



HOST HOMES DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION: REPORT I

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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 model across Canada?

Methodology

In order 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
- 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

Results

This is the first report for the Host Homes Developmental Evaluation. This report provides results from Phases 1 and 2 of the evaluation and focuses on a literature review on Host Homes programs and results from a national online survey on Host Homes programs. The second report will focus on adaptations to the Host Homes model across Canada, key partnerships required of Host Homes programs, and how RtR can support communities in implementing Host Homes programs. The final report will focus on how the Host Homes model fits within HF4Y framework, how the Host Homes model fits within the broader youth homelessness sector, and the training and technical assistance needs required for scaling up the Host Homes model in Canada.

The current report includes four main parts:

- 1) Ethics approval
- 2) Description of the national advisory committee.
- 3) Literature review.
- 4) Host Homes national survey.

Ethics Approval

This project received ethical clearance from York University's Office of Research Ethics.

National Advisory Committee

A national advisory committee was created with representation from across Canada. The committee members are largely Host Homes providers.

Committee members represent the following organizations:

1. A Way Home Canada
2. Bridging the Gap (Halton Region, Ontario)
3. Calgary Boys & Girls Club (Calgary, Alberta)

4. Home Horizons (Collingwood, Ontario)
5. oneROOF Youth Services (Kitchener, Ontario)
6. The Bridge (Kelowna, British Columbia)
7. Western Rocky View Family and Community Resource Centre (the Resource Centre) (Cochrane, Alberta)
8. YES (Peterborough, Ontario)
9. 360 Kids (York Region, Ontario)
10. Portal Youth (Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia)
11. Social Planning Cowichan (Cowichan, Alberta)

The advisory committee has convened on quarterly intervals. The advisory committee members represent agencies that have longstanding Host Homes programs and agencies that are just launching Host Homes programs. Therefore, the meetings have served an opportunity for shared learning amongst the group.

Themes that have emerged during these calls include recruiting Host Homes providers, accommodating Host Homes provider schedules, supporting young people with varying needs, assessing the needs of young people, partnerships, and defining the Host Homes model. These themes will be further explored during key informant interviews in the second report.

The advisory committee also provided feedback on materials produced through this project and members have agreed to participate in key informant interviews.

Literature Review

The literature review developed by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and Raising the Roof for the Bridging the Gap evaluation has been updated.

PREVENTING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA

In Canada, solutions to homelessness have primarily focused on crisis-based, emergency responses. Assistance is largely provided to someone after they have become homeless. Although emergency shelters are an important component of a community's response to homelessness, preventative measures should also be prioritized. *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness* (Gaetz, Schwan, Redman, French, & Dej, 2018) states that:

Youth homelessness prevention refers to policies, practices, and interventions that either (1) reduce the likelihood that a young person will experience homelessness, or (2) provide youth experiencing homelessness with the necessary supports to stabilize their housing, improve their wellbeing, connect with community, and avoid re-entry into homelessness. Youth homelessness prevention thus necessitates the immediate provision of housing and supports for youth experiencing homelessness, or the immediate protection of housing, with supports, for youth at risk of homelessness. Youth homelessness prevention must be applied using a rights-based approach and address the unique needs of developing adolescents and young adults (p. 20).

The *Roadmap* also identifies six key components of homelessness prevention: 1) Structural prevention; 2) Systems prevention; 3) Early intervention; 4) Eviction prevention; 5) Housing stabilization; and 6) Duty to assist. Focusing on early intervention, these are strategies designed to immediately address the risk of homelessness and provide supports to young people who have recently experienced homelessness. The Host Homes model is one type of early intervention that can be labelled as a housing-led support.

The underlying goal of housing-led supports, such as the Host Homes program, is to provide an alternative to emergency shelters. Housing-led supports provide young people with locally based supports, drawing on the resources that exist in the community, and by giving young people temporary housing options. This allows time to work through the problems that led to homelessness, ideally with case management support.

Housing-led supports are important since emergency shelters for youth do not exist in every community, especially those that are smaller or located in rural areas. Even when a shelter is available, it is often located in downtown areas far away from a young person's community. Research has shown that when young people are forced to leave

their communities and natural supports, their health and mental health worsens, and they face increased challenges and problems (Gaetz, 2014). Thus, Host Homes programs can fill an important service gap that can keep young people in their community.

Further, most emergency shelters for youth bring together a mix of young people, some who have recently become homeless and some who have become entrenched in homelessness. The challenge for shelter staff is preventing young people who have recently become homeless from exposure to harm (e.g., crime, sexual exploitation, violence, addictions) (Gaetz, 2014). Again, Host Homes programs contribute to reducing the harm that young people may experience while homeless.

HOST HOMESS OVERVIEW

The name “Host Homes” was coined in the mid-1970s (Naidich, 1988). The goal of the Host Homes model is to immediately support young people by diverting them from shelter accommodation to a safe place where they can stay with an adult or family. While in the Host Homes, program staff work with the young person and their family to mediate conflict and formulate a plan to be followed after program discharge. When family reconnection is not possible or safe, the program works with young people to support their independent housing needs.

Host Homes programs may offer space for a couple days, a few weeks or months, or even years. Host Homes are in the young person’s community which allows them to remain in school and stay connected to their natural supports (Gaetz et al., 2018).

IMPLEMENTATION OF HOST HOMESS PROGRAMS

There are several components that organizations need to consider when operating a Host Homes program. These include recruitment of Host Homes providers, referrals of young people, assessment of Host Homes providers and training, assessment of young people, matching young people and host providers – respecting youth choice, responsibilities of Host Homes providers, supports provided to young people, Host Homes provider compensation, and licensing.

Recruitment of Host Homes Providers

Host Homes programs should have a sufficient number of Host Homes providers. Although the number of providers depends upon the size of the community and the demand for services, some agencies maintain three times the number of host families as young people (Naidich, 1988). This number allows for young people to have more

choice in selecting the host provider that best fits their needs. Recruitment should aim to develop a diverse network of families so that the diverse needs of young people can be met (Bonlender, 2017; Naidich, 1988).

Effective strategies for recruitment include reaching out to media outlets to promote the program, speaking to community groups, using current host providers to recruit other providers, developing promotional materials (e.g., pamphlets) to share at community centres and other community hubs, and social media (Naidich, 1988; Point Source Youth, 2018; Raising the Roof, 2018). Host Homes programs should use these outreach techniques concurrently, as it can be difficult to recruit Host Homes providers (Point Source Youth, 2018; Raising the Roof, 2018). Because of the potential delays in recruiting providers, Host Homes programs should give ample time for this process to occur.

Referrals of Young People

Young people are generally referred to Host Homes programs via the child welfare system, emergency shelters, or social service workers in the community. For example, young people in Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program in Halton Region, Ontario stated that they were referred to the program via their social worker at school and through a local emergency shelter (Ecker, Sariyannis, Holden, & Traficante, 2019). Alternatively, The Bridge Services in Kelowna, British Columbia has a Host Homes program that works with young people under the age of 19 who have status with the ministry—either through a voluntary care agreement or a youth agreement (Ecker et al., 2019).

Assessment of Host Homes Providers & Training

Once Host Homes providers have been recruited, an assessment takes place. This includes interviews, reference checks, background checks, and a home visit for each potential host provider (Raising the Roof, 2018). Information acquired from a potential host provider may include the relationship status of applicants (married, children, etc.), housing information, contact information, employment history, and the availability of public transit near the host's home. Related to hosting a young person, questions regarding the type of youth they would prefer to host and the ways in which they might respond to different situations may be asked (Raising the Roof, 2018). Background checks may include criminal record checks and a record of renter/homeowner's insurance (Point Source Youth, 2018).

Once a Host Home provider has met the program's requirements, program staff will conduct a series of trainings. Trainings include topics such as de-escalation, anti-

oppression and anti-discrimination, gender identity and sexual orientation, positive youth development, and trauma and resiliency (Point Source Youth, 2018; Raising the Roof, 2018).

Assessment of Young People

Young people will be assessed on their fit with the program and whether they meet program eligibility requirements. Once a young person has been referred to the program, staff will conduct an assessment to determine whether immediate reconciliation with their family is feasible. If it is determined that a young person cannot return home, then a full assessment may take place. Some programs may choose to use assessment tools, such as the Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) or the Youth Assessment Prioritization (YAP) tool. It is important to conduct an assessment, since Host Homes programs are generally meant to support young people with low-to-moderate needs. Host Homes providers may not have the capacity or expertise to meet the needs of all young people, including those with significant mental health or substance abuse issues (Bonlender, 2017).

Matching Young People and Host Providers – Respecting Youth Choice

Once young people and host providers have been accepted into the program, the matching process can proceed. Host Homes programs must provide young people with a choice in the Host Homes they reside in. Youth must not get ‘placed’ into homes but rather work with the program to choose which host family might best suit them (Simoes & Adam, 2017). Additionally, youth should be given an opportunity to nominate potential hosts from extended family and friends, or pre-existing supportive relationships (Gaetz, 2014; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.).

Young people and host providers will have the opportunity to meet each other to determine if there is a fit. Host Homes workers have stated that it is important to consider the personalities of both the young person and the host provider in determining a good fit (Ecker et al., 2019).

Responsibilities of a Host Home Provider

In the original iterations of the Host Homes model, the host families provided all the supports to young people, including housing, food, and other support services (e.g., counselling, referrals, and transportation). As Host Homes programs expanded, most programs shifted the responsibility for providing support services to staff responsible for the general administration of the program.

As part of a Host Homes program, young people are given their own room and meals. Based upon the needs of young people, a Host Homes provider can provide support related to the development of life skills, such as cooking and cleaning (Raising the Roof, 2018). Host Homes providers can also support young people by connecting them to employment opportunities and/or supporting their educational goals (Raising the Roof, 2018). Further, Host Homes providers can work to foster a sense of social inclusion with young people. For example, a host provider in Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program invited the young people to family events and worked to develop a family-like environment for young people (Ecker et al., 2019).

Supports Provided to Young People

The host family or adult serves as a support to the youth, but on-going supports are also provided by the agency operating the program. Combined with a family reunification strategy (when it is safe for the youth to do so), Host Homes programs give youth and their family the ability to take a break and resolve issues causing conflict. This focus on family reunification can also strengthen families and potentially shorten the length of time young people experience homelessness (Gaetz, 2014). For youth who are leaving care, a Host Homes can ease the transition to independent living, reduce isolation, and prevent them from entering the youth homelessness system (Gaetz, 2014; Gaetz, 2017).

Host Homes programs can offer a variety of supports to young people. Bridging the Gap's Host Homes program noted that they have weekly individual meetings with host providers and young people (Ecker et al., 2019). The staff provide young people with basic necessities, training opportunities, and assistance accessing community and health services. They also mediate conflicts between young people and host providers. The necessary skills of a Host Homes worker included being personable, approachable, flexible, patient, and empathetic (Ecker et al., 2019). As linking young people to services is a large part of the work, Host Homes workers should also have a good understanding of the systems young people may be encountering.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Several considerations need to be made in providing supports to young people and host providers. These includes caseload ratios, hours of operation, harm reduction, engaging older participants, and settling young people.

Caseloads

There is little consistency in the literature on caseload sizes. A seminal report on Host Homes programs indicates that a caseload of one staff member to five Host Homes is preferable (Naidich, 1988). This low caseload size was due to the staff having to provide services to both young people and host providers, as well as recruiting new host providers. This one-to-five ratio requires further examination.

Hours of Operation

The hours of operation of the program must also be considered. Often, a Host Homes worker's schedule must be flexible to accommodate the needs of young people and their families (Naidich, 1988). For example, young people may be in school and their family may be at work. This means that Host Homes workers may need to work evenings. It is also to have on-call supports available should an emergency arise during the overnight or the weekend (Ecker et al., 2019; Naidich, 1988).

Harm Reduction, Engaging Older Participants, and Settling Young People

Other challenges include working under a harm reduction approach, engaging older participants, and settling young people in the home. Related to harm reduction, it is important to educate providers on safe and safer use of substances (Ecker et al., 2019). On engagement, engaging younger participants, particularly those under the age of 18, can be easier since their goals are often focussed on education. Older participants, who may not have educational goals, can be more difficult to engage in the program (Ecker et al., 2019). Supporting young people to adjust to a new environment can be another challenge. Host Homes workers have noted that it is a big adjustment, particularly for younger participants, to live in a "stranger's" home. This may result in a hesitancy of younger participants to develop a trusting relationship with their host provider (Ecker et al., 2019).

COMPENSATING HOST HOMESS PROVIDERS

In some cases, host families are paid a per diem by the agency or government program running the Host Homes program to cover their costs and to reimburse funds they may lose by not being free to rent that space out. By providing a stipend, it may also allow a senior, for example, to be able to afford to stay in their own home and maintain their independence. In other communities, the families are volunteers and there is no funding provided; this helps reduce the cost of homeless youth service provision.

LICENSING AND DISPERSION OF HOST HOMESS PRORAMS

It is important for organizations to determine whether local zoning laws prohibit the establishment of Host Homes programs in particular areas (Naidich, 1988). An additional consideration is the geographic distribution of Host Homes locations. Excessive travelling cuts into the time available to work with young people and their families; however, programs which intend to serve large areas may need Host Homes in a variety of locations to serve young people in the entire area adequately (Naidich, 1988).

HOST HOMESS PROGRAMS AS PART OF A SYSTEM OF CARE

The Host Homes model can fit within a system of care for young people experiencing homelessness. Considerations for the inclusion of a Host Homes program within a system of care are: 1) Host Homes programs as a community-based response; 2) Diversity and inclusion requirements; 3) Critiques of the model; and 4) The difference between Nightstop and Host Homes programs.

Host Homes Programs as a Community-Based Response

Host Homes programs provide communities with a great deal of flexibility and ability to scale the program. Host Homes programs may be most effective when developed at the grassroots level as a community-based response to an identified need (Bonlender, 2017). Host Homes programs tend to exist in smaller communities, especially when the community does not have an existing youth emergency shelter and where there is a built-in network of potential volunteer host families (Bonlender, 2017). Host Homes programs do not rely on a fixed site for a congregate living (including staff, capital, and operating expenditures) and therefore operate at a reduced cost compared to emergency shelters.

The length of stay in a Host Homes program can vary. In some communities Host Homes programs are used as a temporary intervention, with young people generally staying six months or less in the Host Homes (Raising the Roof, 2018). In other communities, Host Homes programs have been used as longer-term transitional housing. This flexibility enables communities of varying sizes to tailor Host Homes programs depending upon the needs of young people. From a system of care approach, Host Homes programs should be one of a range of housing options available to youth.

Diversity and Inclusion

Diverting young people from the emergency shelter system is particularly important for young people with diverse identities. Within the emergency shelter system, young people who identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Colours (BIPOC) and/or 2SLGBTQ+ can face racism and discrimination (Schwan, Gaetz, French, Redman, Thistle, & Dej, 2018). As an alternative to shelters, Host Homes programs can match young people with hosts who have a shared identity (Bonlender, 2017). Matching young people who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ with hosts who share their identity has been successful (Simoes & Adam, 2017). In an American survey of 354 youth-serving organizations, five percent of organizations indicated that they operate a Host Homes program. Within these Host Homes programs, 42 percent of young people identified as LGBT (LGB = 37 percent; transgender = 5 percent) (Durso & Gates, 2012).

When working with diverse young people, it is important that host families receive the appropriate training, such as those focused on anti-oppression and anti-discrimination. Simoes and Adam (2017) noted that previous Host Homes models did not account for the intersectionality of young people. They suggest that to become inclusive Host Homes providers, programs must:

.... examine and challenge oppression, especially in relation to Whiteness and racial disparities within our LGBTQ2S communities. It is essential that we minimize the mess that is borne out of unexamined power and privilege, such as allowing White applicants to become hosts if they are not willing and able to commit to racial justice (Simoes & Adam, 2017, p. 166).

Critiques of Host Homes Programs

The main critique of Host Homes programs is its potential resemblance of a foster care program. For example, in proposing housing options for young people in Austin, Texas' community plan to end homelessness, young people with lived experience were not comfortable with Host Homes programs being considered (Schoenfeld, Bennett, Manganello, & 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). These critiques highlight the importance of including youth choice as a mandatory component of a Host Homes program. The critiques neglect to consider young people

who may require temporary supports to mediate conflicts with family members, particularly young people under the age of 18, who may benefit from a Host Homes program.

Nightstop Compared to Host Homes Programs

The Nightstop program originated in the United Kingdom over 30 years ago. It is a shelter diversion program similar to the Host Homes model (Sariyannis, Traficante, & Hermans, 2019). Young people stay at a volunteer's home on a night-by-night basis for up to three weeks and can be placed in a new home every night depending on the schedule of the volunteer hosts. An extended version of the program, Nightstop Plus, allows young people to stay with volunteers longer than the three-week mandate. Therefore, the main difference between the Nightstop model and the Host Homes model is the length of stay in the program. Nightstop is often focused on very short stays, whereas Host Homes programs are often focused on longer stays.

Host Homes National Survey

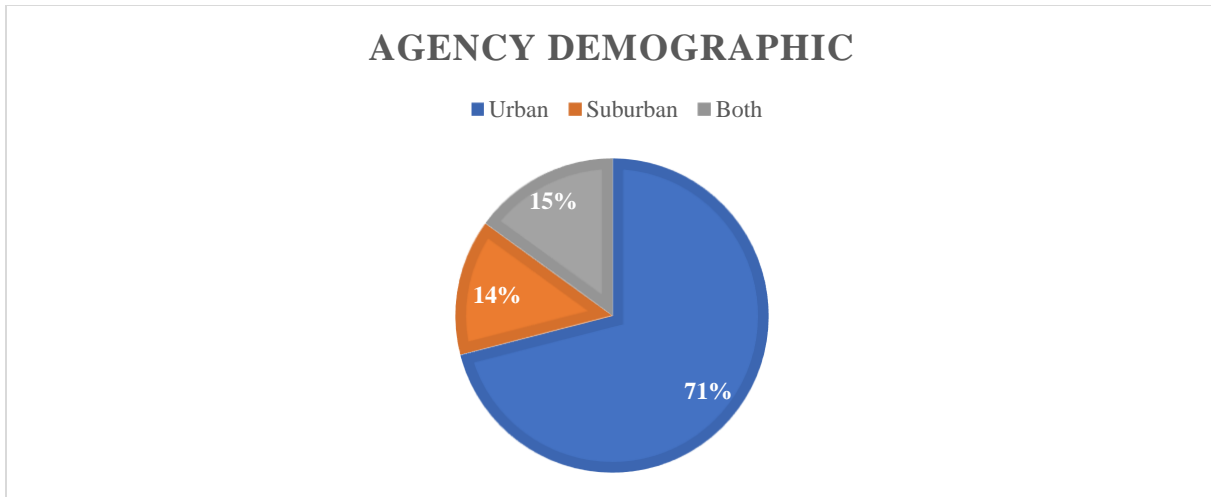
In the fall of 2018, we sent out a brief online survey to youth-serving agencies across Canada to gain a better understanding of awareness of and interest in implementing the Host Homes model in their community. The list of agencies was taken from HireUp youth employment platform, which engages with youth homelessness service providers. Over 100 agencies were contacted, with two reminder emails also sent.

The response to the survey was low. In total, seven agencies across Canada participated in the survey.

Below, the results from the survey are presented.

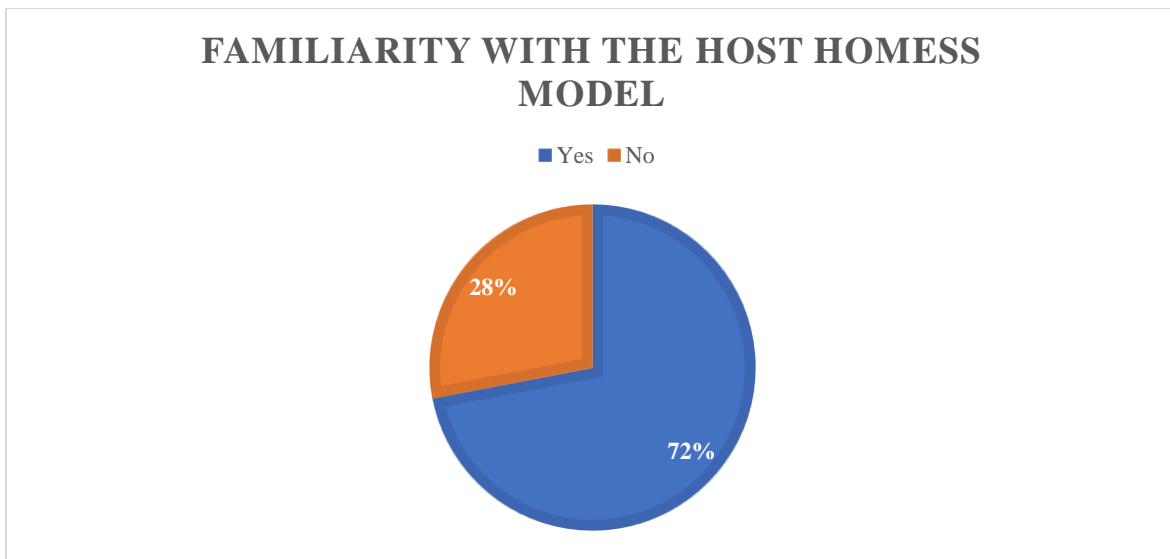
Agency Demographics

Most agencies operate in an urban location and serve anywhere between 250 to 2,500 youth each year. Of the seven agencies, four agencies operate youth shelters (capacity between 31 to 96 beds). Additionally, three of the seven agencies offer a shelter diversion program.



Familiarity with the Host Homes Model

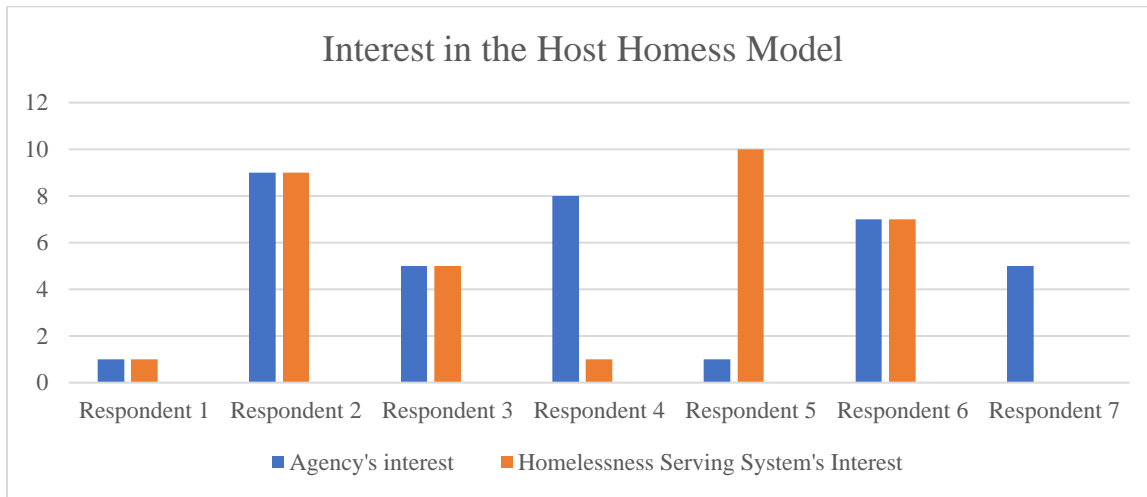
Most of the agencies were familiar with the Host Homes model (five out of seven respondents), yet more than half of the respondents (four out of seven respondents) did not know whether a Host Homes program currently exists in their community.



Interest in the Host Homes Model

When asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 their interest in implementing a Host Homes program in their community, results were mixed. The average of all seven responses yielded a neutral rating of five.

When asked to rate the homelessness serving system’s interest in implementing the model in their community, the average rating was slightly higher at 5.5.



Despite this low interest in implementing the model within their communities, nearly all respondents (six out of seven) expressed interest in learning more about the model.

Summary

- 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. Even when a shelter is available, it is often located in downtown areas far away from a young person's community.
- 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).
- 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 program, 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 smaller caseload sizes, as they are supporting both young people and the host provider.
- Host Homes programs will need to consider providing targeted supports that meet the needs of younger and older youth, as their needs may differ.

- Host Homes programs will need to address how to adopt a harm reduction approach within the program.
- Host Homes programs may be most effective when developed at the grassroots level as a community-based response to an identified need, and tend to exist in smaller communities with fewer resources dedicated to homelessness (Bonlender, 2017).
- 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.
- Host Homes programs must be careful in their promotion, as they may be conflated with foster care programs.
- Short-stay programs, such as Nightstop, are an important complement to Host Homes programs.
- The number of survey participants was low, so it is challenging to make distinct conclusions. The low response rate could be the result of several factors, but it may demonstrate that the understanding of Host Homes programs needs to be enhanced. For example, potential survey participants may have been unaware of the Host Homes model and therefore did not feel confident to participate.
- The survey results indicate that most of the participants were aware of the Host Homes model, but few participants were aware if 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 in their community, 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.

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