DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS EVALUATION OF A WAY HOME TORONTO

Prepared for: A Way Home Toronto

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hub solutions

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Canada

Land Acknowledgement

We are grateful and humbled to work in Tkaronto. We acknowledge we are hosted on the lands of the Mississaugas of the Anishinaabe, the Haundenosaunee Confederacy and the Wendat. We also recognise the enduring presence of all First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples[1].

As stated in A Way Home Toronto's Strategy to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness, "We are living in a time when we are all responsible to learn and honour the history that precedes confederacy that has been kept from people who live and reside in Canada. We are heartbroken and appalled by the impact of historical and current colonial violence on our Nation's, our city's First Peoples, and commit to learning the necessary to live and work in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples going forward. We acknowledge the strength, resiliency and survival of our city's Indigenous peoples. It is critical to A Way Home Toronto to integrate this commitment into all strategies, practices, projects and relationships that address youth homelessness in this city."[2]

Thank You

Hub Solutions would like to take the time to thank A Way Home Toronto for their thoughtful contributions (in alphabetical order): Adam Benn, Mardi Daley, Natricia Drummond, Ann Fitzpatrick, Andrés Gil-Luces, Natasha Gleeson, Rose Gutierrez, Elizabeth Hayward, Julia Huys, Sophia Ilyniak, Brent Mitchell, Phyllis Novak, Anna Penner, Cheyanne Ratnam, Mervi Salo, Sabrina Samsudeen, Fiona Scott, Alissa Skorik, Louise Smith, Darren Wilson, and Joel Zola.

Specifically, we would like to thank Sophia for her thoughtful additions to the introduction around gentrification, Andrés for supporting the interview question development and Dorothy Frimpong (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness) and Kaitlin Schwan (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness) for support with analysis and writing.

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[1] The acknowledgement was developed by the Toronto District School Board (2018) alongside many Indigenous leaders and community members.
[2] The Acknowledgement was developed collaboratively by A Way Home Toronto's Expert Steering Committee (2018).

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Glossary of Terms

AWHT	A Way Home Toronto (aligned with the mandate of A Way Home Canada).
AWHT Strategy to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness	First strategy of its kind dedicated to addressing youth homelessness in Toronto with a focus on aligning with other community-based, municipal, provincial and federal policies and initiatives.
Collaboration	The action of working with several groups to produce or create a product.
CSC	Cross Sectoral Steering Committee. Stakeholders across sectors working with/for young people affected by the homelessness spectrum.
Experts	A way to honour the lived expertise that young people on the homelessness spectrum hold, but to also challenge systems and assumptions. The term "youth" can often be conflated to mean different things and can tokenize a young person's experience. Expert is not meant to replace "youth" but to introduce nuance to the language, and respect that young people are people first.
ESC	Expert Steering Committee. Community stakeholders with lived expertise of the homelessness spectrum.
Strategy	A plan of action or policy designed to achieve an overall aim. Provides a strategic roadmap of best practices and innovative ideas.

Key Findings

This summary presents the key findings from the *Developmental Process Evaluation of A Way Home Toronto*

What is A Way Home Toronto?

A Way Home Toronto (AWHT) is a collaborative between community stakeholders (experts) and cross-sector stakeholders (professionals) in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The two interdependent councils are working together to develop a strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness in the GTA.

How is AWHT different?

1. AWHT is guided by the Expert Engagement Model[3]. The model is co-led by community stakeholders with lived expertise on the homelessness spectrum (Expert Steering Committee, ESC) and stakeholders across sectors working with/for young people affected by the homelessness spectrum (Cross-Sectoral Committee, CSC). The ESC and CSC hold the same decision-making power and both committees are involved in all aspects of the development of the strategy.

2. AWHT effectively engages experts in the strategy development process. The ESC members feel respected and have ownership of AWHT's efforts. The experts were engaged in many aspects of the strategy development, including administrative and procedural tasks.

3. Collaboration between the ESC and CSC is critical to the implementation of the Expert Engagement Model. It is important for the two committees to come together at regular intervals to share ideas, celebrate successes, and build professional relationships.

Why should the work of AWHT be sustained?

The process of AWHT is effective because it is based on a human rights framework that centers the lived expertise of young people. Without the centering of the Expert Steering Committee, the process of developing a strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness would be inauthentic and simply not as effective. AWHT's efforts were constrained by tight timelines and budgets. Therefore, it will be important for long-term investments to be made that allow for the collaborative work of AWHT to develop, flourish and grow.

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[3] Developed by A Way Home Toronto Project Coordinator, Cheyanne Ratnam

Executive Summary – For Young People, With People

This summary provides a high-level overview of the findings from the *Developmental Process Evaluation of A Way Home Toronto*. It demonstrates that centering the experiences of young people is ESSENTIAL to any project/program/strategy that strives to prevent and end youth homelessness.

The document was vetted by the ESC and acts as a report for, and from, young people with lived expertise of the homelessness spectrum. It can be used by young people as evidence that they NEED to be meaningfully engaged in project/program/strategy development. It also provides evidence to program and policy makers that strategies to prevent and end youth homelessness will not be effective unless young people are CENTERED in the process.

What is A Way Home Toronto?

A Way Home Toronto (AWHT) is a collaboration between community stakeholders (experts) and cross-sector stakeholders (professionals) in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) working together to prevent and end youth homelessness.

In 2015, Toronto's Youth Shelter Interagency Network (YSIN) approached the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) division of the City of Toronto to look at a new way of addressing youth homelessness. The YSIN wanted to move away from managing emergency services that were crisis-focused to engaging in prevention-focused efforts and system integration. Thus, AWHT began developing a youth homelessness strategy in one of the largest cities in Canada.

How is AWHT different?

Developing a strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness is a big task. So, AWHT wanted to evaluate the process to find out what worked, what didn't work and what could be improved. The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness partnered with AWHT to conduct this evaluation. We asked the following questions:

A. How can AWHT facilitate effective collaboration across sectors to address the youth homelessness spectrum?
B. How can community coalitions work with young people with lived experience as key stakeholders, partners, experts and leaders?
C. How do we collect information to ensure that innovation and improvement is continued?

To examine how AWHT operates, we attended their meetings, community forums, and events. We also learned from the previous work of AWHT by reading documentation and reviewing the literature on best practices for community engagement.
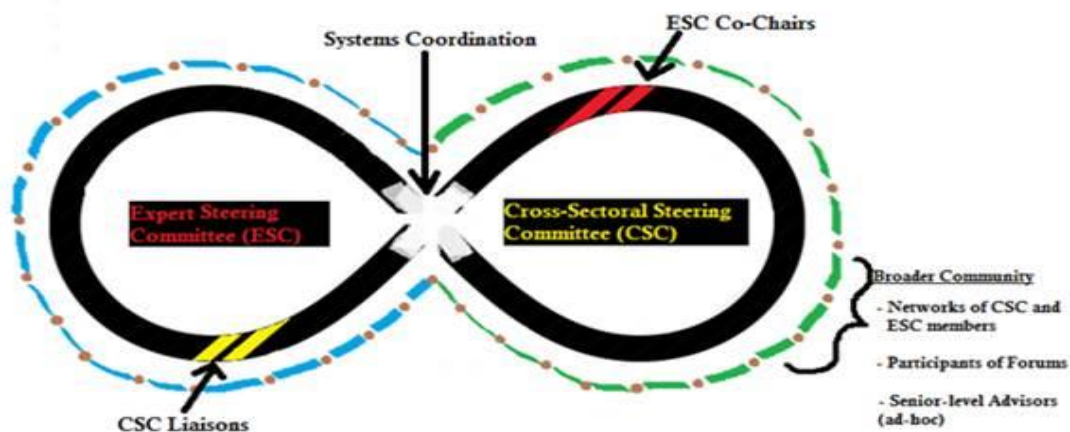
Here's what we found:

EXPERT ENGAGEMENT IS VITAL

AWHT's governance structure is guided by the Expert Engagement Model[4]. The Model includes two components: 1) community stakeholders with lived expertise of the homelessness spectrum (Expert Steering Committee, ESC); and 2) stakeholders across sectors working with/for young people affected by the homelessness spectrum (Cross-Sectoral Committee, CSC).

The model is based on a human rights framework and centers lived expertise, ensuring that experts have equitable decision-making power. It also fairly compensates experts for their time and knowledge, by paying a living wage.

> *The [ESC-CSC governance] model is a great metaphor for the system changes that we need. It's the kind of new voice, new frame that we need to make a difference. Because we don't all have the same analysis, we don't all hear it or see it. We all need to work together in order to find each other's' voice. - CSC Member*

EMPOWERMENT LEADS TO ENGAGEMENT

ESC members felt respected within AWHT. Each expert brought something unique to the table and their differences were celebrated rather than cast aside. Experts felt like their strengths were recognized and that they were treated as colleagues and professionals.

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[4] Developed by A Way Home Toronto Project Coordinator, Cheyanne Ratnam

Because of this, experts felt a true ownership of the project. Experts showed a strong willingness to be engaged in all aspects of the development of the strategy, including administrative and procedural tasks often undertaken by CSC members.

> *I feel important being [with AWHT]. I feel way more respected, and viewed as an employee, and not just part of a' youth group' [...] We have a lot of power over planning. It's been great to see us taking the lead. -- Andrés Gil-Luces*

WORKING COLLABORATIVELY IS KEY

Since AWHT's structure includes two steering committees (the ESC and the CSC), it was important for these two groups to come together to share, learn, and grow with each other. By making sure that there is time and space for these meetings to happen, the development of AWHT's strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness was strengthened. We encourage even more opportunities for collaboration going forward.

> *I want [ESC members] to have what they need, and I want them to not feel isolated in community and culture. For me, I want every young person to know how important they are to healthy inclusive vibrant communities. They are the pivot point of where we turn. - CSC Member*

COLLABORATIVE WORK TAKES TIME AND MONEY

Developing a strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness takes time and money, especially in Canada's biggest city. AWHT could have benefitted from more time and funding, especially since it takes considerable energy to develop professional bonds with the various players that needed to be at the table. The collaborative process should not be rushed, especially when working within a person-centred governance structure such as AWHT.

> *We've got big ideas in a short time frame and a lot of collaborative partners [can] create confusion. Sometimes, it's just difficult to figure out what's happening, what are our funding pockets, what are our deliverables [...] However, I feel like there's a lot of communication with a lot of transparency. It's just hard because the project has such a short timeline, and we need to make decisions without the necessary time to flesh them out. - CSC Member*

LANGUAGE IS IMPORTANT

Challenging assumptions and working toward innovative solutions, particularly in regards to language and labels, was a complex and rewarding experience for ESC and CSC members. Oftentimes "youth experiences" are tokenized, or not taken seriously enough. The term **expert** became centered in the language of AWHT, not only as a way to honour the lived expertise of young people (in both personal and professional ways), but to also challenge systems and assumptions that youth homelessness is built on.

Language is one piece and language is power. In changing language, you are changing power. In negotiating that language, we are dialoguing through power as well. - Cheyanne Ratnam

Key Take Away Message

The results clearly demonstrate that AWHT's process to create a strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness is unique, impactful, and effective. ***The process is effective because it is based on a human rights framework that centers the lived expertise of young people***. Without the centering of the Expert Steering Committee, the process of developing a strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness would be inauthentic and simply not as effective. For this collaborative work to continue, it is critical that long-term financial investments are made.

Here's how communities can meaningfully engage young people in similar processes:

1. Hire experts in a sustainable way. This includes having opportunities for professional development and informal mentorship among members. By engaging in this practice, experts will be able to share their knowledge and build their own capacity.
2. Fairly compensate experts for their knowledge and expertise. This includes providing access to transportation.
3. Involve experts in all aspects of governance, including providing input on budget, technical writing, evaluation and design.
4. Schedule a "kickoff meeting" with formalized onboarding procedures right at the beginning to ensure everyone is fully aware of the equal role of experts.
5. Involve experts in research and evaluation. Experts need to be involved as a point of accountability and reflection of the project as it develops.

We close with a quote co-written by members of the ESC that captures why centering the experiences of young people is essential:

We're at a point of multiple crises in Toronto and collaboration is the key to the future. People who have lived here their whole lives know what the problems are and what needs to be done. No one knows better than an expert. It's not enough to just engage us. We need to be owners or our ideas and solutions. To be treated respectfully. This is non-negotiable. -- Andrés Gil-Luces, Cheyanne Ratnam, Mardi Daley, Joel Zola, Sophia Ilyniak and Alissa Skorik

Technical Report

Introduction

This report presents findings from the Developmental Process Evaluation of A Way Home Toronto (AWHT). The purpose of the evaluation was to examine: (1) the collaborative processes involved in AWHT; (2) how young people with lived experience of homelessness (experts) are engaged in this process; and (3) how evaluation processes can be integrated into AWHT's efforts.

To begin, the report outlines the key parties involved in the evaluation. We follow with the guiding principles of the evaluation, the sociopolitical history of Tkaronto, our methodology, the results, and an interpretation of the results. The report concludes with key recommendations for AWHT to maintain and strengthen their efforts.

KEY EVALUATION PARTNERS

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness & Hub Solutions

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) is a non-partisan research and policy partnership between academics, policy and decision makers, service providers and people with lived experience of homelessness, housed within York University. The COH conducts and disseminates research that contributes to effective solutions to homelessness.

In an effort to bridge the gap between research, policy and practice, the COH goes beyond the mandate of a traditional research institute. Through Hub Solutions -- a COH social enterprise -- we support service providers, policy makers and governments to improve their capacity to end homelessness. Partners of Hub Solutions benefit from the knowledge and experience of the COH staff, including the Homeless Hub communications team.

AWHT hired Hub Solutions as a third-party evaluator to examine the processes and partnerships involved in the creation of their strategy to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness.

A Way Home Toronto Youth Homelessness Strategy

AWHT is a group of individuals and partners in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) working together to prevent and end youth homelessness. The makings of AWHT began in 2015, when Toronto's Youth Shelter Interagency Network (YSIN) approached the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration division of the City of Toronto to look at a new way of addressing youth homelessness. In particular, the YSIN wanted to move away from managing emergency services that were crisis-focused to engaging in prevention-focused efforts and system integration. Thus, AWHT began the ambitious process of developing and implementing a youth homelessness strategy in one of the largest cities in Canada.

What began as a working group of emergency shelters, housing providers, drop-ins, arts organizations, health services, and Indigenous organizations turned into a comprehensive coalition in 2016, adopting the name "A Way Home Toronto" and aligning with the mandate of A Way Home Canada. Building off the work of A Way Home Canada, AWHT took a multiphased approach to creating the strategy (see Table 1), which strived to iterate and collate information, building off of what has been done instead of reinventing old products and services.

Phase 1: Strategy Foundations	Phase 2: Strategy and Solution Development	Phase 3: Implementation & Beyond
• Convene interested groups • Build relationships • Youth voice • Learn from others • Identify existing initiatives • Begin conversation • Develop shared vision and priorities • Identify needs and opportunities	• Expand coalition • Convene community of interest • Support youth leadership • Develop theory of change • Identify strategies and solutions to address priorities • Establish shared indicators • Develop detailed plan	• Prototyping & testing solutions • Advancing strategies and recommendations • Pursue opportunities for impact • Continue community engagement • Monitor progress • Learn and improve

Table 1: A Way Home Toronto Phased Approach to ending and preventing youth homelessness. Table reproduced from *A Way Home Toronto Makes Changes* report (2017).

Most of Phase 1 was implemented in 2016. This phase focused on building capacity, identifying goals, and developing tools, while engaging in inclusive practices in the

process. Additionally, Phase 1 included: a) an environmental scan of what was already happening at the local, provincial and national levels; b) listening and centering the lived experience of young people; and c) building relationships with service providers, advocates and researchers in order to identify shared connections. In sum, Phase 1 was about AWHT's collective responsibility to doing their background research and inviting people to the table.

With the idea of a strategy beginning to form by the end of Phase 1, Phase 2 focused on putting these ideas into action. AWHT began to leverage connections that were already in place and established shared indicators. Taking a community-based approach, the activities and deliverables were somewhat intentionally left open so that the community could determine the best approaches to collect information. With more people coming to the table, the specifications of what the strategy would look like began to take hold.

Starting in November 2017, Phase 2 also led to the formalized creation of the Cross-Sectoral Steering Committee (CSC) and Expert Steering Committee (ESC), a governance and engagement model that was both designed and coordinated by Cheyanne Ratnam.
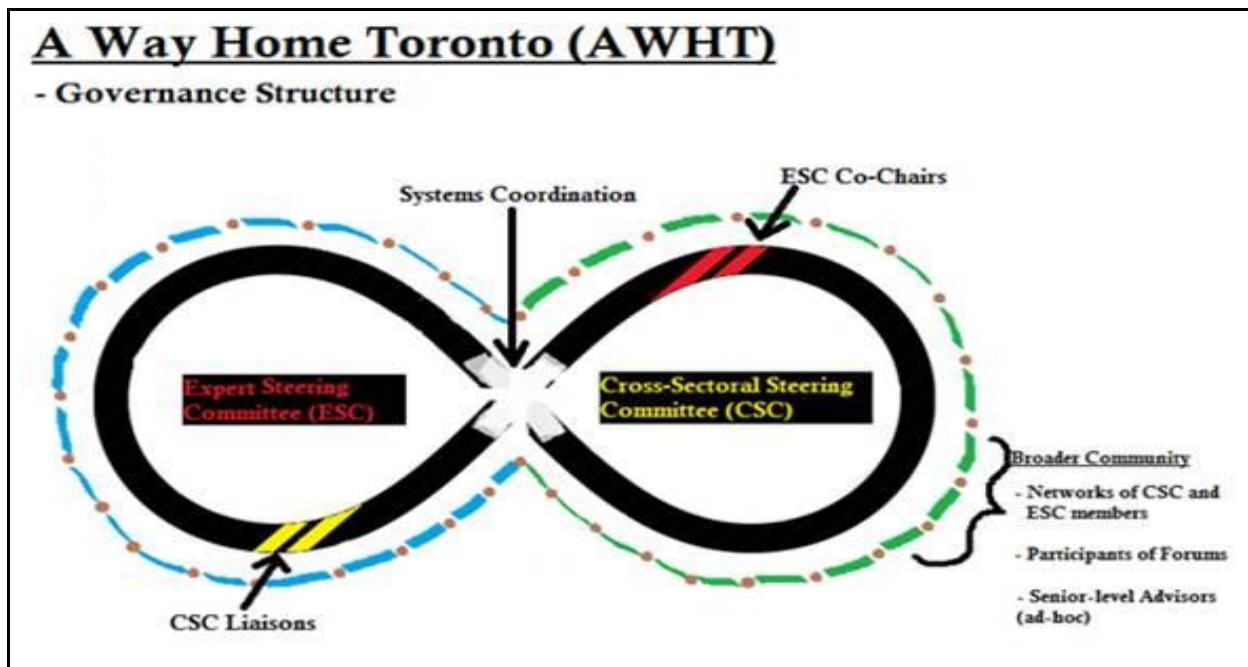

Table 2: Governance Structure between the Expert Steering Committee and Cross-Sectoral Steering Committee of A Way Home Toronto

The CSC focuses on service provider expertise across different sectors. The ESC is comprised of young people (experts) with lived expertise of experiencing and navigating through systems of homelessness. In theory, both councils consult with one another before any decisions are made (see Table 2). Given the collaborative nature of Phase 2, it seemed logical that Hub Solutions engage in a developmental process evaluation that would document how these conversations evolved, the language used, and how individual and organizational power dimensions make or break partnerships, shifting conversations and moving the strategy forward.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE EVALUATION

Our evaluation was guided by elements from three conceptual and methodological frameworks: (1) AWHT's strategic pillars; (2) Developmental evaluation; and (3) Collective Impact. Below we provide an outline of each of these frameworks.

AWHT Strategic Pillars

AWHT outlined five strategic pillars that governed their work through the different phases. Keeping in line with such spirit, the developmental process evaluation was guided by the following:

1) **Youth Leadership**: Develop structures and opportunities that facilitate development, capacity building and leadership of young people with lived experience. Foster ways of working that recognize and value different types of expertise and contributions, and move towards shared decision-making.

2) **Advocacy & Awareness Raising**: Articulate and advocate a paradigm shift around youth homelessness. Advance a strengths-based understanding of young people who navigate homelessness, challenging stigma, illuminating systemic issues and calling for evidence-informed, collective solutions.

3) **Research & Data**: Ground strategy development in research and data on youth homelessness and evidence-based solutions. Incorporate research, data collection, analysis and information sharing into strategy implementation, to monitor outcomes, learn and improve for maximum impact.

4) **Service Coordination**: Improve service coordination and integration both within the housing stability system and across other service systems to better meet the needs of young people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. Align access, assessment, and support processes and programs to ensure young people are connected quickly to individualized and youth-centred supports.

5) **Systems Transformation**: Identify opportunities to reshape the policies, processes, and structures that organize how programs and services are planned, funded, delivered and monitored, to advance the goals of preventing, reducing and ending youth homelessness.

Developmental Evaluation

As the name implies, developmental evaluation (DE) is a model that tackles complex social issues precisely because of its flexibility to adapt or develop alongside a project with a high degree of variability (Patton, 2010). It is typical to assume that the framing of an issue can change, particularly in regards to how the problem is conceptualized and the various approaches that are likely to be tested. As such, a DE approach is less focused on methodological consistency as a way to measure validity, and more interested in iterating with the methods itself. As a result, DE does not assume that there is a linear direction from problem to solution-- in fact, the back and forth is welcomed and part of the natural ebb and flow of any project as it moves forward.

When working on a youth strategy to prevent and end homelessness, one that centers lived experience and involves many players that connect through different levels of government, a DE approach is an appropriate fit, given how AWHT is reflective of, and responsive to, an ever changing homelessness sector.

Collective Impact

As AWHT operates under a Collective Impact model, we aligned our evaluation strategies with its principles through continuous communications and mutually reinforcing activities. Collective Impact Initiatives can be described as long-term commitments by a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a complex social issue (Kania & Kramer, 2011). At its core, there are five key conditions that ensures success:

1) **Common Agenda**: Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and

joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions. Any disagreements incurring from even a slight difference will splinter the other conditions.

2) **Shared Measurement Systems**: Following an agreed upon agenda, there must be an agreement on how successes will be measured and reported. Collecting data and measuring results at the community level not only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, but it also enables participants to hold each other accountable and learn from success and failures.

3) **Mutually Reinforcing Activities**: Stakeholders should ensure that each undertake a specific set of activities that can help to support and coordinate the action of others. The power of collective action lies in this differentiated coordination through a mutually reinforcing plan of action. Each stakeholder's efforts must fit into an overarching plan if combined efforts are to be successful.

4) **Continuous Communication**: Developing trust among non-profits, corporations and government agencies can be challenging. Many times, stakeholders need multiple meetings/extended amounts of time to see that their interests are treated fairly and that organizational priorities are treated equitably. This process of allowing trust to build and creating a common vocabulary takes time and is essential for developing a shared measurement system.

5) **Backbone Support Organization**: The backbone organization requires a dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations who can plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection, and reporting. They are also here to support other logistical and administrative details needed for an initiative to function smoothly.

Collective Impact initiatives that are at the initial stage of their development are a particularly good fit for DE because of how the methods focus on relationship building and identify early progresses and challenges (Parkhurst & Preskill, 2014).

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SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXT AND HISTORY OF TKARONTO

As developmental evaluators, we would remiss if we did not also recognize the socio-political histories shaping Toronto's economic market and the impact it has had on homelessness. Ontario has seen a steady growth in precarious labour (Wilson et al. 2011), intensifying a post-Fordist labour market (Lewis et al. 2015). There has been an increase in short-term, part-time, seasonal and casual employment contracts in Ontario that offer little to no work protections, insurance coverage or sick days (Wilson et al. 2011). As labor markets and economic conditions continue to intensify in Toronto, it places additional challenges to finding stable housing at market rent, let alone stable employment and high quality of life.

Neoliberal governance further influences how homelessness is experienced in Toronto. Dating back to the 1970s, the Federal government began distancing itself from having a direct role in urban development (Albo, 2006), mirroring the patterns, fiscal reforms and divestments in government responsibility seen in the United States (Price, 2017). As a result, housing policy reoriented favourably for private sector mortgage markets and developers. Additionally, the Ontario government began to push for mergers of cities as a way to market favourably for business investment. For example, the 1998 amalgamation of the regional municipality of Metropolitan Toronto and its six constituent municipalities (East York, Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough, York and the City of Toronto) was proposed as a cost-saving measure to produce a "strong, unified voice to sell itself to the global marketplace" (Chidley & Hawaleshka, 2003).

While the influence of neoliberalism began taking roots in the 1970s, displacement due to colonization has much deeper roots. Tkaronto has been the site of human activity for over 15,000 years. As mentioned before, these were the lands of the Mississaugas of the Anishinaabe, the Haundenosaunee Confederacy and the Wendat. European settlers began contact over 400 years ago, and despite the promises of early treaties (Government of Ontario, 2018), Indigenous peoples became the target of exploitation and assimilation in favour of Judeo-Christian and capitalist institutions (First Nations House, 2012). As Canada became independent, this legacy only amplified with systemic atrocities designed to strip away Indigenous culture, laws and rights such as residential schools, the "Sixties Scoop" (Menzies, 2010; Brown et al. 2007), over-policing and other processes of cultural genocide. The imposition of these systems and the government's failure to fulfill treaty obligations has resulted in the overwhelming poverty we see today (Waldram et al. 2006), and has been cited as a direct cause of the

overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples experiencing homelessness (Gaetz et al. 2014).

Many racialized communities are generally overrepresented in homeless and hidden homeless youth populations, most notably Black, Afro Canadians and immigrants and newcomers (CAMH & CAS, 2014). During the United States civil war between 1861-1865, Toronto was often hailed as a site of "new beginnings" for African American slaves that fled for their freedom during the Underground Railroad. Although Canada's economic prosperity was never based on plantation-based slavery, the country is still no stranger to importing labour with little protections and insufferable working conditions. In the 1800s, Chinese immigration was encouraged as cheap labour to building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and menial wages and poor working conditions resulted in anywhere between 600-5,000 deaths (Ferguson, 1975). By the late 1800s in Toronto, many freed slaves and Chinese railway workers were left with menial jobs and little rights or protections, confined to live in St. John's Ward (bound by Queen, College, Yonge and University street today) or York Township (now an amalgamation of multiple neighborhoods surrounding Jane and Finch, Etobicoke, North York and bound by the Humber river) (Lorinc, 2017). These neighborhoods, that were known to be high density with high poverty rates, compounded over the years and reinforced the cycle of poverty.

Today, many Black communities living in Toronto are predominately of Caribbean and East African origin due to migration surges in the 1980s (Statistics Canada, 2018). In line with neoliberal movements of the 1970s, there was a strong push to deregulate rent and urban planning controls, and these policies had a profound influence on gentrification in neighborhoods where immigrant and newcomers first settled (Albo, 2006). This caused market rent to inflate, squeezed local business margins, and displaced many 3rd, 4th or sometimes 5th generation families farther away from the core of the GTA.

Further, between 1970 and 2005, the GTA saw a dramatic rise in high-income neighborhoods clustered around the central city and subway lines, as well as an intensification of low-income neighborhoods growing in the northeastern and northwestern parts of Toronto (Hulchanski, 2007). David Hulchanski coined the concept of Toronto's "three cities", predicting that middle-income neighborhoods in Toronto would continue to decline and eventually disappear altogether (Hulchanski, 2007). Today, we see these effects most intensely in neighborhoods like Little Jamaica (Spurr, 2018), Chinatown (Silva, 2017) Moss Park (Csanady, 2016), and Parkdale (Vernon, 2017). Displacement patterns have started to concentrate around the broader GTA,

such as Ajax, Scarborough, Jane & Finch and Black Creek Pioneer Village (Hulchanski, 2007).

Specific to this evaluation, we see these histories as an integral part to our work because it allows us to broaden our own evaluation indicators to include these social determinants, and to draw narrative patterns that might have been lost by other methodologies. For many, home is not always a physical structure, and to recognize people's relationship to land, how they come to it, and how they navigate through it, is an important place to ground the evaluation. Aligned with Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples (2017), Hub Solutions frames their understanding of homelessness using Jesse Thistle's Definition of Indigenous Homelessness (2017), which is also employed by AWHT.

1) Historical Displacement of Homelessness

2) Contemporary Geographic Separation Homelessness

3) Spiritual Disconnection Homelessness

4) Mental Disruption and Imbalance Homelessness

5) Cultural Disintegration and Loss Homelessness

6) Overcrowding Homelessness

7) Relocation and Mobility Homelessness

8) Going Home Homelessness

9) Nowhere to Go Homelessness

10) Escaping or Avoiding Harm Homelessness

11) Emergency Crisis Homelessness

12) Climatic Refugee Homelessness

Methodology

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

We began the project by connecting with AWHT to establish objectives and develop protocols to undertake this evaluation. It was determined that three main evaluation questions would be examined:

1) How can AWHT facilitate effective collaboration across sectors in a major urban centre to address the drivers, experiences and consequences of youth homelessness?
2) How can community coalitions work with young people with lived experience as key partners, experts and leaders to address the complex social policy issues directly affecting their lives?
3) How can robust monitoring, measurement and evaluation be integrated into emerging, multi stakeholder initiatives in ways that support continued innovation, evolution and improvement?

In order to address these evaluation questions, a qualitative study design was developed. This included a document review, ethnographic observation, and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. These methods were chosen since they align with our guiding conceptual frameworks (AWHT Strategic Pillars, DE, Collective Impact). Prior to data collection, we received ethical clearance from York University's Office of Research Ethics.

Below we outline each of the methodologies used.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

In order to address these evaluation questions, a qualitative study was designed and developed that combined ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The methods was chosen as a way to construct a narrative across different agents and phases in the project.

Our first task was to examine the documentation from Phase 1, which included reports, meeting minutes, key informant interviews, and other data that would help contextualize our evaluation plan.

ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION AND SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

We collected ethnographic notes from 13 steering committee meetings, community events, and debriefs. During this time, the Hub Solutions team was encouraged to actively participate in these processes. We also conducted interviews with members of the 12-person Cross Sectoral Committee (CSC) and the five-person Expert Steering Committee (ESC). Interviewees were recruited via e-mail, with the support of the AWHT coordinator. While the meeting notes highlighted the ebb and flow of conversations, interviews tended to reflect on what participants thought of the meetings. As such, interview questions tended to have a strong focus on power, privilege, perceptions of collaborative partnership models, and environmental factors that helped or hindered people's ability to engage in social change efforts. The preliminary analysis of the data also helped move subsequent interview questions to more precise pressure points and examples, which enriched the data.

MEMBER CHECKING

The flexibility of DE allowed our evaluation team to continue to modify/change our evaluation focus during the member-checking processes. During this time, the Hub Solutions team analyzed the data and met with the CSC, ESC and Indigenous subcommittee (independently) to check over the report and make specific additions.

DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data for both the interviews and meetings were transcribed verbatim and coded by two members of the COH team. Transcripts were then analyzed using an iterative, narrative approach. To ensure reliability of the coding process, the evaluation team independently coded the same segment of the data from one transcript. After independently coding a portion of a transcript, they then met to compare and contrast codes.

The transcripts were read line-by-line and coded in the participants own language as much as possible. The coded data was then analyzed for similarities, variations and

differences across transcripts. This helped us gain a better understanding of the main themes.

AWHT had a keen interest in engaging Hub Solutions from the start, so as to ensure that we felt part of the ESC and CSC and were able to meaningfully contribute. Rather than having limited touch points with the committees, Hub Solutions sought to be meaningfully included in AWHT's work. This allowed the Hub Solutions team to create a more cohesive narrative link, bridging together the various data points. During the proposal stage, it was thought that data yielded from the meeting notes would hold more analytical weight than the interviews. However, in building that trust with AWHT, Hub Solutions was able to collect richer data from the interviews, and thus used that as its primary source of data.

DIRECT QUOTING

While being interviewed, one of the participants began to question the overarching structures of anonymity and confidentiality within a research report. It was agreed that while the original purpose of preserving participants' anonymity was an ethical best practice, this blanket approach did not apply to everyone who participated in the evaluation. It was requested that Hub Solutions submit an addendum that allowed participants to self-identify in the final report if they choose to. York University's Office of Research Ethics granted these changes. As such, some names will be identified throughout the report to honor the integrity of individual stories and lived experiences.

Results

To begin, our data supports the notion that inverted models of governance like AWHT are effective ways to increase community engagement and commitment in developing a strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness. Below we present the key themes that demonstrate AWHT's efficacy and innovative practices, as well as factors that impacted AWHT's development and implementation. The themes are grouped into three main sections: (1) AWHT's unique governance structure; (2) Contextual influences impacting AWHT processes; and (3) Internal processes that challenged and strengthened AWHT. It is worth noting that these contextual influences and internal processes are common to many similar initiatives and therefore not unique to AWHT's experience.

UNIQUE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF AWHT

The governance structure of AWHT was unique and innovative, particularly the role of the ESC. Below we discuss: (1) the development of the CSC and the ESC; (2) strengths of the ESC; (3) the dedication of both the ESC and the CSC in testing the governance structure; and (4) challenges in communication between the two groups.

Development of CSC and ESC

Between Phase 1 and Phase 2, an evolved governance structure began to take form. The CSC expanded to include a more diverse array of community stakeholders and new co-chairs were appointed, representing high priority populations. Meanwhile, experts were hired to form the ESC, and onboarding began anew.

While the Phase 2 processes of CSC stakeholder mapping and recruitment were occurring, the project coordinator recruited and hired the ESC members. This was done intentionally to acquaint experts to the project and to one another, and enabled the ESC to begin a critical dialogue about homelessness, intersectionality, and other related subjects. The recruitment process included the development of a formal job ad that highlighted roles, responsibilities, and qualifications of respected positions (Co-Chair positions, and non-co-chair positions). The job ad was shared through the AWHT's professional network, and the coordinator's network of non-AWHT contacts. AWHT received over 20 applications and expressions of interests. The coordinator intentionally looked for people with seasoned experience working in similar environments as well as

people with no experience as a way to capture a variety of perspectives. Those hired were treated as professionals, and not as 'youth'. There were clear expectations of work ethic, attendance, and overall commitment to engaging with the group. While there were clear expectations, it was also important to allow for the organic flow of members - to acknowledge that life circumstances may force young people to disengage and then re-engage.

Centering Experts in the Governance Structure

The formation of the ESC had a positive impact on how young people with lived experience can engage in the complex process of system change. Many of the ESC members we interviewed spoke highly of the opportunity to be a part of AWHT, particularly: (1) the fair compensation they received; and (2) the unique and sustainable ways they were positioned as professionals. For example, an ESC member shared:

> *I feel important being [with AWHT]. I feel way more respected, and viewed as an employee, and not just part of the youth group [...] We have a lot of power over planning events. It's been great to see us taking take the lead.*

Our data supports that having such a robust ESC isn't just meaningful for the experts, but also for the stakeholders who sit on the CSC. Many CSC members we interviewed had experience sitting on various councils, and mentioned that they appreciated the ESC as a whole functioning entity. Several of the CSC members expressed that such meaningful inclusion of experts was an essential, effective and innovative part of the AWHT model, as illustrated by the following quotes:

> *We were informed in an earlier phase of the project that young people need to be resourced and engaged, but also take on leadership roles. This is key. And leadership is not something that's going to happen without resourcing. Not just compensation, but to support them taking meaningful leadership roles beyond a one-time focus group or one seat at the table. – CSC Participant*

Part of what made the ESC's model so successful was its ability to provide a mix of sustainable mentorship, peer support, and professional growth. Professional 'weaknesses' (such as punctuality or communication) weren't dismissed or ignored; rather, there were opportunities to build capacity and skills through mentorship and collaboration. There was plenty of time before, during, and after meetings to touch base informally and explore topics of self-care, burnout and life changes which helped make

the space safe enough for ESC members to take risks and develop trust amongst each other. Quotes from ESC members illustrate this point:

> *[The magic behind AWHT is that] we have the time to get to know each other. That's the reason there is trust and respect. That doesn't usually happen in a normal program" - Andrés Gil-Luces, ESC*

> *It's about seeing everybody's strengths. I've learned a lot. Everybody is present [...] When someone is not available because life, there's always someone to step in". – ESC Participant*

> *You get more autonomy with your own process. With [other] training, it's like 'you have to do it this way, speak this way.' You feel kind of censored. This is the problem when people say 'we need to engage young people,' but you are using them as a token because you control what they can and cannot say. At AWHT, we know that happens all the time, we know the problems, now it's time to figure out how. As a [member of AWHT], I can be like 'ok I'm going to engage with these people, and how I do is up to me for me to learn.' - Andrés Gil-Luces, ESC*

Overall, ESC members felt that there were limited challenges in being a part of AWHT, although a few did note that they wanted to take on more strategic power, particularly around governance and budget. One ESC participant who was privy to both ESC and CSC meetings mentioned that they felt like the work of the ESC tended to focus on execution of events and activities. While this work was important, the ESC participant felt the ESC was less involved in governance and decision making, particularly with budgets and ownership.

Dedication of ESC and CSC Members in Testing the Governance Structure

Essential to the implementation of this unique governance structure was the buy-in of its membership. Our data points to substantial buy-in from both the CSC and the ESC, as evident by the level of dedication and commitment from each participant and, ultimately, the creation of the strategy. This sentiment is found within the following quotes:

> *I've been really blown away by how committed people are on both tables. I'm not surprised with the ESC because they chose to be here. I'm more surprised with the CSC. A big difference is that we're paid to be there, but they are salaried*

[through their organization]. It's surprising to see how much people really care, and contributing in many different ways. - ESC Participant

When [experts] are not able to make it to meetings, they get emotional. They think they are letting down AWHT. That shows me their drive. It's not just about community change, it's about a personal stake, it's an intimate stake. [...] Trust is something that's evident on both tables. It's much more evident with the [experts] because we're more like family. With family institutions, trust is very important and a value that we uphold. I see a lot of trust with the Cross Sectoral Committee, but the dynamic is different because they are workers, and members of organizations, but it is very evident that they both exist".   - Cheyanne Ratnam, AWHT Project Coordinator.

It's funny you should ask, because I do see a remarkable consistency in meeting attendance. Most tables you don't get that. - CSC Participant

CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES IMPACTING AWHT'S PROCESSES

As previously mentioned, contextual realities impacting AWHT were often outside of the collective's control. Despite these challenges, AWHT continued to operate in a structured fashion; however, these contextual realities sometimes impacted the collaborative processes involved in the work. These contextual realities were: (1) the transition between Phase 1 and 2; (2) a tight budget; and (3) quick timelines. In reviewing these themes, the reader should view them as factors AWHT was contending with, rather than critiques of the AWHT process.

Transitioning Between Phases

As Phase 1 transitioned into Phase 2, there was a noticeable and important shift in the people at the table. Since homelessness is an intersectoral issue, it was incredibly beneficial to have a variety of sectors and experiences present. This brought a new lens to the work of AWHT and was vital in the development of a strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness.

As the table grew, the people who held decision-making power effectively doubled (i.e., the ESC and the CSC). Some committee members felt that the rapid expansion of AWHT made it difficult to onboard members while simultaneously moving the agenda

forward. Every member went through an organic process of understanding their place in the collective, but with time constraints it was not always possible to see that process through. Specifically, for individuals who were asked to represent an identity at the intersections of youth homelessness (e.g. Indigenous, LGBTQ2S), meeting them where they were at and centering their needs didn't always come through. As such, some CSC members described their discomfort as they were asked to support AWHT (sometimes with little to no context) and felt somewhat tokenized by speaking on behalf of the community they were supposedly invited to represent. For example, CSC participants shared the following:

> *The most challenging part of that process is [Phase 2]. I felt a little bit more comfortable [in Phase 1] because it was smaller, and it was easier to get things moving. Smaller groups can get more done, it can be more efficient, but you don't always get that rich conversation. - CSC Participant*

> *I'm new to the committee, the very first day I was brought in I kind of felt coerced. So I didn't have enough time to really reflect, or have a greater understanding of group dynamics. Now that I've been in it for a while, it's a detail I need to monitor. It's challenging as a new member. - CSC Participant*

With people coming in at different times, or people switching out due to unanticipated circumstances, it was sometimes difficult to keep track of who had what information. This sometimes made it challenging to come to consensus when a decision had to be made.

Budgetary Constraints and Sustainable Resources

Interviews and ethnographic observation indicated that both timelines and budgetary constrictions impacted the ability to effectively collaborate. The quotes below demonstrate the impact of these constraints:

> *We wrote a proposal for a 12 month project, we didn't build in 3 months lead time, and 3 months to get the Expert Steering Committee up and running—We should have anticipated this timeline in the grant, but it's hard to write in. – CSC Participant*

> *I have seen these constraints in every collaboration I've worked on. There is this expectation that these people have extra time to be part of this collaboration. To*

go to the meetings, to read the documents, to participate meaningfully without any expectation or compensation. - CSC Participant

This suggests that for AWHT, like most collaborative coalitions, budgetary constraints can impose tight timelines. This impacts the ability to collaboratively build and develop solutions to complex social problems. This was significant because it was reflected not just in how AWHT moved the meetings along, but also how their work progressed. It was arguably a major barrier to achieving true collaboration and growth. This sentiment was echoed by multiple participants, specifically around what would happen after the strategy was written. Despite this, AWHT managed to keep its collaborative spirit alive while also having to chase after deadlines and deliverables.

In relation to the budget, while having a surplus of funding was often noted as a "a good problem to have", the time and energy spent on strategizing how to best shift budget lines, how to negotiate deadline extensions, and how to achieve more funding was challenging. In some cases, the administrative burden of the funding ultimately (and ironically) took time and energy away from supporting the strategy development itself and contributed to burnout.

I see this frustration as an organic process, part of accountability. If there's no frustration, you're not committed to this. Funding is always talked about because that is where the root of the frustration is coming from, us trying to figure out how to fit this project into the funding structures that currently exist. We lack process because we have a lack of funding and a funding system that does not understand what we need to sustain these kinds of projects. There is also strain at organizational levels where staff from various organizations are involved as in-kind members – if there was funding, especially in a Collective Impact grant, which was allocated to provide organizations an amount for time, perhaps that would have changed the dynamics of the group. Due to the known lack of sustainability, we don't know the next steps would be. It's not frustration with the members across the table, it's about the funding system which is nurturing such frustration because we want to make sure that the work continues". - Cheyanne Ratnam, AWHT Project Coordinator

With that, it is also worth noting a positive funding example that occurred. About halfway through Phase 2, a provincial grant came into the fold, and there was a great rush to submit an application. After some back and forth on what the proposal should focus on, one of the CSC members mentioned that an organization adjacent to AWHT was

submitting something very similar. As a result, AWHT ultimately decided not to submit an application to minimize overlap. While this meant that AWHT did not take advantage of a funding call, an interpretation of this experience could be seen as Collective Impact done well; at its barest bones, Collective Impact aims to create an environment that allows everyone to share what they know and make better and more informed decisions.

High workload and difficult turnaround times

The tight turnaround times also impacted AWHT's collaborative processes. Bringing more people to the table required AWHT's processes to slow down, and with a funding deadline looming, it became difficult to meet important deliverables within the timeline. In some cases, participants mentioned that the workload was double what they anticipated. For example, a CSC participant shared:

> *It's been more legwork and meetings than I anticipated. I see some folks who are being asked to go above and beyond who did not know what they signed up for. Sometimes they tap out not because they are complacent, but because they are just maxed out.*

There were other systemic challenges that made it difficult for AWHT to achieve its goals. As with any group environment, differences of opinion in the CSC occurred during some of the meetings we attended, but participants were quick to point out that this was the result of structural constraints. Even when tensions arose that were perceived as value differences or "strong personalities", it felt like consensus could be possible if only they were given more time. As such, people sometimes had to abandon important trust-building conversations in order to "get the work done". A CSC participant stated:

> *We've got big ideas in a short time frame with a lot of collaborative partners creating confusion. Sometimes, it's just difficult to figure out what's happening, what are our funding pockets, what are our deliverables [...] However, I feel like there's a lot of communication with a lot of transparency. It's just hard because the project has such a short timeline, and we need to make decisions without the necessary time to flesh them out.*

At some point, some tasks became contracted out, most notably a technical writer as well as a design thinking specialist to support some of the community forums. It became

clear how valuable their roles were in the making of the strategy and how they would have benefited from being a part of the earlier conversations.

INTERNAL PROCESSES STRENGTHENING AND CHALLENGING AWHT'S COLLABORATIVE WORK

We finish by discussing the internal processes that strengthened and challenged AWHT's collaborative work. Our analysis of the interview and ethnographic data uncovered four main themes that focused on: (1) Strengths: (a) strong leadership; (b) expanding ideas of homelessness through language; and (2) Challenges: (a) communication between the ESC and CSC; (b) staying on message; and (c) recognizing the power settings and environments can have.

Strengths

Strong leadership

Through our ethnographic analysis, our evaluation team witnessed the strong leadership from the project coordinator and their supervisor. Both individuals were strong presences in all of AWHT's activities, bringing expert and sector knowledge. They were responsible for many of the administrative tasks that kept AWHT operating in a smooth fashion and were involved in the majority of the 'behind the scenes' work. The passion displayed by both individuals, particularly the project coordinator, was essential in ensuring that AWHT's unique governance structure was effectively implemented, especially the centering of experts.

Expanding ideas of homelessness through language

Early on, the term "expert" and "young person" became infused in the AWHT vernacular, not only as a way to honor the lived expertise that young people hold, but to also challenge systems and assumptions that youth homelessness is built on. Within the homelessness sector, "youth" can often be conflated to mean many different things, and in doing so, can tokenize or erase the complexity of a young person's experience. These changes in language weren't meant to replace "youth" with "expert" but rather to introduce nuance in the language and remind those that young people are people first, and their expertise of navigating through complex systems can and should be seen as a valuable skill.

Cheyanne Ratnam shared that, "*For our steering committee, we do chat a lot about language, and if people say things that are out of line, they are called out politely.*"

The process of utilizing this language came with many praises, challenges and questions from both the ESC and CSC. The following quotes demonstrate the complexity of engaging in this change of language:

Language is one piece and language is power. In changing language, you are changing power. In negotiating that language, we are dialoguing through power as well. - Cheyanne Ratnam, AWHT Project Coordinator

My issue is that, a lot of time we are talking about language more than we are discussing policy change. Yeah you can call us experts, but a rose by any other name is still a rose, and still smells sweet. My issue isn't the changing language, my issue is the prioritization of changing language instead of changing policy. - ESC participant

It's about being knowledgeable. We usually have labels placed on us by people by Anglo-Saxon communities, put in place by scholars or doctors. Day-to-day it doesn't make sense". - Andrés Gil-Luces, Expert Steering Committee

I agree that we are experts, and it's good that we're recognized as such. But I don't see why we can't call ourselves youth. In the context of strategy-building, it makes sense and it's great. Other than that, I don't feel like it's a big deal. We're youth and we're talking about youth homelessness. The change in language seems like a reaction to the uncomfortable feelings around the fact that 'youth' or 'youth homelessness' has become a big non-profit industry; and from which everyone at AWHT directly or indirectly personally benefits from. I do think language is important and has power to change things in our society, but I think we should be careful to not use new language to sugar-coat things. - ESC Participant

Efforts to redistribute power in this way can be difficult when there are many protocols in place that require those who hold power to enforce their position. AWHT recognized the ESC as professionals, and trusted them as such, but within the confines of more institutionalized settings there were concerns that experts may be reverted back to being treated as "youth". Cheyanne Ratnam positioned herself both as the AWHT

coordinator, and an expert, and was the backbone that bridged the two counsels. She provides an example of how institutional protocols can be hindering:

> *The way I see you (experts), is that we've hired you as professionals, but we work in a system that's very rigid. There's a protocol, for example, that staff cannot smoke with the 'youth' – however our experts are hired on a professional capacity and not seen as 'youth'. These protocols hinder important opportunities- with AWHT, that's rapport building time, and productive time. That's time to reflect with you on the process that is happening and strategize. [This can be] tough when your organization [has protocols around that]. - Cheyanne Ratnam, AWHT Project Coordinator*

While we found little consensus on using the specific term "expert", there was a strong consensus on respecting changes in language, and the significance of understanding why it mattered. For example, an ESC participant shared:

> *I do think language is important and I do think we are at a pivotal time for language right now. We've gotten away from generalizations, and what we perceive as efficacy in terms of systems and work. I think we are standing in contrast to our mission and work if we don't pay attention to language. -- ESC Participant*

We saw this process overall as positive, because it allowed people to critically think about the power that language can hold when working with young people who experience homelessness. As AWHT expands, we anticipate that the term expert will continue to be adopted as these conversations continue to unfold.

Challenges

Communication across the CSC and ESC

A challenge to the unique governance structure of AWHT was the lack of opportunities for the ESC and CSC to collaborate. Members from both committees felt like they weren't in the loop of the others' day-to-day activities, and some suggested that the two should have met earlier on in the formation process. A CSC participant stated:

> *I feel like there's somewhat of a disconnect [with the ESC]. As a steering committee member, we get reports, but I still haven't even met all of the folks*

from ESC. It would've been nice to get together earlier to figure out who's doing what. I don't know how the decision making happens.

With the CSC meetings typically happening on weekday mornings and ESC meetings typically happening on weekends, it made it logistically difficult to synchronize both conversations. Two representatives from each council had agreed to be present in other meetings to ensure a strong line of communication, but because of these differences in schedules, this was not always executed.

One exception to this were the community forums. These forums brought together the ESC and CSC, as well as members of the broader homelessness sector. In these forums, participants were invited to engage with one another in dynamic activities, which allowed for some team building opportunities to arise. However, it did appear that most CSC members gravitated to other CSC members and most ESC members gravitated to other ESC members. This makes sense given the relationships that were emerging in each of the respective groups, but it is also indicative of the need for earlier attempts at bringing the two groups together.

Staying on message

The shift to Phase 2 led to more people at the table, which also meant that there were more opportunities for misunderstandings. With a number of new people coming into the fold, combined with the planning of many events, it was not always clear how AWHT's activities fit into the activities of developing a strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness in the GTA. This sometimes made it difficult to achieve consensus.

Several CSC members shared with us that when people from different sectors come together, it often requires that they address power, privilege, and subject positions in order to first build trust. CSC members elaborated that these conversations can take time, and do not always fit neatly into a budget line or agenda item-- as such, and as illustrated by the below quote, conversations could be cast aside for the sake of time:

> *Does your voice get heard? It depends on what you're bringing forward, your social location. It's a predominately white group and I've been pushing more non-traditional ideas, so I know my voice doesn't always get heard. Your social location informs the way you frame information in suggestions, which may or may not align with mainstream thinking. I don't know if it's mainstream thought or my*

own social location, because other folks say the same thing, and it's received differently. We've been working a lot around this. - CSC Participant

The lack of time needed to address important facets were not always available, and did have a noticeable impact once the ESC and CSC met. When it became time to write the strategy, it was difficult to hold a narrative thread across all the different events, conversations, agendas and draw a clear picture of the synthesis of it all. With the clock racing, one ESC participant mentioned that they enjoyed the first CSC-ESC synthesis, but struggled to keep up with the pace. They shared, "*I have learning disabilities, so it makes it difficult to follow. It's like which one is what? So many acronyms, so that's difficult to follow. The CSC-ESC synthesis, there was a lot happening.*"

While the CSC members primarily agreed on the council's values, being a representative from a different organization or sector could lead to differences of opinion. Again, this is a natural component to cross-sectoral work, but it sometimes clouded consensus for the CSC, as demonstrated by the following quote:

> *The [ESC-CSC governance] model is a great metaphor for the system changes that we need. It's the kind of new voice, new frame that we want if we want to make a difference. Because we don't all have the same analysis, we don't all hear it or see it. We all need to work together in order to find each other's voice. - CSC Participant*

Interestingly, mission drift was not something we saw as strongly with the ESC committee, perhaps because experts spoke from their personal and professional background as opposed to an organization that they represented. This allowed consensus to get achieved on their own terms, and overall, made for less mission drift than the CSC.

Location of meeting spaces and events

Since AWHT is a collaborative of many individuals, agencies and organizations, this meant that some of the meetings and event spaces took place in settings that existed within the homelessness sector, including emergency shelters. This practice makes sense, as the venues were often familiar to CSC and ESC members; however, participants of the community forums, particularly young people from outside of the ESC, were left wondering who was responsible for the day's events. For example, at an event taking place at one member agency, some young people were unclear if it was an

event of the member agency or an AWHT event. Importantly, during CSC and ESC meetings, committee members questioned if these meeting locations were suitable for young people and a discussion took place. As the physical location of these spaces can hold deep, and sometimes traumatic, meanings to individuals, it was a necessary and important discussion to have.

In the proceeding section, we'll now interpret these findings and discuss their implications.

Discussion

In the spirit of collaboration, our intention behind the discussion of these findings is that: (i) those from AWHT can reflect on their shared experiences; and (ii) others may learn from these experiences should they choose to build upon or replicate AWHT practices.

CENTERING EXPERTS

A Way Home Canada and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness recently released "*What Would It Take*" a national report on what it would take to prevent youth homelessness (Schwan et al, 2018). Among the recommendations in the report, four were targeted at the community level and particularly relevant to the work of AWHT. A key recommendation spoke to the need to foster meaningful youth engagement in the development of community policies and responses, and ensure provision of necessary supports (such as reimbursement, upskilling and accessibility) for all types of engagement. AWHT's governance model is reflective of this recommendation and has shown a considerable positive impact on experts, both professionally and personally. Unlike more traditional models of community engagement, whereby one or two people are invited to speak solely from their lived experience of homelessness via an ad hoc committee, AWHT's governance model addresses the client-provider power imbalance by ensuring that experts sit shoulder-to-shoulder with the very systems that serve them. It also allows opportunities for experts to showcase their expertise in other domains outside of their lived experience of homelessness, such as research, design, leadership, project management, and workshop facilitation.

Moving beyond strategic innovation, we have also seen how the governance model ties into the *Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada* (Thistle, 2017). Thistle (2017) describes cultural disintegration and loss as, "*homelessness that totally dislocates or alienates Indigenous individuals and communities from the relationship web of Indigenous society*" (pg.11). Although there was no evidence to suggest that AWHT achieved true cultural integration, it was suggested that the groundwork was laid as a starting place to reconnect. There was great care taken into ensuring that Indigenous ceremony was a part of the opening and closing of key events, and that Indigenous voices were centered when approaching community. Some ESC members even described their relationship to the council as a kind of "family" and cultural appreciations were noticed by Indigenous participants. These small stepping stones are important to achieving meaningful reconciliation, and that connection brought momentum the humility to the strategy.

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

We have evidence to support that AWHT's governance model enables collaboration in new and exciting ways. Having a committee solely comprised of experts inherently enforces accountability measures for the CSC, as both councils are required to report to one another and hold equal decision-making power. Additionally, having more expert perspectives allowed space for new discussions about language, finances and power in ways that were not previously had. These models of expert engagement have been cited as important and much needed (Kennelly, 2011; Kennelly 2018), and something organizations should continue to integrate into their own work.

With that, we also know that AWHT has potential for improvement, and some of the heartaches of Collective Impact work persisted in both predictable and unpredictable ways. For organizations pressed with their own priorities and deadlines, buying into a relatively new organization took time, squeezing timelines that were already tight. As a result of this, individuals who were brought into the fold, particularly those who represented communities who experience marginalization, did not always feel able to collaborate on their own terms. AWHT always worked to foster a dynamic of anti-oppression, but because of the funding and deliverable deadlines, it did not always feel like there were opportunities to explore these dimensions. We saw this happen most prominently as Phase 1 moved into Phase 2, as more people were brought to the table and when the strategy began to take form.

In *A Way Home: Youth Homelessness Community Planning Toolkit*, Alina Turner (2016) outlines the role of four distinct groups that comprise of a planning team: (i) steering committee, (ii) project manager (iii) backbone supports and (iv) experts and consultants. As we know from Collective Impact, the backbone is essential to guiding the vision, supporting aligned activities and building public will. Turner (2016) also outlines the role of the project manager, who is essentially dedicated to the day-to-day execution and championing of the initiative. In many ways, given the number of activities AWHT was engaged in, the backbone supports and the project manager were oftentimes faced with too many tasks and not enough time. This meant that as new people came into the fold, there sometimes lacked the support needed to bridge knowledge, onboard and (perhaps most importantly) allow space for conversations on power and privilege to occur. This sometimes left newly admitted members confused of what their role and deliverables were and left little time to allow a forum of discussion between the ESC and the CSC. As with the case of AWHT, sometimes it became unclear what the other committees did, and how these two committees were tied together. This tension is

something Collective Impact enthusiasts dote upon, recognizing that the structure can be just as important as the strategy (Kania, Hanleybrown & Juster, 2014), and we believe that is was a main lesson learned of AWHT's process.

As the ESC became robust and productive, it would have been beneficial to have the entire committee involved earlier while key decisions were being made around budgeting and planning events. Having more than two representatives at the CSC table would have also allowed the experts to share a diversity of perspectives and provided more opportunities for engagement. For example, with all the data collected during the Knowledge Exchange Circles and events, it could have been a great opportunity for an expert with a research background to perform a secondary analysis, to accompany some of the outcomes from the graphic facilitation.

BUDGET AND TIMELINES

While these dynamics are interpersonally linked, it's also important to recognize how this works within a funding system with strict budget lines and tight timelines. AWHT came together precisely to work on breaking down silos in the homelessness sector through innovative community building, but being bound by their funding and their timeline, it did not always allow for the work to be done at its fullest capacity. There is an increasing urge for a new paradigm in funding, as the current context does not enable people to respond effectively to the challenges of complex issues. For example, as proposed by Patrizi et al. (2013):

> *Under conditions of uncertainty, foundations need to acknowledge what they do not know and cannot control and commit to learning their way is better strategy. This is no small matter. It puts the value of strategic philanthropy in question; to be good strategists in these settings, foundations need to become good learnings and to position learning itself as core strategy.*

With over 5+ hours of advisory meetings or events happening almost every week within our data collection period, it became clear that membership disengagement wasn't an issue of complacency, but of administrative burden. Working through tight public funding took up a lot of time and energy. This had a disproportionate effect on smaller organizations who were working without institutional core funding and found it increasingly difficult through the year to justify their time and energy to the project, especially if it meant spending less time on other (paid) contracts.

To add, it is important that funders think innovatively on how to fund the cost of collaboration (Bartczak, 2014). Over the decades, there has been a shift towards "collaborative funding models" as a way to ensure that organizations with similar values and mission are engaging with one another. While collaboration is important within the homelessness sector, what is often missed are the "hidden" costs of such, including funding a backbone function, supporting capacity building for network participants or covering the costs of evaluation. This allows for more seamless iterations and adaptations and doesn't compromise the time or input from smaller organizations without institutional core funding.

The 1-year restriction on Phase 2 of AWHT greatly narrowed outcomes and left certain key community members scrambling to finish the majority of the work. This was not due to mismanagement, but more so a lack of time to meaningfully commit and be present. In their 2017 *Report A Whole New World: Funding and Commissioning in Complexity*, Collaborate for Social change outlined the ways in which funders could move away from "outcome-oriented philanthropy" to "emergency philanthropy" through 11 principles that embody complexity-friendly funding that prioritizes building trust, encouraging challenge and accountability in addressing power dynamics. Support and accountability mechanisms can take time to do well. Having these processes built into the budget allows for communities to breathe, grow and mobilize in an optimal fashion. Such a model would work well for AWHT and support the organic nature of its development.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, and along with reflections from the ESC and CSC, we have devised a list of recommendations that build off the proposed research questions. Our first recommendation is directed toward the sustainment of the AWHT model.

SUSTAINMENT OF THE AWHT MODEL

The process of AWHT is effective because it is based on a human rights framework that centers the lived expertise of young people. Without the centering of the Expert Steering Committee, the process of developing a strategy to prevent and end youth homelessness would be inauthentic and simply not be as effective. Therefore, it will be important for long-term investments to be made that allow for the collaborative work of AWHT to develop, flourish and grow.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

How can AWHT facilitate effective collaboration across sectors in a major urban centre to address the drivers, experiences and consequences of youth homelessness?

There's clear evidence to support that the AWHT model of governance is a powerful way to engage in collaborative spaces. With that, there are particular practices that AWHT should continue to strengthen and some that should be enhanced. AWHT should:

- Continue the good practice of having formal structures in place that invest sufficient resources to build and develop relationships and continue to engage with the community through a variety of ongoing events. This includes continuing to dedicate funds that supply food and transit tokens at all events.

- Continue to engage with a variety of stakeholders, prioritizing voices that experience marginalization, such as Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ2S, newcomer and aged-out communities. It is equally that one engages with a "nothing about us without us" mentality to ensure meaningful and reciprocal collaboration.

- Further enhance the communication among AWHT by scheduling a continual check-in process to ensure that vision/mission and goals of the initiative are respected and

celebrated. This can take form in many different ways, such as a standing agenda item, or a recurring monthly 20-minute phone call. This allows for an ongoing opportunity for input, and a reminder for individuals who are not always able to follow the narrative of the group.

- Further enhance opportunities for the ESC and CSC to come together to share ideas, celebrate successes, and build professional relationships.

- As expertise is built out in an initiative (i.e. developing a council or deliverable with experts), further enhance the onboarding process by scheduling a "kickoff meeting" with formalized procedures. This ensures that there are opportunities to familiarize members with one another and build trust.

- In outsourcing tasks (i.e. hiring a technical writer or facilitator), ensure that they are brought into the fold of the project earlier than one might anticipate. This ensures that people can get up to speed more quickly and can do their best work.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

How can community coalitions work with young people with lived experience as key partners, experts and leaders to address the complex social policy issues directly affecting their lives?

Experts should be central to the governance structure, and their diverse skills should be recognized and appropriately compensated. With that, these are the particular practices that community coalitions should consider:

- As exemplified by AWHT, an expert committee should co-develop its own standards, timelines and accountability measures. An expert committee must also be appropriately compensated for their work, in line with industry standards.

- Drawing from the AWHT model, experts must be hired in a sustainable way (i.e., adequate length of employment) and provided opportunities for professional development and informal mentorship within the committee.

- As part of AWHT's model, experts' capacity building and sustainability should be centered in all aspects of an initiative, and experts should be involved in all aspects of governance, including input on budget, technical writing, evaluation and design.

- As allies, it is the collective's responsibility to ensure technical/budgetary work is accessible to experts. This might look like providing opportunities and budgeting extra time in a meeting to ensure ad hoc learning moments can happen.

- As AWHT demonstrated, move away from defensiveness and guilt towards action. Individuals who work in the homelessness sector without lived experience may feel hesitant to make decisions over the fear of "getting it wrong". If trust is being built with an expert body, then it's worth reaching out to ask their opinions and take action.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

How can robust monitoring, measurement and evaluation be integrated into emerging, multi stakeholder initiatives in ways that support continued innovation, evolution and improvement?

Research can be a powerful tool in many ways and can play multiple roles in bolstering stakeholder initiatives. With that, these are some particular practices we recommend:

- Research and evaluation should be flexible and reflexive to community changes, and should follow research paradigms grounded in anti-oppression and critical theory that utilize participatory methodologies.

- As previously mentioned, experts can build off their expertise to participate in monitoring, measurement and evaluation. With all of the data collection opportunities that can take place (i.e., meeting notes, events), work with experts to involve them in the evaluation of the collective's work, and report back to the rest of the committee on developments, lessons learned and challenges that might get lost in the wash.

- When data is collected (either formally or informally) have a clear understanding on what the information will be used for. Oftentimes, communities who experience homelessness are over-researched, and so it is important to be mindful of that history.

- Reflect on the histories and implications behind institutionalized language and respect changes; oftentimes, language is rooted in very specific socio-political histories. Expanding past the term "youth" to include terms such as "young person", "expert", etc. (and the conversations around its adoption), could benefit from the

lessons learned of other language movements around the GTA, specifically in the mad, fat, IBPOC and LGBTQ2S communities.

Additional to the recommendations based upon the research questions, our data supports additional recommendations for future funding endeavors:

- Funders should ensure that their grants and awards are able to move with flexibility so communities can mobilize on their needs without prescription. Providing fluid movement between budget lines could also account for the natural ebb and flow of resources that are needed for a Collective Impact process to take shape.

Study Limitations

As a team, it is important to reflect on some of our own limitations concerning how this evaluation was conducted. As the findings pointed to such a strong emphasis on expert engagement, we reflected on how we did not fully utilize experts for evaluation purposes, specifically in data collection and analysis. While there were consultations throughout the project, we feel the data would have been more robust had we provided more opportunities for experts to be involved, especially considering that the research capacity among the ESC was quite high. With that, we had also hoped to incorporate a stronger feedback mechanism to ensure that individuals felt meaningfully involved during the evaluation. While our team tried our best to be present at every meeting and event, it was not always possible to be meaningfully engaged in the evaluation process.

Having the evaluation team involved earlier in Phase 2 would have helped, especially to document the transition between Phase 1 and Phase 2. As our findings did seem to center around that particular time period, having firsthand knowledge would have been beneficial to help contextualize these stories as folks came forward. This presents itself as both a finding and a limitation of the study overall.

Finally, it is also important to reflect on the lived experiences of the evaluators. The decision-making power on the team was often made by predominately white cisgender settlers from the LGBTQ2S community, meaning that we brought a particular lens and bias to the evaluation. While this doesn't mean that the integrity of the data was compromised, per se, it did play a role in what kinds of questions we asked, and what data points we thought were relevant. As a team, we worked on bringing in a diversity of perspectives by acknowledging the histories of colonialism, racism, gentrification and neoliberalism and how they have shaped youth homelessness, allowing multiple stages of member checking throughout the analysis and report writing.

Conclusion

Young people in Toronto who experience homelessness are underserved in the current system of care. Young people continue to experience difficulties accessing services, forcing them to navigate a system that has often neglected their voice. AWHT's strategy has made waves through its innovative governance structure and unique approaches to community engagement. As with much Collective Impact work, it is also a process that is not immune to similar difficulties and challenges, particularly when addressing power dynamics, engaging underserved communities and experiencing burnout. However, the evaluation also shows signs that these grievances are exacerbated by overarching funding structures and timelines imposed on the project that make it difficult to carry the work out as collaboratively as it could have. With the current socio-political context and its histories, we end this report on a hopeful note. We have evidence to support that innovative models of addressing youth homelessness require innovative funding models; AWHT is on the right track to ensure that true community collaboration and Collective Impact can be achieved if the institutions that govern its programming allows for that flexibility and innovation. By attaining committed, long-term funding, AWHT will be able to continue its efforts and move toward the next phase of implementing its plan to prevent, reduce, and end youth homelessness in Toronto.

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