Host Homes Developmental Evaluation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Introduction

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) partnered with Raising the Roof (RtR) to conduct a developmental evaluation of strategies to scale up the Host Homes model in Canada. The project received funding from Innoweave.

The evaluation questions were co-created by the COH and RTR. The original questions to be answered were:

1. How can the Host Homes model be adapted to meet the needs of diverse Canadian contexts (i.e., urban vs. rural, different geographic regions, various political climates)?

2. How can partnerships and cross-ministerial relationships be utilized to create high leverage policy opportunities for scaling the Host Homes model across Canada?

3. How can RtR most meaningfully support agencies in developing and implementing Host Homes programs across Canada?

Through further consultation, additional questions were added. These were:

4. How do Host Homes programs fit within the Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) framework?

5. How do Host Homes programs fit within the broader system response to youth homelessness?

6. What are the training and technical assistance needs required to scale up the Host Homes program across Canada?

The evaluation questions are answered in a series of three reports. The current executive summary provides key findings from each report.

Methodology

To answer the evaluation questions, we have proposed
a multi-phased methodology.

PHASE 1. Document Review and Consultations

Question 1. How can the Host Homes model be adapted to meet the needs of diverse Canadian contexts (i.e., urban vs. rural, different geographic regions, various political climates)?

› Literature review

› Consultations with Host Homes working group

› Survey of communities across Canada to determine interest in offering Host Homes programs in their community (n = 7)

PHASE 2. Partnership Mapping and RtR Support

Question 2. How can partnerships and cross-ministerial relationships be utilized to create high leverage policy opportunities for scaling the Host Homes model across Canada?

Question 3. How can RtR most meaningfully support agencies in developing and implementing Host Homes programs across Canada?

› Interviews with Host Homes working group members (n = 10)

› Consultations with Host Homes working group

› Review of HF4Y framework

PHASE 3. Fit with HF4Y, System Mapping, and Training and Technical Assistance Needs for Host Homes Program Scaling

Question 4. How do Host Homes programs fit within the Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) framework?

Question 5. How do Host Homes programs fit within the broader system response to youth homelessness?

Question 6. What are the training and technical assistance needs required to scale up the Host Homes program across Canada?

› Consultations with Host Homes working group

› Review of HF4Y framework

› Consultations with training directors from Canada and the United States (n = 8)

Results

This section provides the key results from each phase of the evaluation.

Key Question

1. How can the Host Homes model be adapted to meet the needs of diverse Canadian contexts (i.e., urban vs. rural, different geographic regions, various political climates)?

PHASE 1: Literature Review

Host Homes Definition. The Host Homes model, a type of housing-led support, is a type of early intervention that is often viewed as an alternative to emergency shelters. Host Homes programs provide young people with locally based supports, which is important since emergency shelters for youth do not exist in every community, especially those that are smaller or located in rural areas.

Two types of accommodation are common within Host Homes programs. Young people can be offered a safe space where they can either stay with an adult that they may not have previously known or a trusted family member or friend (Naidich, 1988).

Host Homes programs must be careful in their promotion, as they may be conflated with foster care programs. For example, in proposing housing options for young people in the Community Plan to End Homelessness in Austin, Texas, young people with lived experience were not comfortable with Host Homes programs being considered (Schoenfeld, Bennett, Manganella, & Kemp, 2019). The young people felt that the Host Homes model resembled the foster care system and "placed" young people into homes without much respect for the choice of the young person. Instead, young people preferred a diversion program, which offered short-term rental assistance, mediation services, utility assistance, and other supportive services (Schoenfeld et al., 2019). Further, young people with experiences of trauma may liken Host Homes programs to foster care and are resistant to being placed in an intimate, home environment (Bonlender, 2017).

Key Program Elements. A Host Homes program should have a large number of host providers so that young people are given several housing options. This could mean that for every young person admitted to the prog ram, they should be given at least three host providers options (Naidich, 1988). This means that a Host Homes program should spend a considerable amount of time recruiting host providers.

Host Homes programs need to sufficiently assess host providers and young people to assist with the matching process. The needs of young people must be prioritized.

Host Homes programs should provide young people and host providers with structured supports. Young people should be asked what their goals are in the program, and staff and host providers should support young people with these goals. Host Homes programs will need to consider providing targeted supports that meet the needs of younger and older youth, as their needs may differ. Therefore, Host Homes programs will need to consider smaller caseload sizes, as they are supporting both young people and the host provider.

Host Homes programs need to recognize the diversity of young people and recruit Host Homes providers that reflect the identities of young people. Host Homes programs must offer anti-oppression/anti-racist training to host providers.

PHASE 1: National Survey

The number of survey participants was low (n = 7), so it is challenging to make distinct conclusions. The survey results indicate that most of the participants were aware of the Host Homes model, but few participants were aware of whether there was a Host Homes program operating in their community.

The results also show that some communities were very interested in implementing a Host Homes program, while others were not interested. Again, although this a very small sample size, it does indicate the need for a broader outreach strategy on educating homeless serving systems on the Host Homes model.

PHASE 2: Interviews and Consultations with Host Homes Working Group Members

Key Question

2. How can partnerships and cross-ministerial relationships be utilized to create high leverage policy opportunities for scaling the Host Homes model across Canada?

Partnerships and collaboration are necessary in all contexts. Participants all touched on the need for collaboration and partnerships. Partnerships and collaboration are especially necessary within smaller communities where there are much fewer services available for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. To secure a true wrap around approach for young people, a range of key system partnerships are required, including education (school boards, schools), mental health, social assistance (e.g., Ontario Works), justice, and child welfare.

Developing a flexible definition of the Host Homes model is required. There was still some confusion about what a Host Homes program is. This includes the target group of the model, the length of support, the type of support, and the role of a young person's family in the program. It is also important to differentiate between foster care and Host Homes programs.

Key Question

3. How can RtR most meaningfully support agencies in developing and implementing Host Homes programs across Canada?

Supporting the diversity of young people and ensuring host providers reflect this diversity. Host Homes programs must support the diversity of young people, particularly Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, and 2SLGBTQ+ young people. This includes providing supports that meet the needs of young people, including their cultural needs, and referring to community-based supports that are specific to their identities. Host Homes programs should also aim to recruit host providers that reflect the identities of the young people in the program. This may mean that targeted outreach needs to occur, as well as ensuring that the program application process does not have barriers which may prevent diverse host providers from applying.

Colonialism needs to be addressed in the Host Homes model. Host Homes programs need to understand how the model may perpetuate colonial practices. For example, the Host Homes model, much like the foster care system, has parallels to the Sixties Scoop, where Indigenous young people were removed from their families and placed into foster homes or adopted. It will be important for Host Homes programs to collaborate with local Indigenous organizations to ensure that Indigenous young people who may be eligible for a Host Homes program are supported in culturally appropriate ways. It will also be important for Host Homes programs to recruit Indigenous host providers, should it be appropriate.

Host Homes programs need to be youth-centered in design. An important aspect of the Host Homes model is to be youth centered. This means that young people ultimately determine if they would like to be matched with a host provider, the goals that they would like to work toward, and their exit from the program. By being youth centered, Host Homes programs will align with a Housing First for Youth philosophy.

Consider accreditation and developing fidelity standards. Along with developing a clear and flexible definition of the Host Homes model, accompanying accreditation and/or fidelity standards may also require development. By developing standards for accreditation and/or by developing fidelity standards, existing Host Homes programs can examine how they fit or do not fit within these standards and provide guidance for new Host Homes programs.

PHASE 3: Interviews with Training and Technical Assistance Experts

Key Question

4. How do Host Homes programs fit within the Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) framework?

Fit with HF4Y. The Host Homes model can be part of the array of housing options presented to young people in a HF4Y program and can offer services that align with HF4Y case management. That being said, Host Homes programs do not fully align with the HF4Y principles as they often provide time-limited housing and support. Providing choice in the selection of a Host Homes and in the supports that are received is imperative if Host Homes programs want to align their services with the HF4Y model. As more communities align their systems within a Housing First philosophy, it will be important for Host Homes programs to demonstrate how they align with and how they are separate from HF4Y programs.

Host Homes programs should be part of a coordinated access system. Including Host Homes programs within a community's coordinated access system is important for the full implementation of Host Homes programs within a homelessness system.

Situating Host Homes programs within local system responses to youth homelessness. It will be important to situate how Host Homes programs can fit within the broader youth homelessness system. Host Homes programs should demonstrate the impact they can have on their community's coordinated access system as an early intervention program. There are two different places Host Homes programs can fit: 1) During triage as an alternative to emergency shelters; and 2) During prioritization as a housing option for young people who are defined as having low support needs. As always, young people should be given the choice of entering a Host Homes program as it may not fit their needs. Host Homes programs should also strengthen their partnerships within their communities, both within the homelessness system and outside the homelessness system.

Training and Technical Assistance. Although current variability in model definition does not seem to allow for scaling of programming and TTA, the interviews provide a guide for the next steps necessary to move towards readiness.

READINESS TO NATIONALLY SCALE HOST HOMES TTA WOULD ENTAIL WORK TOWARDS:

› **Definition of Host Homes program model.** Identification and consistency of the core elements, principles, and polices comprising a Host Homes program.

› **Preparation for Host Homes scaling.** Organizing for Host Homes interventions to have the qualities of portability, adaptability, flexibility, and fidelity; each Host Homes program to be grounded in community.

› **Addressing funding barriers.** Building relationships and mobilizing knowledge towards shifts in funding models that favor multi-year funding cycles, innovative program design, and flexible funding streams.

› **Design of a layered, systems approach to training.** In the same way that the Host Homes model must be adaptive to community context, TTA must be adaptive to organizational context; training should be delivered as layered content, holistically reaching across all levels of and around an organization.

› **Capacity for ongoing technical assistance**. TTA is to be delivered in an ongoing relationship with Host Homes operators, ensuring that organization, staff, or Host Homes providers do not feel abandoned after the initial implementation.

› **Thoughtful Host Homes provider training**. The same consideration taken for organizational training should be devoted to training and supporting the Host Homes providers.

Recommendations

Based upon the results of the evaluation, a series of recommendations were developed that focused on the potential scaling of the Host Homes model across Canada. As it stands, these recommendations should be addressed prior to the scaling of the intervention and the development of a national training framework.

MODEL DEFINITION

1. Continue to refine the definition of the Host Homes model with youth homelessness sector leaders and young people. A consistent theme throughout the evaluation was the need to clearly define the Host Homes model. In its most basic form, a Host Homes offers young people a safe space where they can either stay with an adult that they may not have previously known or a trusted family member or friend (Naidich, 1988). This distinction between staying with an unknown host provider compared to a trusted family member or friend is important and warrants further investigation. Similarly, the Nightstop model and the Host Homes model have

several overlapping features that should be further examined. When definitions are agreed upon, the creation of fidelity standards can then occur. All these discussions should include the voices of young people who have participated in Host Homes programs.

2. Consultations must occur with Indigenous communities to examine if the Host Homes model is culturally safe for Indigenous young people. Although briefly touched upon during one of the interviews, further examination is required on the role of Host Homes programs in relation to Canada's history of colonisation. This includes the legacy of the residential school system and the Sixties Scoop. Host Homes programs may inflict harm and trauma among young Indigenous participants if these young people are placed in non-Indigenous housing. Therefore, consultations with Indigenous organizations are required to determine if this kind of model is fit for Indigenous youth in the community. It is also important for Host Homes programs to recognize that Indigenous homelessness extends beyond a lack of physical housing and encompasses 12 different dimensions (Thistle, 2017): 1) Historical displacement; 2) Contemporary geographic separation; 3) Spiritual disconnection; 4) Mental disruption and imbalance; 5) Cultural disintegration and loss; 6) Overcrowding; 7) Relocation and mobility; 8) Going home; 9) Nowhere to go; 10) Escaping or evading harm; 11) Emergency crisis; and 12) Climatic refugee. The Host Homes model must address the multi-faceted impact of homelessness on Indigenous communities.

3. There is a need to differentiate the Host Homes model from foster care. The Host Homes model is similar to the foster care system, but there are key elements that differentiate the two. First, the goal of the Host Homes model is for young people to safely return to living with their family or finding independent housing. The Host Homes worker supports the young person with these housing goals, as well as other goals identified by the young person. Host Homes programs promote independence, rather than dependence. It will be important for any messaging about the Host Homes model to clearly articulate the difference between the model and foster care.

SERVICE PROVISION AND TRAINING

4. The Host Homes model should operate from a HF4Y service philosophy, with youth choice being paramount. A key element of the Host Homes model is working with young people to identify goals they would like to achieve while they are in the program. This means that Host Homes programs need to operate from a youth-centered approach that aligns with the HF4Y model. This includes applying a Positive Youth Development and strengths-based orientation. Therefore, the service provision within the Host Homes model should be further defined to incorporate HF4Y service principles.

5. Host Homes programs need to both recognize the diversity of young people who could benefit from the program, and to develop a diversity of Host Homes providers. A potential strength of the Host Homes program is the ability to recruit host providers that reflect the diversity of the young people accessing the program. This includes recruiting host providers from BIPOC communities, 2SLGBTQ+ communities, and geographically diverse communities (e.g., rural, suburban, urban). By having a diverse number of host providers, young people will be able to select homes that reflect their cultures and values. This may support a young person to feel comfortable in the Host Homes space.

6. Host Homes programs need to ensure that their recruitment of host providers is equitable and has few barriers. To have a diversity of host providers, Host Homes programs should be mindful when designing and implementing the screening process to ensure that barriers are not created. To ensure that barriers do not exist, Host Homes programs should consult with community organizations to receive their feedback.

7. Host Homes programs need to consider a young person's support network, including families and natural supports, when considering a Host Homes placement. Host Homes placements typically involve host providers who are not known to the young person. Although this model is important, Host Homes programs should also be prepared to support young people who may have members of their social support network, including extended family and natural supports, that they can stay with. This will require flexibility in the operations of the program but will provide young people with greater choice in the type of housing options that are offered.

8. The Host Homes model requires a staffing model that is unique and adaptive, and thus requires specific training. The Host Homes model requires staff to work concurrently with young people and Host Homes providers. Although the work is primarily with young people, there may be instances where Host Homes staff are required to support both parties. The recruitment of Host Homes providers is also often a requirement of Host Homes staff. As a result, Host Homes staff need to be adaptive and flexible. Therefore, Host Homes staff should be trained in supporting young people and Host Homes providers, as well as strategies for recruitment of providers. Given the complexity of the role, multiple and sustained training opportunities will be beneficial.

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS SYSTEM

9. Host Homes programs require a significant number of partnerships to be successful. Throughout the consultations and interviews, it was apparent that successful Host Homes programs have several different partnerships in the community. Partnerships were particularly important for referrals to the program and for service provision. Important referral sources were the education system, the justice system, and the child welfare system. Important partners for service provision included social assistance and the mental health sector. What appeared to be missing were community partnerships to support people to exit Host Homes programs. Therefore, partnerships with landlords may be important to develop. As the Host Homes model supports young people with their goals for independence, Host Homes programs should be ready to form a number of different partnerships in the community.

10. Host Homes programs uniquely fit within an early intervention approach to coordinated access systems. Host Homes programs can serve two purposes within a coordinated access system. They can support the triage process, where young people may be diverted from the shelter system, and they can support young people with low support needs who may be lower on a City's prioritization list. By using Host Homes programs in this dual fashion, early intervention strategies will be employed. Therefore, Host Homes programs should be involved within youth coordinated access systems.

11. Raising the Roof should continue to address the stigma of youth homelessness, particularly given the importance of having a breadth of host providers. Key informants continued to stress the importance of national organizations addressing the stigma of youth homelessness in the general public. Participants felt that despite the efforts of several national organizations, there remained a significant level of stigma. This is particularly important in the recruitment of host providers, as dispelling myths on youth homelessness may enable more community members to consider becoming a host provider.

References

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