-voices-streets-boyle-1.4558476>

# Recommendations:

## A. Service Provision Recommendations

- ✓ Provide staff inclusivity training to help raise awareness about stereotypes and pre-conceived notions of what a 'homeless youth' looks like
- ✓ Engage in targeted outreach to ensure that young people who need the services know they are there (e.g. towards newcomer communities who might not self-identify as 'homeless' even when they have no stable place to live).
- ✓ Host public awareness and engagement campaigns to shift public perceptions of homelessness and homeless persons

## B. Policy and Legislative Recommendations

- ✓ Develop policy approaches that respond to the multiple, complex causes of homelessness (e.g. poverty reduction strategies, affordable housing, gender equity) and move away from individualized and crisis-oriented responses
- ✓ Integrate recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in order to address the inter-generational impacts of colonialism, as part of any policies seeking to address youth homelessness
- ✓ Be attentive to the ways in which policy or legislation might be inadvertently addressing only one sub-set of the homeless youth population, and over-looking others



Figure 13: Plenary Panel on Constructing and Deconstructing Youth Homelessness, with Larissa Silver, Cheyanne Ratnam, Tiffany Rose, and Dr. David Farrugia.



## 2. Human Rights Approaches & Service Delivery Models

### Context

In 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing challenged governments across the globe to make the elimination of homelessness a top human rights priority, with particular attention on youth. Embracing this call to action and the fundamental, legal right of all young people to be free of homelessness and have access to adequate housing, participants who attended the A Way Home Canada consultation identified human rights approaches as a necessary component of Ontario's response to youth homelessness. The adoption of rights-based frameworks in research, policy, and service delivery was emphasized by speakers in each of the opening and closing plenary panels and was a recurring theme in breakout session presentations, workshops, and panels focused on prevention, systems, and service-delivery strategies for reducing youth homelessness in communities across Canada. The CUT youth planning team prioritized a workshop about knowing and navigating legal and tenant rights as part of the dedicated Youth Stream. The following sections highlight why homelessness is a human rights issue and outline some practices for grounding work in rights-based frameworks.

### Lessons Learned

#### 1. *Youth Homelessness is a Human Rights Issue*

Young people experiencing homelessness are at greater risk of experiencing trauma and are disproportionately targeted by police and laws designed to punish homelessness. They are far more likely to be victims of physical violence, sexual assault and exploitation, and are less likely to receive help and support when victimized. Indigenous youth, Inuit youth, LGBTQ2S+ youth, racialized youth and newcomer youth are over-represented in homelessness statistics and may be doubly or triply marginalized, not just because of their homelessness, but also due to racism, homophobia, and transphobia.

“Rights can be framed as aspirational, but they also have to be functional and enforceable”

– Mary Birdsell,  
Justice For Children and Youth

#### 2. *Solutions to Youth Homelessness Require Rights-Based Frameworks*

When developing, implementing and mobilizing solutions to youth homelessness, ranging from immediate intervention to preventative strategies, it is critical that the different sectors ground their work in rights-based frameworks. Through adopting human rights based approaches to homelessness, we are more able to carefully consider the degree to which all orders of government, and most ministries and departments within them, have some role to play in producing the conditions that lead people to become homeless.

#### 3. *Achieving Housing as a Human Right Means Destigmatizing Homelessness*

To shift rights-based frameworks from aspirational goals to functional and enforceable realities, we have a responsibility to reframe public perceptions of people experiencing homelessness as irresponsible and immoral towards seeing them as equally deserving of dignity and rights.

# Promising Practices:

## I. *Legislating Assistance for At-Risk and Homeless Youth at Local, Provincial and Federal Levels*

Canada has lagged behind many other countries in making homelessness legislation a priority. Legislation coming out of Wales and Ireland, for example, stipulates that local authorities, supported by higher levels of government, have a duty to provide information and assistance to those who are at risk of homelessness. Finland has substantially reduced homelessness by focusing their response on the human right to housing. The adoption of similar legislation in Canada would establish access to adequate and safe housing as a statutory responsibility of all levels of government and provide funding for local communities to design, deliver, and implement required services.

Key examples of legislation that treats homelessness as a human rights issue include:

- *Housing Act* (Wales), 2014: Regulates private rental housing, outlines duties of officials who come into contact with people experiencing homelessness, and outlines standards for decent, safe and accessible social housing.
- *Homeless Preventative Strategy* (Ireland), 2002: This national strategy focusses on the provision of housing for people exiting care, such as foster care, mental health institutions, and correctional facilities.

“When housing is viewed as a right and not a privilege and youth are viewed as rights-bearers, housing becomes a priority and a legal obligation, reducing instances where revoking rent money or needed support to maintain housing occur”

— Kaite Burkholder Harris,  
A Way Home and Michele Biss, Canada Without Poverty

## II. *Housing as a Human Right Training Models*

To incorporate rights based approaches to youth homelessness, everyone working in the various sectors within youth homelessness must be informed about human rights perspectives on housing – from policy makers to frontline service providers to the youth themselves. All levels of government, youth-serving organizations and public institutions should require staff to complete housing as a human right training programs. This helps shift perceptions of youth homelessness as an individual issue of deviance, pathology and personal failure to an understanding that acknowledges the dignity and agency of all youth.

Key example of a Housing as a Human Right Training Model:

Canada Without Poverty (CWP) and A Way Home Ottawa (AWHO) presented “Flipping the Script: Young People Leading Service Providers in Human Rights Based Service Delivery” at the CUT conference. To advance housing as a human right for youth, CWP and AWHO developed an economic and social rights program, in which young people receive an overview of a human rights perspective on housing, are trained in the practical application of this framework, and lead community agency staff and government services staff in training about the development of housing as a human rights-based policy and program delivery.

## III. *Reporting and Monitoring Progress on Housing as a Human Right*

To ensure accountability, governments and other key actors responsible for implementing rights policy, legislation and programming must report goals and benchmarks, demonstrate funding capacity in budgets, and maintain transparent processes. Internal and external monitoring mechanisms should be implemented to review strategies as well as engage stakeholders, including young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.



# Recommendations:

The right of all young people to live free of homelessness must be recognized by law, with institutions dedicated to ensuring the accountability of all levels of government and other sectors including the criminal justice system, private sector, social services, and public institutions, to young people as rights-holders. To actualize this obligation, we recommend the following practices be adopted, which include the implementation of human rights training models, advocacy to change public perceptions of homelessness, and policy that reflects human rights obligations of local, provincial and federal governments in regards to providing housing.

Figure 14: Dr. Cath Larkins, from University of Central Lancashire, discusses the Welsh model of preventive care for young people at risk of homelessness, and meaningful youth engagement.



## A. Service Provision Recommendations

- ✓ Provide staff with training on human rights-based frameworks for addressing youth homelessness, as well as delivery models and implementation strategies
- ✓ Lobby government for legislation, policies, programs, and community services to ensure that the legal right of all young people to adequate housing is complied with
- ✓ Host public awareness and engagement campaigns to shift public perceptions of homelessness and homeless persons
- ✓ Establish internal and external mechanisms that measure and monitor progress towards meeting the rights of young people to housing

## B. Policy and Legislative Recommendations

- ✓ Mandate housing as a statutory responsibility of the state, public institutions, and local governments
- ✓ Amend existing policies and legislation which perpetuates stigma against the homeless or criminalizes them for meeting basic needs (e.g. eating and sleeping)
- ✓ Establish institutional mechanisms to monitor and implement economic and social rights
- ✓ Create venues (e.g. courts, tribunals, and ombudspersons) to review complaints and redress human rights violations related to housing

# 3. Prevention Frameworks for Ending Youth Homelessness

## Context

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness defines homelessness prevention as policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness. Preventing homelessness also means providing those who have been homeless with the necessary resources and supports to stabilize their housing, enhance integration and social inclusion, and ultimately reduce the risk of recurrence of homelessness.

Prevention-focused approaches to youth homelessness, rather than emergency responses, were a recurring theme in the conference plenary panels, breakout sessions, and facilitated discussions. Communities across Canada are recognizing that we need to do more than simply manage the problem of youth homelessness through crisis responses and emergency shelters. While communities have been moving in the direction of supporting chronically homeless people to exit homelessness, until recently little attention has been paid to how we might prevent the problem. There was a

consensus among those presenting on prevention strategies that although it is far easier, more economical, and less damaging to prevent youth homelessness before it begins, homelessness cannot be prevented by the homelessness sector alone. Government ministries and departments of health, education, child protection, criminal justice, housing, and employment and training also have a role to play.

[Mike Bulthuis](#) @mikebulthuis Feb 22  
Where do we go from here?  
[@TOAdamVaughan](#) reminds us that youth  
[#homelessness prevention](#) permanent  
solutions are where the focus needs to be.  
[@CominUpTogether](#) [#onpoli](#) [#cdnpoli](#) [#youth](#)

Figure 15: Prevention plenary panel with Corinne Sauvé, Dr. Stephen Gaetz, Melanie Redman and Mike Lethby.



## ***Lessons Learned***

In the final morning plenary session, panelists from A Way Home Canada (AWHC), The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) and The RAFT, provided attendees with a conceptual framing for the prevention of youth homelessness, and offered practical strategies of prevention for communities of every size. Break-out sessions during CUT also shared lessons learned from other prevention-focused strategies, such as the Upstream Project, a school-based prevention program developed collaboratively by Raising the Roof, COH and AWHC that identifies at-risk youth before they become homeless and connects them with services. Three important insights about prevention arose: the need for proactive, not reactive responses; coordinated institutional action; and structural and systemic change.

“The key point is this - we wait too long to help”

- Dr. Stephen Gaetz,

Canadian Observatory on Homelessness|Homeless Hub

### *1. Proactive Responses Can Prevent Youth Homelessness*

We are waiting too long to intervene when a young person is at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness. When our responses to youth homelessness are primarily reactive we condemn youth to hardship and trauma. Proactive responses to youth homelessness mean prioritizing early intervention policies and programming within educational, child welfare, and criminal justice systems.

### *2. Prevention Requires Coordination at Multiple Institutional Levels*

All levels of government must be engaged in coordinated youth homelessness prevention from different ministries, departments, and institutions including health, education, child protection, criminal justice, housing, employment and training. Youth can easily fall through the cracks if there is failure at different institutional levels to provide the supports they need to prevent homelessness.

### *3. Preventing Youth Homelessness Requires Structural and Systemic Change*

Engaging in homelessness prevention means addressing structural factors that undermine housing stability and inclusion, and repairing the institutional and systems drivers that contribute to homelessness. Too many young Canadians face significant barriers to accessing and maintaining housing, such as family poverty and systemic racism, homophobia and transphobia.



# Promising Practices:

## I. *Setting Out Prevention Responsibilities, Goals, and Objectives at Multiple Levels*

Understanding the risks and causes of homelessness provides a starting place to consider where legislation, policy, and practices can contribute to the prevention of homelessness. To accomplish this, higher levels of government must align their responsibilities, goals, and objectives of homelessness service provision, legislation, and policy within a prevention framework. The approach outlined in the recently published resource, *A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention* (2017) requires that the responsibilities, goals and objectives address the non-discrete categories of prevention - primary, secondary and tertiary. Through prioritizing these preventative strategies, we can make progress towards addressing the individual, relational, institutional, structural or societal factors that produce and sustain youth homelessness.

<b>Primary prevention</b>	Addressing structural factors and systems driving homelessness Examples: Building and maintaining affordable housing stock, poverty reduction strategies, and anti-discrimination policy
<b>Secondary prevention</b>	Ensuring successful transitions from public institutions (mental health care, child protection, and corrections) to safe and affordable housing Examples: Coordinated assessments, shelter diversion strategies, landlord-tenant mediation
<b>Tertiary prevention</b>	Supporting young people to exit quickly and stay housed Examples: Housing First; Harm Reduction Programs

## II. *Providing Policy and Funding to Support Local Communities in Prevention*

While community-based delivery of many prevention supports is necessary in order to meet local needs, impact is not possible without the proper investment and policy framework to support this work. To support communities which deliver services, all levels of government (federal, provincial, and municipal) must set policy and provide funding to support the development, adaptation and implementation of prevention strategies. For example, policy and funding should prioritize the creation of affordable and subsidized housing over new emergency shelters.

## III. *Defining Integrated Responses between Different Levels of Government*

As a ‘fusion policy’ issue, homelessness touches on many of the responsibilities of senior levels of government, including health care, housing, corrections and criminal justice, child and family services and supports, income supports, education, employment and training, etc. Both federal and provincial/territorial governments must play a leading role in engaging both public and private mainstream services and institutions to prevent youth homelessness. Mainstream service providers must necessarily be part of this integrated system for prevention to work.

“The evidence from economic, social and health disciplines is unambiguous: ensuring universal access to housing is a cost-effective, socially progressive, and health promoting prevention”

– Dr. Naomi Nichols, McGill University

# Recommendations:

Canada's response to homelessness continues to focus on emergency services, including shelters, day programs, targeted services, and the criminal justice system. While these services are essential, we must align our research, service, and policy agendas with prevention goals, objectives and responsibilities to ensure all young people have access to safe and affordable housing. Additionally, all levels of government must commit to establishing funding streams and developing legislative and policy frameworks which address homelessness by working 'upstream'.

[Katherine Morin](#) @Katherinecmorin Feb 22  
We wait too long to help. Full stop. We need to prevent people from becoming homeless rather than helping when they are homeless and precariously housed. [#upstream](#) approach is needed for prevention [@ComingUpTogether](#)

## A. Service Provision Recommendations

- ✓ Work with community partners, funding agencies and all three levels of government to secure funding and support for prevention-focused interventions, in order to shift services away from exclusively emergency responses
- ✓ Develop collaborations between those within and outside of the housing and homelessness sector (e.g. education, criminal justice, foster care) in order to develop 'upstream' responses to youth homelessness that reduce the reliance on emergency responses.
- ✓ Develop peer-peer programming in prevention approaches (e.g. harm reduction, housing first, community-education partnerships).

## B. Policy and Legislation Recommendations

Prevention programs exist in a number of communities, but are rarely addressed specifically in provincial and federal policy and legislation. We suggest that government legislation and policy can:

- ✓ Ensure the provision of housing for young people exiting prison or youth detention, the child welfare system, and hospitals and treatment centers for mental health and addiction
- ✓ Mandate access to affordable, safe and stable housing for all youth
- ✓ Establish poverty reduction strategies at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels
- ✓ Develop anti-discrimination housing policies that provide equal access for all youth, regardless of ability, nationality, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, addictions, or criminal records
- ✓ Establish tenancy laws that protect vulnerable young people from eviction.

[AbeOudshoorn](#) @AbeOudshoorn Feb 21  
"The best policies to address homelessness aren't specific to homelessness." David Farrugia. Good Reflection on upstream thinking at [#2018CUT](#) [@ComingUpTogether](#)

# 4. Meaningful Youth Engagement

## Context

Young people who experience homelessness frequently experience social exclusion and have few opportunities to meaningfully participate in decisions affecting them, or in research about them. Barriers to their inclusion include structural conditions and processes rooted in power imbalances; stigma, stereotypes and myths about homelessness; and the lack of resources (e.g. housing, income, transportation) and/or opportunities to participate in policies and programs in ways that are meaningful to them. To ensure young people benefit from relevant evidence-based programs and policies at all levels, active and meaningful youth participation in service provision, legislation, and policy, is of critical importance.

“It is not the particulars of a social policy that matter most, but the relationship between those who influence policy and those who are affected by policy”

– Dr. Naomi Nichols,  
quoting Paul Burstein, 2018

## Lessons Learned

From a human rights perspective, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) acknowledges the right of a child or youth to express their views, to be heard and to have their views given due weight according to their age and level of maturity. It is essential to meaningfully involve youth. Creating a youth engagement strategy at the outset of the process means engaging youth from planning through implementation. As the real experts on their experiences, needs and interactions with organizations and systems, youth have unique perspectives on issues, are innovative problem solvers and can pose tough questions. Engaging youth will lead to more responsive and appropriate decisions to meet their needs, and demonstrates that youth perspectives matter.

### 1. *Youth are the Experts on Policies and Services that Affect Them*

Youth can play an important role in service provision and policy relevant to their communities and future, both as the targets and as actors in implementation. Involving young people with lived experience of homelessness—as collaborators, team members, leaders and decision makers—in addressing the day to-day issues that affect them offers a broad range of benefits to both young people and their communities. Those benefits vary from greater community connectedness and social awareness of individuals to enhanced participatory decision-making in service provision and policy.

### 2. *Community Engagement with Youth Optimizes Positive Impacts*

Community engagement ranges from comprehensive open engagement sessions with young people to partnerships in the entire policymaking process. Channels for engagement include youth councils in local communities as well as at the national level. The benefits of community engagement include challenging the stigmatization of homelessness, strengthening the credibility of government institutions, optimizing the positive impact of policies and programming on those most impacted by them, and encouraging youth participation and decision-making.

[Elisa Traficante](#) @Elisa\_RtR Feb 20  
Charlotte shared that she finally felt equal while working with [@Kennelly\\_jackie](#) and the [@awayhomeottawa](#) team as a Research Liason [@2018CUT](#)

### 3. *Youth Engagement can Lead to Youth Empowerment*

Establishing venues for young people to share their insights and experience with decision makers amplifies the voice of young people and demonstrates that their perspectives and knowledge matters. Through centering young people as the experts driving research, policy, and programming, we can catalyze the energy and motivation needed to effect social change.



# Promising Practices:

## I. Respecting Youth as Experts: ‘Nothing about us, without us’

It is important for youth not only to participate in community planning, but also for those who have the power to change things, to really listen to what they have to say. In the engagement session with the HPS, youth attendees noted that all too often, people hear what they want or expect to hear, and then tune out what is really important from the perspective of young people. It is essential that policy representatives and researchers demonstrate that they really care and are paying attention to what is being said. Part of this means listening to what youth say is not working, and taking their suggestions for how to better engage young people.

Key example of peer-to-peer programing that respects youth expertise: *The Satellite Peer Outreach Training (SPOT) Program*. Eva’s Satellite, a 33-bed shelter for youth ages 16 to 24, based in Toronto, combines shelter services with harm reduction, counselling, case management, housing services and recreational programming. Their philosophy is that peer involvement improves engagement and enriches programming with fresh ideas.

## II. Setting Meaningful, Youth-Defined Goals

When the different sectors engage with young people they often do not address the questions young people want to talk about. Partnerships between organizations and the young people they work with require that organizations reconcile their own agendas with the goals of young people. Meaningfully engaging youth requires that the organizations work with young people to determine their goals and provide them with the resources, tools and training needed to achieve these goals.

*Hamilton Street Youth Planning Collaborative (SYPC)* brings together youth service directors, front line workers and youth with lived experience of street-involvement and homelessness to provide a coordinated system of supports for young people at-risk of or experiencing homelessness. The youth leadership committee are consulted as key informants and provided with training, professional development, and resources to identify and reach their goals.

[Arisha Khan](#) @arisha\_khan 1 Feb 20  
Impressed and floored by [@evasinitatives](#) SPOT (Satellite Peer Outreach Training) Program and the great things they are going, despite being the \*only\* youth harm reduction centre in Toronto. [#2018CUT](#) –at [University of Ottawa | Université d'Ottawa - uOttawa](#)

## III. Meeting Young People Where They Are

It is our responsibility to design engagement opportunities that can accommodate where young people are in the present, not just where they want to be in the future. This means developing youth policy with young people to guide the priorities and actions of organizations, agencies, and institutions. For example, instead of requiring youth representation on governing bodies (e.g. board of directors, executive committee, management committee), mandate annual meetings and/or engagement sessions between the governing body and the young people they serve.

Key example of meeting young people where they are: The Board of Directors at *Choices for Youth*, a non-profit organization that supports at-risk and homeless youth in Newfoundland and Labrador, meet twice a year with the organization’s Youth Leadership Council comprised of young people from different backgrounds and lived experiences.

## Recommendations:

At CUT, youth demonstrated their interest, ability, and capacity to be positive change agents who can address and help solve the emerging issues facing us nationally and internationally. Conference contributors also stressed the potential of young people to provide leadership in ending and preventing youth homelessness at the local and national levels. Ensuring meaningful youth engagement, which requires that young people with lived experience of homelessness be engaged about decisions that directly affect them, including design, implementation, and monitoring of interventions, is vital. This will not only help youth reach their full potential, acting as leaders and positive change agents in the world, but is a necessary strategy for ending and preventing youth homelessness.

Figure 16: Aya Fawzi, graduate student in design at Carleton University, and member of CUT Youth Stream planning team, discusses strategies for meaningful youth engagement.



## A. Service Provision Recommendations

- ✓ Partner with young people to identify goals and support them in achieving these goals
- ✓ Consult young people as educators, advisors, informants, and advocates
- ✓ Create longer term engagement projects and opportunities that allow for relationships between organizations and young people to develop. When this is not possible, look to existing groups in communities before designing consultation and engagement processes
- ✓ Provide young people with resources (bus tickets, food) and offer monetary compensation for their time and contributions
- ✓ Establish leadership councils to ensure youth inclusion and engagement in all processes that affect them
- ✓ Recognize and reward expertise by providing young people with accreditation for participating in community planning and engagement sessions
- ✓ Offer professional development and training workshops as part of engagement and community planning sessions
- ✓ Enact youth-positive policy to guide the priorities and actions of work with young people
- ✓ Utilize co-chairing and co-facilitation models for workshops, training, and engagement and planning sessions

## B. Policy and Legislation Recommendations

- ✓ Create national policies which ensure youth participation in social and economic development
- ✓ Engage young people through outreach, advocacy and mainstreaming of youth issues in all spheres of homelessness planning
- ✓ Establish structured youth delegate systems which include and support youth representatives to become meaningfully involved in governmental participation and decision-making processes

“When you make a clear link between young people’s goals and to policy, then that’s really effective”

– Sheldon Pollett, Choices For Youth (NFLD)



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