

# Here and Now: Innovative Solutions to Youth Homelessness Final Report

2019



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Canada



## ESDC Final Report

Recipient Name: Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc.

Project Number: 1510872

Project Title: Here and Now: The Winnipeg Plan to End Youth Homelessness

## Summary of the Project

Here and Now: The Winnipeg Plan to End Youth Homelessness reflects the unique partnership between dozens of Winnipeg agencies and stakeholders working to develop strategic partnership agreements, structures, and accountability frameworks to reduce and end youth homelessness in Winnipeg.

**The background.** In October 2016, Winnipeg's youth serving agencies launched Here & Now: The Winnipeg Plan to End Youth Homelessness an unprecedented effort to unite the community based on the Indigenous teachings and the principles of reconciliation towards a common goal: reducing and ending youth homelessness. This was only the first step of an ongoing process. The momentum was building, yet a governance structure, detailed action plan, evaluation strategy, and youth engagement strategy were still needed for full plan implementation.

**The goal of the project.** To reduce and end youth homelessness in Winnipeg by implementing an innovative framework based on the principles and values of reconciliation through the development of strategic partnerships between service organizations, funders, youth, and private sector stakeholders.

**The gaps.** This never-before-implemented strategy provides multiple opportunities to address knowledge and policy gaps including:

**1. Coordination & Governance.** While Here and Now: The Winnipeg Plan to End Youth Homelessness was able to create a common vision, goals, and strategies, we lacked a governance structure and 5-year action plan to implement the plan. We responded to this gap by creating an effective governing body that reflects the values of reconciliation and aligns with existing strategies to maximize impact.

**2. Results Measurement.** There was no mechanism to measure the collective impact of community agencies because they lacked shared outcomes, shared measurement tools, and common data gathering methods or tools. Simultaneously, private and governmental funders in the community are measuring different outcomes, with varied tools, and at different intervals. Overall, this is preventing community collaboration and precluding an understanding what is and is not working when addressing youth homelessness in Winnipeg. Establishing an adaptive learning system through shared measurement is essential to tracking and evaluating the plan to end youth homelessness and strategies therein.

**3. Youth Leadership & Engagement.** Youth leadership and engagement is essential to ensuring that responses to youth homelessness will be successful. From a rights-based point of view young people have the right to represent their own interests. Yet, engaging youth with ongoing or past experiences of homelessness can be challenging. Standard youth engagement strategies tend to fall short with this population because youth experiencing homelessness are often transient, may use substances, have mental health challenges, and sometimes they distrust authority figures and researchers. Engagement methods therefore tend to attract higher functioning youth, and youth without experiences of homelessness. While there are a number of toolkits and resources that have been developed across Canada to work with youth in general, there were no toolkits designed to



engage youth experiencing homelessness. We proposed to create a first-of-its-kind toolkit that can be used in Winnipeg and in other jurisdictions to design and implement a youth engagement strategy.

## Action and Results

**Coordination & Governance.** While the Here and Now: The Winnipeg Plan to End Youth Homelessness was able to create a common vision, goal, and strategy, we lacked a governance structure and 5-year action plan to implement the plan. We responded to this gap by creating an effective governing body that reflects the values of reconciliation and aligns with existing strategies to maximize impact.

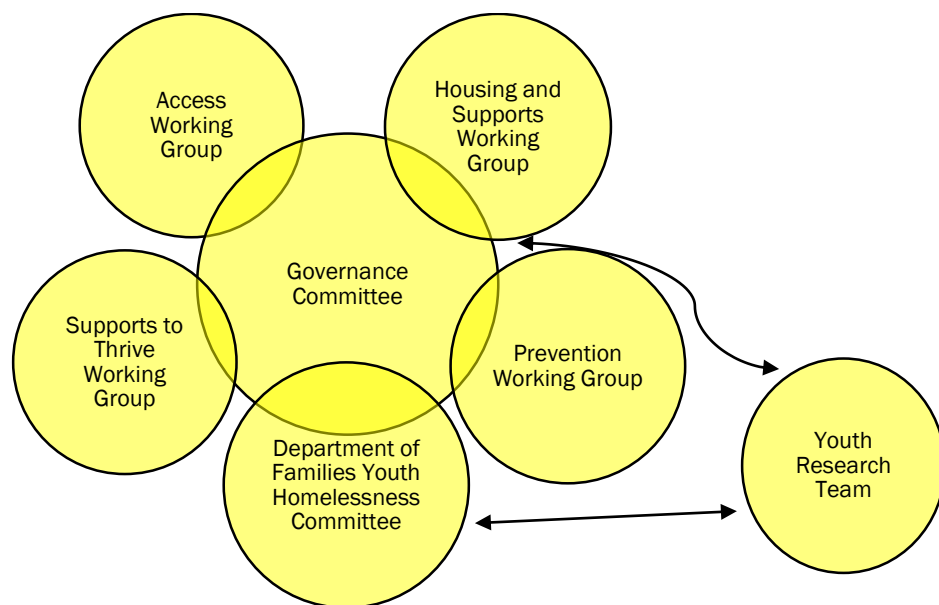
### Task forces on streamlining and enhancing services

Here and Now established a series of task forces designed to move towards achieving the first for priorities of the strategy.

These priorities are:

1. **Access:** Develop a network of regional hubs open 24/7 by increasing the capacity of existing youth-serving agencies
2. **Prevention:** Create an interdepartmental “Zero Discharge into Homelessness” strategy, starting with a coordinated provincial policy direction, that supports youth transitioning from any type of provincial government or government funded care
3. **Housing and Supports:** Develop increased supply of transitional housing programs for youth
4. **Supports to Thrive:** Encourage Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) to increase the stability of income supports for youth

The “task forces” were developed into a series of four working groups, who met regularly throughout the project facilitated by the Here and Now Coordinator. Each working group was chaired by a member of Here and Now’s Governance Committee. The working groups helped to create the 5-year Action Plan, and discuss opportunities for systemic changes that would be brought to a quarterly meeting between the Governance Committee and leaders within the provincial government’s Department of Families.





The formation of these working groups has led to long-term results for youth experiencing and at-risk of homelessness.

1. **Access:** Develop a network of regional hubs open 24/7 by increasing the capacity of existing youth-serving agencies

### Working Group Membership and Context

It is envisioned that Winnipeg will have a network of 'hubs' across the city that provide a full-spectrum of supports and services to prevent and address youth homelessness. There are non-profit organizations already providing safe spaces to youth, however they did not meet regularly nor have the full range of services envisioned. These organizations include Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc. (Ndinawe), the Spence Neighbourhood Association's West End 24/7 (WE 24/7), and Rossbrook House.

The youth resource centre at Ndinawe, recently re-named Tina's Safe Haven (in loving memory of Tina Fontaine), is now open 24/7. Tina's Safe Haven is open to youth who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. It is located in the north end of Winnipeg. It is a safe space that offers access to support, resources and services in the community such as housing and employment support, EIA support, food and clothing. Ndinawe is currently the only youth-serving agency that has a regional youth hub open 24/7 365 days a year. A lack of stable and predictable funding has prevented more youth-serving agencies from operating 24/7 regional youth hubs.

Spence Neighbourhood Association currently operates the West End 24/7 (WE 24/7) youth hub. It is open 24/7 only during the winter months. As part of the cold weather response, WE 24/7 provides an overnight space for youth ages 13-26 to rest, relax, access food, resources, basic needs, in a supportive, kind and warm environment. It acts as a hub in the West End neighbourhood in Winnipeg.

Rossbrook House operates a youth safe space/ hub in the Central Neighbourhood area. Founded in 1976, Rossbrook House is a neighbourhood drop-in centre for children, youth and young adults. With programming for ages 6-24 that includes music lessons, homework help, cultural activities and much more. It is open 24-hours weekends and during school holidays, including summer.

### Results of the Access Working Group

The first focus of the working group was to improve communication and collaboration among youth safe space providers in Winnipeg. This will better address the immediate needs of youth who access services and resources. The group created a list of current challenges, opportunities and next steps. One of the opportunities that was highlighted in the working group was their current mobile outreach initiatives. Ndinawe, WE 24/7 and Rossbrook House are actively involved in connecting with youth who are at risk, sleeping rough throughout the year. Their mobile outreach initiatives transport youth to safe spaces where they can access support and resources in the community. Mobile outreach collaborates and coordinates with each other on an ongoing basis to better address the needs of youth who are at risk or are currently experiencing homelessness.

Here and Now actively worked to build awareness about the importance of having adequately funded 24/7 regional youth hubs in Winnipeg. The Coordinator facilitated the following initiatives:

- Met with City Councillors in January 2018 to advocate for support in principle of the Here and Now Plan, increasing funding to youth safe spaces and support for the cold weather strategy.



- Presented at the City of Winnipeg Standing Policy Committee on Protection, Community Services and Parks (June 2018) to advocate for an increase in funding to youth safe spaces as part of the 2019-2020 municipal budget.

These efforts assisted with the temporary additional funding to the WE 24/7 space over the winter of 2018, however have not yet succeeded in expanding services permanently.

### Next Steps

The three safe spaces have made a commitment to meet regularly to share information and resources. The working group will utilize the data gathered in the shared measurement strategy development to focus their collaboration efforts towards removing barriers to access for the youth they serve.

2. **Prevention:** Create an interdepartmental “Zero Discharge into Homelessness” strategy, starting with a coordinated provincial policy direction, that supports youth transitioning from any type of provincial government or government funded care

### Working Group Membership and Context

The Department of Families is a relatively new Department within the provincial government, including the formerly separate Departments or Divisions of Child and Family Services, Housing, and Employment and Income Assistance. To focus on achieving the priorities of Here and Now, quarterly meetings between the Here and Now Governance Committee and leaders (Assistant Deputy Ministers, Executive Directors, CEOs, Policy Analysts) within the Department of Families were held. After initial meetings to present to each other on the objectives of the Plan and current activities within the Department relevant to it, the committee developed an action plan with possible steps towards achieving the priority of a zero discharge into homelessness.

### Results of the Prevention Working Group

Pieces of a zero discharge into homelessness strategy are being developed. These include:

- The Department of Families is currently focused on developing an Intra-System Team that represents the range of supports a youth would need across programs, government, and community. The team would be the point of contact for youth as part of their transition plan (system navigation and coordination). The Intra-System Team would also facilitate transitioning for Temporary Wards in the care of CFS who were previously ineligible for transitional support.
- Development of Exit Plans/Skills checklist (Foster Parents and Group Providers) specifying all items to be completed before the youth is 15 years of age. This checklist should include: resume, identification, medical care information, health supports (eg. mental health), budgeting, cooking, cleaning etc. A check list is in development with CFS Authority partners.
- CFS System Legislative Review has been completed to identify whether changes are required in order for the government to fulfil its Child Welfare Reform community-based prevention and lifelong relationships goal. These include Customary Care, subsidized guardianship and modernized adoption supports will all facilitate long-term relationships.

### Next Steps

The Committee has made several recommendations that focus on transition supports for youth, not yet in place, including:



- Transitional planning for youth in care should be entrenched in legislation, in such a way that allows youth to develop independent living skills at an early age in an age appropriate manner.
  - That youth aging out of CFS care have priority access to programs and supports that will help them successfully transition to independence.
  - That the legislation ensure youth who have been in care of CFS are eligible to receive culturally safe supports up to 25 years of age.
  - Youth should have direct and meaningful input into planning their futures, although the maturity level of the youth needs to be considered in determining plans. The legislation should provide youth between the ages of 16 and 18 with more input and involvement in their transition plans.
3. **Housing and Supports:** Develop increased supply of transitional housing programs for youth

### Working Group Membership and Context

The defining feature of homelessness is a lack of adequate housing; the solution to homelessness must therefore always include housing. Though housing and support are often viewed, and developed, as two distinct continuums, effective coordination between the two is essential. Moving towards an increase of transitional housing programs for youth has involved two different structures, the Department Families/Here and Now committee described above, and a working group made-up of employees of youth-serving organizations who met more regularly to develop recommendations, share information, and provide input to Here and Now's 5-year action strategy more broadly.

### Results of the Housing and Supports Working Group

Manitoba Housing has identified transitional housing programs for youth as a priority as has moved forward on this initiative in the following ways:

- Manitoba Housing has completed a significant review of the Social Housing Rental Program (SHRP) with the goal to remove barriers, improve and modernize the program. The program is supported by more flexible and adaptable policies that enable the program to be client-focused, efficient equitable and consistent for all Manitobans. The modernization considers and aligns with other provincial strategic initiatives and policy directions such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy, Homelessness, Mental Health and Victims of Domestic Violence. Policy and program changes include:
  - The age requirement of 18 years to access Manitoba Housing has been removed
  - Roommate situations are now allowed
  - People experiencing homelessness are considered to be one of the groups most vulnerable and in need of housing under the "Special Circumstances" section of the new housing application
  - There is increased flexibility for previous arrears and poor rental histories, as well reduced requirements for a rental history

Youth-serving organizations in Winnipeg have also been developing an expanded range of transitional housing options, based on this priority area. Since Here and Now was launched, two organizations, Shawenim Abinoojii Inc. and New Directions for Children, Youth, Adults, and Families, have developed small-scale transitional housing programs specifically for youth leaving the care of Child and Family Services. Both programs have used Here and Now as rationale for their



development in funding applications, and have taken advice from the “What we Heard” section on transitional housing from Here and Now.

### Next Steps

The Community Advisory Board has been provided a presentation on Here and Now’s transitional housing priority. As they work with the new community entity, End Homelessness Winnipeg, to develop a new community plan, Here and Now partners will ensure that transitional housing remains a priority for funding under Reaching Home.

4. **Supports to Thrive:** Encourage Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) to increase the stability of income supports for youth

### Working Group Membership and Context

Income supports allows youth to explore educational and employment options, address trauma and gain independent living skills without fear of losing housing. Youth strongly stated that creating more stability in income supports was a priority because it provides smoother transitions between youth and adulthood, EIA and employment/education/training and other transition points where youth are at risk of experiencing a sudden loss of income and therefore homelessness. Moving towards the increase of transitional housing programs for youth been through the Department Families/Here and Now committee described previously.

### Results of the Supports to Thrive Working Group

EIA has identified the need to increase stability of income supports for youth and have moved forward in the following ways:

- Improving access to EIA case workers for youth and youth-serving agency staff
  - EIA is taking steps to create empowering spaces in EIA waiting rooms, including content on TVs in waiting areas with pertinent information on community programming, and brochures/print resources such as the resource guide and map developed by the Winnipeg Outreach Network (with support from Here and Now).
  - Exploring the creation/enhancement of a Youth Liaison model whereby EIA has point people who undertake intake, information sharing, and linking to EIA case managers. The model already includes EIA staff assigned to go to certain community/health organizations sometimes as a liaison only, sometimes with an intake and case management capacity for the participants there; if this model is proven to be useful, it may be expanded.
  - While EIA prioritizes lower caseloads for youth, and numbers are decreasing, additional decreases would require allocating staff resources away from other EIA caseloads (families, disability categories). EIA is monitoring youth caseload size and will continue to share progress and challenges to Here and Now Steering Committee moving forward.
  - EIA is open to opportunities for a “perching” model whereby community organizations are invited to EIA office to connect with youth directly.
- Improving and stabilizing income supports
  - EIA is undertaking significant digital modernization and mobile outreach that will include an online intake application and orientation (currently required in-person and



with an appointment). Community agencies participated in testing on online intake in May 2018.

- The rental damage deposits policy has been updated and there is no longer a verification process with a landlord/housing provider needed to access this resource. Feedback has been quite positive.
- EIA is continuing to review processes to assist youth who may need to return to EIA. Rapid re-enrollment is currently being used; within 45 days of closing a file, a former EIA participant can call their worker/EIA office and have the file re-opened within a day. EIA will bolster a quality assurance protocol requiring a manager to review cases where file closure could directly lead to homelessness.

### Next Steps

The changes to Manitoba's EIA system proposed in Here and Now are long-term and require a significant shift in how the system serves youth. The Department of Families and Here and Now Governance Committee will continue meeting regularly to monitor these changes and seek to evaluate their impact. The Youth Research Team of Here and Now will continue presenting their direct experiences to leaders in the EIA system so they can understand how policy and practice change are received, and whether or not they are having the effect envisioned.

**Shared measurement and evaluation:** There was no mechanism to measure the collective impact of community agencies because they lacked shared outcomes, shared measurement tools, and common data gathering methods or tools. Simultaneously, private and governmental funders in the community are measuring different outcomes, with varied tools, and at different intervals. Overall, this is preventing community collaboration and precluding an understanding what is and is not working when addressing youth homelessness in Winnipeg. Establishing an adaptive learning system through shared measurement is essential to tracking and evaluating the plan to end youth homelessness and strategies therein. Yet, throughout this 18-month process, the changes in the homelessness sector due to a change in provincial government along with revisions to Reaching Home made it extremely challenging to provide a youth-lens to existing measurement approaches. Despite the uncertainties, we have started conversations on shared measurement in the youth sector that we hope to continue into the future.

The network of youth safe spaces, including Ndinawe, WE 24/7, and Rossbrook House, have begun to discuss the shared practices they would like to enhance or implement together. The network does not only want to measure their successes at moving youth out of their spaces and into permanent housing; they also need to understand how open and barrier-free they are to youth who need to access their services in the first place. Over the 18-month project, we found that convening direct service staff to discuss policies and approaches to be difficult because there are significant resource constraints. Rather than creating a fulsome shared measurement strategy that would be resisted by those operating safe spaces in Winnipeg, we supported a bottom-up approach to moving towards a few common goals we could evaluate collectively.

First, Here and Now engaged an evaluation consultant who compiled promising or common practices amongst youth safe spaces through a literature review. We then facilitated discussions with leadership and direct service staff of the safe spaces. This will create a common evaluation framework to measure movement towards the agreed-upon practices.

Second, Winnipeg's adult emergency shelters are currently utilizing a shared instance of the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System for their information management through an initiative called the Homelessness Information Partnership of Winnipeg. With changes to Reaching





Home (including requirements for HIFIS use more broadly) and shifting responsibilities for HIFIS implementation to End Homelessness Winnipeg, expansion of HIFIS use in Winnipeg has been delayed. Here and Now hired a consultant to complete a Privacy Impact Assessment with WE 24/7 to understand the youth-specific privacy considerations and risks for shared information management. This will inform the implementation of HIFIS amongst other youth-serving organizations in Winnipeg as they system expands over the next three years.

**Youth Leadership & Engagement.** Youth leadership and engagement is essential to ensuring that responses to youth homelessness will be successful. From a rights-based point of view young people have the right to represent their own interests. Yet, engaging youth with ongoing or past experiences of homelessness can be challenging. Standard youth engagement strategies tend to fall short with this population because youth experiencing homelessness are often transient, may use substances, have mental health challenges, and sometimes they distrust authority figures and researchers. Standard youth engagement methods therefore attract higher functioning youth, and youth without experiences of homelessness. While there are a number of toolkits and resources that have been developed across Canada to work with youth in general, there are no toolkits designed to engage youth experiencing homelessness.

### Youth Engagement Toolkit and Strategy

Throughout Here and Now's implementation, it was a priority that youth remain meaningfully engaged. The Here and Now Youth Research team was formed in April 2018 made up of 15 research team members who participated in a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project. Over the year, youth were trained as researchers and learned how to conduct interviews, focus groups, and analyze data. PAR provided a platform for youth to learn new skills, grow their leadership capacity, and take action in the community. Here and Now youth research team members co-facilitated 13 focus groups designed to further detail or inform the action strategies from Here and Now. A total of 89 youth with experiences of homelessness in the community participated in the focus groups.

The Youth Research Team created and implemented a youth engagement strategy, as well as a first-of-its-kind toolkit that can be used in Winnipeg and in other jurisdictions to design and implement a similar youth engagement strategy within their own organizations or jurisdictions. The toolkit outlines practices, based on the literature and on primary research, to meaningfully engage youth with experiences of homelessness.

The motivation of the youth research team is reflected in the knowledge mobilization activities that were completed over the 18-month project. Highlights included participation in several community presentations and conferences such as the 2018 Winnipeg Street Census results launch, a radio show on a community radio station for World Homelessness Day in October 2018, a bus shelter advertising campaign centered on raising awareness about youth homelessness, and a youth-led protest against youth homelessness in April 2019.

Both the youth engagement strategy and the youth engagement toolkit have been published and shared within Winnipeg and Manitoba, as well as with youth-serving organizations across Canada.

### Evaluation

The Youth Research Team conducted an evaluation of the youth engagement process. The full results of the evaluation are available in the Youth Engagement Strategy. Highlights of this evaluation include:



- On average, participants rated their experience with the project as 9/10 (with 10 being most positive)
- On average, participants rated their engagement in the project as 8/10 (with 10 being most engaged)
- Participants rated the accessibility of participation as 9.9/10 (with 10 being most accessible)
- Of the 12 participants who filled in the evaluation survey:
  - 10 learned something new
  - 9 had the opportunity to try new things
  - 7 felt their voice was heard throughout the project
  - 6 had the opportunity to express themselves creatively
  - 8 gained skills in more than one area

We identified several challenges, limitations and lessons learned that came out of this youth engagement project.

First, in the future, it would be important to ensure that organizations/coalitions are willing to make youth engagement a focus, and that is reflected in the budget/budgeting processes. For example, the application for funding was submitted prior to the start of the youth engagement strategy, and was therefore based on some assumptions. There were unfunded project needs which we found to be necessary to breaking down barriers and carrying out successful PAR project with Indigenous youth. Flexibility in project spending to adapt to youth's needs and interests is necessary for youth-led engagement to be successful.

Next, our youth engagement process showed us that over and above everything else we are doing, we must be flexible, adaptable, and put youth's needs first. Trauma-informed care, and harm reduction are key approaches to meeting youth where they are at and showing them the compassion that is required for engagement. The youth who make up the Here and Now youth research team all experienced trauma that is inherent as a part of homelessness. This often-meant prioritizing time to support youth individually, or deal with crises in youth's lives as they arose (i.e. lack of housing, relationship breakdowns, mental health challenges, addictions, etc.). This flexibility, while necessary, directly impacted the capacity and ability of the Here and Now Research Team as a group to complete all the tasks required. In most cases, youth were able to manage themselves and participate. But, in some cases, youth's substance use impacted their ability to participate in research training, discussions, and work with group members and facilitators in a positive way.

Third, we found that the timeline was too limited to complete a project of this nature. PAR is often carried out over a longer period (such as 2 or 3 years). We had 11 months to complete this PAR project, which included training youth as researchers, conducting data collection, completing data analysis, and carrying out knowledge mobilization activities. Due to our limited time frame, several activities were rushed and we did not have time to complete as thorough of a job collecting or analyzing data as is required for PAR. Additionally, by the time that the project was nearing completion (March 2019), the youth research team members were very engaged in the process and wanted to keep the project going to learn more and do more. Unfortunately, there was no funding received for continuing the Here and Now Youth Research Team as of March 2019.

### 5-year Action Plan

The objectives of Here and Now: the Winnipeg Plan to End Youth Homelessness have been detailed into a full 5-year Action Plan through consultation, engagement, and research. The Governance Committee, task-forces/working groups, Youth Research Team, and other committees established



over the past 18-months participated in the development of this Action Plan. However, with evolving mandates and priorities from the Government of Manitoba and End Homelessness Winnipeg, establishing alignment and formal endorsement from partnering entities has not been possible. A Memorandum of Understanding, Funding Agreement, or Terms of Reference was not finalized by the end of this project. The 5-year Action Plan therefore remains a draft without funding available to continue to achieve the objectives of Here and Now.

### Case Study on Reconciliation and Youth Homelessness

A case study on Reconciliation and Youth Homelessness has been completed and shared with partners in Manitoba. The case study summarizes Here and Now's experience, context, and connects the actions proposed/taken to the values and principles of the Plan. The Here and Now framework proposes a way forward towards reconciliation and ending youth homelessness, and can guide our work as a community in the future.

### Next Steps

Here and Now: Winnipeg's Plan to End Youth Homelessness has progressed on all four commitment priorities through our collaboration with youth serving agencies, the Department of Families and other community partners. The difficulty in identifying sustainable funding to support the coordination of Here and Now has been disappointing; despite considerable progress, the difficult task of convening and organizing systemic change is not a funding priority. Local leaders of youth-serving organizations in Winnipeg spearheading these efforts are also supporting youth in dire crisis daily.

Everyone has a responsibility to help prevent and end youth homelessness in Winnipeg, and the Governance Committee of Here and Now will continue to advocate and collaborate with community partners to continue meeting the goals and objectives of Here and Now: Winnipeg's Plan to End Youth Homelessness.