ONEROOF HOST HOMES PROGRAM EVALUATION: FINAL REPORT

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Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

oneROOF Youth Services (oneROOF) supports young people between the ages of 12 to 25 who are at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness in the Region of Waterloo. The organization works to reduce and prevent youth homelessness by providing emergency shelter, outreach, case management, drop-in programming, and education and employment supports. To complement these supports, and fill a gap in the Region of Waterloo, oneROOF opened their first Host Homes program in 2018.

CONTEXT OF THE EVALUATION

oneROOF received a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation in 2018 to launch the first Host Homes program in the Region of Waterloo. As part of this funding, resources were allocated to evaluate the program. Hub Solutions, a social enterprise embedded within the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, partnered with oneROOF to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of the program.

The evaluation had four key questions:

1. What is the program theory?
2. Are program operations aligned with the program theory?
3. What are the differences between assessment tools used in the program (e.g., the YAP and the SPDAT tool)?
4. What are the outcomes of youth involved in the program?
    a. Housing
    b. Well-being
    c. Program satisfaction

After the program was implemented, two additional evaluation questions were included:

1. What are strategies to recruit Host Home providers?
2. What is the experience of Host Home providers in the program?

Two separate reports were developed to answer the above two questions.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The methodology had four main components:

Logic Model. An iterative process was used to develop and verify the logic model with program staff. The first draft of the logic model was reviewed by program staff in a conversation guided by the evaluation team. Feedback elicited from this session was used to modify the draft logic model. A second session with program staff was then conducted to make final changes to the logic model.

Process Evaluation. The process evaluation took place in mid-2020. Given that there has been little formal formative evaluation of the Host Homes program, a process evaluation was an important component to capture its key pieces. Interviews were conducted with Host Home providers (n= 2), young people in the program (n= 4), and Host Homes program staff and community stakeholders with familiarity with the program (n= 4).

Tool Administration Review. The Youth Assessment Prioritization (YAP) Tool and Service Prioritization Decision Assistance (SPDAT) Tool were compared based upon perspectives from program staff. The YAP and SPDAT tools are common assessment tools used in the sector to determine the needs of those experiencing homelessness.

Youth Outcomes. The outcome evaluation was ongoing. Surveys were distributed to youth at baseline and after they exited the program. Qualitative interviews were conducted with youth once they were close to exiting the program or after they had exited the program. Administrative data was also analyzed.

KEY FINDINGS

Outcome Evaluation

The Host Homes program is supporting young people to attain stable housing.
The evaluation has demonstrated that the program is supporting young people to avoid the shelter system and find independent housing or safely reconnect with family or natural supports. At the time of this report, only two of sixteen young people had a return to the emergency shelter. Although this result is based upon a small number of

young people (n = 16), it provides early evidence that the program is effective in its goal of supporting young people to attain stable housing.

The Host Homes program is supporting young people with educational goals and making inroads with the education system. More than half of the young people in the program were enrolled in secondary school or post-secondary education. This was facilitated by young people being placed in Host Homes that were close to their school and the program's ability to effectively work with school boards to keep young people in the same school prior to their entry in the Host Home.

Given the low sample size, it is hard to determine outcomes in areas outside of housing and education, but young people generally did not report poor ratings related to quality of life. Unfortunately, the evaluation was unable to speak with all the participants in the program, particularly at program exit. This limited the ability to make inferences on the program's impact beyond housing and education. However, the available qualitative and survey data does demonstrate that young people were generally satisfied with their lives.

Young people were very satisfied with the quality of the Host Home and the neighbourhood. The ratings related to the quality of the Host Home were high, indicating that young people were very satisfied with the physical structure of the home and the Host Home providers. Young people also rated the neighbourhood of the Host Home favourably. These results are comparable to previous evaluations of Host Homes programs (Ecker, Sariyannis, Holden, & Traficante, 2019).

Process Evaluation

Young people and Host Home providers were generally satisfied with the supports received in the program. Young people were generally very satisfied with their time in the program. The young people we interviewed during the process evaluation were unable to identify any challenges they experienced. The one challenge identified by young people who exited the program was the limited communication that sometimes occurred between Host Homes staff, Host Home providers, and young people. Similarly, Host Home providers were generally satisfied with their experience in the program. However, Host Home providers did provide some areas for improvement.

The program was impacted by the length of time it took to recruit Host Home providers. The length of time to recruit Host Home providers was longer than

anticipated. The program spent considerable time developing trust in the community and actively worked to enhance promotional strategies. Engaging with the media was one of the most successful strategies to recruit Host Home providers. This follows recommendations in the *Host Homes Canada Toolkit* (Sariyannis, 2018).

Host Home providers may need a higher intensity of support when a young person first moves in. Host Home providers greatly valued the training that they received from the program. In particular, the training focused on how to effectively communicate with young people was appreciated. Several Host Home providers shared that they experienced a "learning curve" when a young person enters their home. Therefore, the program should be prepared to provide an enhanced level of training and support to Host Home providers when a young person first enters their home.

The intake and matching process is working well, particularly the opportunity for young people and Host Home providers to meet and the use of the YAP. Young people shared that they were very satisfied with the intake process. This included the intake interview and the matching process with Host Home providers. Young people emphasized that meeting the Host Home providers beforehand was key. It allowed for the hosts to outline their expectations and for young people to see if they were comfortable living in the environment. This process follows recommendations from the *Host Homes Canada Toolkit* (Sariyannis, 2018) and should therefore be sustained. The use of the YAP tool also provided staff with a comprehensive understanding of the needs and goals of the young people prior to matching them with a Host Homes provider.

The needs of young people in relation to the location of Host Homes is an important consideration for the program. Some young people felt that it was difficult to get to school or work, particularly when their Host Home was not close to transit. The program should consider these factors when matching young people and Host Home providers. The program could target their recruitment to find hosts that live close to major schools and transit routes in the Region of Waterloo.

A strong relationship between young people, host providers, and program staff is built on trust. Trust was a major theme to emerge in the interviews. For the program to operate at its full potential, there must be reciprocal trust among all parties involved. Trust is built through respecting the autonomy of young people, respecting the rules of Host Home providers, and the receipt of support from program staff.

Young people appreciated the sense of autonomy in the program, which supported their goals of independent living. Young people in the program explained that they felt a sense of privacy and independence while living in their Host Home. There was an understanding that certain rules had to be followed, but the young people did not feel like these rules were overbearing. Fostering this sense of autonomy, while establishing parameters around expected behaviours, aligns well with the goals of young people. Young people in the program wanted to become independently housed after their time in the Host Homes program. By providing a structured, but independent, living arrangement in the Host Homes program, it set up young people for success in their own apartment. Since independence was a prevalent goal, the Host Homes workers should work with young people to identify areas that will support their independence. This could include educational, employment, and/or life skills (e.g., budgeting).

The relationship between young people and Host Home providers is generally positive but could be enhanced through involvement of program staff to address potential conflicts. Young people shared that they feel at home within their Host Home and that they receive supports from their Host Home provider. This demonstrates the importance of identifying a good match between young people and Host Home providers. When young people feel comfortable in the home, they can ask for support when it is needed. It will be important for Host Homes workers to monitor the relationship between young people and Host Home providers to ensure that both parties feel comfortable and are maximizing the potential of the supportive relationship.

Host Home providers would like to connect with one another. Several Host Home providers shared that they would appreciate the opportunity to learn from other Host Home providers. Therefore, the program could create a monthly drop-in space for Host Home providers to come together and share successes and challenges they are experiencing in the program.

Relationships with family and natural supports could be enhanced. There was no uniform path leading young people to the program, however, the key informants and young people both mentioned conflicts with family and friends as one contributing factor. Therefore, the supports offered to youth in the program should continue to include opportunities to strengthen family and natural supports.

Program Adaptations

The creation of respite Host Homes is important. Having respite Host Home providers was an important adaptation of the program. Since some host providers will not feel comfortable having a young person in their home when they are not present (e.g., on vacation), having temporary housing options for young people is important.

Expanding to rural areas in the Region of Waterloo will require considerations related to transportation and access to services and supports. This finding mirrors previous findings from evaluations of Host Home programs (Ecker et al., 2019). oneROOF's program has great potential to support young people in rural areas who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Having Host Homes in a young person's community will prevent a young person from having to access supports in a different community. Helping young people to stay in their community is important, as it helps to maintain connections to supports (Gaetz, Morton, Borato, & Story, 2020). Host Homes placed in rural settings may require special considerations, such as transportation and access to services and supports.

Expanding the program to support young people with moderate needs will require an enhanced offering of support from the program. The program currently works with young people with lower support needs. This may result in a larger number of young people in oneROOF's emergency shelter having moderate and higher support needs. This means that the emergency shelter should anticipate having to provide a greater level of support than before. It also means that the Host Home program could consider expanding their eligibility requirements to work with young people with moderate needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results from the process and outcome evaluations demonstrated that the program is successfully providing housing and supports for young people. To improve the program, the following recommendations were developed:

Recommendation 1. To examine if young people are having sustained exits out of homelessness, the program should continue to follow up with young people for at least one year.

Recommendation 2. The program should continue to foster relationships with school boards. This includes supporting young people to maintain enrolment at their school,

even if it is in a different catchment area, and promoting the program within schools, particularly among teachers.

Recommendation 3. The program should continue to implement data collection procedures to assess the impact of the program on housing, education, employment, and quality of life.

Recommendation 4. The program should continue to provide feedback opportunities for young people and host providers. This could include brief surveys or focus group sessions.

Recommendation 5. The program should continue to dedicate time for recruitment of Host Home providers. This could include reaching out to media with "good news" stories about the program, both from the perspective of young people and host providers. At the same time, the program should be mindful of the capacity of the program in determining the ideal number of providers.

Recommendation 6. Enhanced training and supports should be considered for Host Home providers when a young person first enters the Host Home. By anticipating this need, program staff will be able to potentially prevent issues before they arise.

Recommendation 7. The program should maintain the intake and matching process, particularly the use of the YAP tool and the meeting between the young people and Host Home providers.

Recommendation 8. The program should continue to consider placements based upon the Host Home's proximity to a young person's work and school.

Recommendation 9. The program should continue to ensure that young people are provided the opportunity to foster their sense of independence while in the Host Home. This should be an important focus of the work program staff engage in with young people and host providers.

Recommendation 10. Host Home workers should continue to act as an impartial mediator in the relationship between young people and Host Home providers and address challenges when they arise.

Recommendation 11. The program should develop more opportunities for Host Home providers to connect with one another. This could come in the form of a Host Home provider network facilitated by oneROOF.

Recommendation 12. The program should look to the Family and Natural Supports Framework (Borato, McMillan, & Gaetz, 2020) for guidance on how to work with young people to address relationships with family and natural supports.

Recommendation 13. The program should continue to develop a repository of respite Host Home providers.

Recommendation 14. The program should develop transportation and support plans for young people who choose to live in rural Host Homes.

Recommendation 15. The program should conduct an assessment with current Host Home providers to examine their capacity to support young people with moderate needs. The program should also consider what added supports will be needed to support young people with moderate needs, particularly those focused on mental health and harm reduction. This process should take place before admitting young people with moderate needs into the program.

SECTION 1. BACKGROUND OF ONEROOF YOUTH SERVICES

For more than 30 years oneROOF Youth Services (oneROOF) has supported young people between the ages of 12 to 25 who are at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness, in the Region of Waterloo.

oneROOF provides several different services for youth. These include:

- The Providing a Roof (PAR) program which is an 18-bed co-ed emergency shelter program for youth aged 16 to 25 years. All youth residing at PAR are assigned a primary worker who assists them in setting short/long-term goals and in transitioning out of the shelter by securing appropriate housing.
- Outreach workers who meet youth out in the community and direct them to services that meet their needs.
- The Streets to Housing team, which consists of intensive case management workers who provide individual and family counselling, family mediation, and case management. The Streets to Housing team also helps youth who are struggling to find and maintain housing under the Housing First model.
- Drop-in services that offer one-to-one meetings with staff to support problem-solving, goal setting, and referrals.
- Offering access to essential needs, such as meals, laundry, showers, storage lockers, and hygiene products. In addition, clothing donations and access to computers and the computer lab.
- Daily programming like life skills training, recreation, and special events, substance abuse and prevention, therapeutic craft/art sessions, and guest speakers from community service agencies.
- The SEE (Streets to Employment and Education) program. SEE invites youth from Waterloo Region to apply to a four-month program that aims to teach them transferrable job and life skills. Participation in the program is intended to equip them for employment in the community and further their education.

In 2018, oneROOF further enhanced their service offerings through the launch of the Region of Waterloo's first Host Homes program. The remainder of this report is focused on the implementation and outcomes of the Host Homes program. It begins with an overview of homelessness in the Region of Waterloo, a brief review of the Host Homes model, the evaluation context, the results from the process and outcome evaluation, and recommendations stemming from the results.

SECTION 2: HOMELESSNESS IN THE REGION OF WATERLOO

oneROOF is one of three organizations in the Kitchener-Waterloo area that provide shelter and other much-needed supports to young people. There are 245 emergency shelter spaces available in the Region of Waterloo, and 20% are offered specifically to youth under the age of 25 (Region of Waterloo, 2018a). Other homelessness agencies in the community include the YWCA Kitchener-Waterloo Emergency Shelter, Charles Street Men's Shelter, Safe Haven Youth Services, the Working Centre Bunkies, and Argus Residence for Young Men and Young Women in Cambridge.

In 2018, the Point in Time (PiT) count for the Region of Waterloo showed that approximately 264 individuals were experiencing homelessness (Region of Waterloo, 2018b). This count was 12% lower than the PiT count for 2014 indicating that some progress has been made toward preventing and ending homelessness. In the 2017/2018 assessment of housing stability, youth shelters were operating with an average daily occupancy rate of 60% and adult serving shelters at 95% average daily occupancy (Region of Waterloo, 2018a).

According to the 2018 PiT count, approximately 15% of the homeless population in the Region of Waterloo are youth (Pye & Schlichter, 2018). The number of young people accessing homeless shelters increased in 2018 compared to 2017. Other trends from the PiT count and Housing Stability Data (Region of Waterloo, 2018a) from 2017 and 2018 include:

- 11% of Waterloo's homeless population identified as Indigenous.
- 63 immigrants/permanent residents and 8 refugees were served by emergency shelters in the Region of Waterloo.
- 71% of residents in emergency shelters in the Region of Waterloo identified as male, 28% as female, and 0.8% identified as other genders (not specified)
- 114 families were admitted to emergency shelters.
- 656 unaccompanied youth ages 16 to 24 and 1,684 adults were served by emergency shelters.

SECTION 3: THE HOST HOMES MODEL

The name "Host Home" 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 youth can stay with an adult or family (Gaetz et al., 2018). While in the Host Home, program staff work with the youth and the youth's family to mediate conflict and formulate a plan to follow after they leave the program. When family reconnection is not possible or safe, the program works with young people to support their independent housing needs.

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

SECTION 4: CONTEXT OF THE EVALUATION

Given that the Host Homes model is a new intervention for oneROOF, and within the Region of Waterloo, the need for a third-party evaluation was identified. oneROOF partnered with Hub Solutions, a social enterprise of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, to develop a comprehensive understanding of their Host Homes program through a process and outcome evaluation. In particular, the evaluation focused on:

- Developing the program theory of the Host Homes program, through the creation of a program logic model.
- Examining the implementation of the program to see if it aligns with the program theory; and
- Assessing program outcomes.

The evaluation had four initial key questions:

1. What is the program theory?
2. Are program operations aligned with the program theory?
3. What are the differences between assessment tools used in the program (e.g., the YAP and the SPDAT tool)?
4. What are the outcomes of youth involved in the program?
    d. Housing
    e. Well-being
    f. Program satisfaction

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After the program was launched, two additional evaluation questions were included:

1. What are strategies to recruit Host Home providers?
2. What is the experience of Host Home providers in the program?

Two separate reports were developed to answer the above two questions.

SECTION 5: METHODOLOGY

To meet the objectives of this evaluation, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used. These methodologies are described below.

Logic Model. To develop the program theory, a logic model was created. The first step was a review of oneROOF's program documentation. Based upon this review, a draft logic model was created by the evaluation team. An iterative process was used to verify the logic model with program staff. The first draft of the logic model was reviewed by program staff in a conversation guided by the evaluation team. Feedback elicited from this session was used to modify the draft logic model. A second session with program staff was then conducted to make final changes to the logic model.

Process Evaluation. The process evaluation took place in mid-2020. Given that there has been little formal formative evaluation of the Host Homes program, a process evaluation was an important component to capture its key pieces. Interviews were conducted with Host Home providers ($n= 2$), young people in the program ($n= 4$), and Host Homes program staff and community stakeholders with familiarity with the program ($n= 4$).

Tool Administration Review. The Youth Assessment Prioritization (YAP) Tool and Service Prioritization Decision Assistance (SPDAT) Tool were compared based upon perspectives from program staff. The YAP and SPDAT tools are common assessment tools used in the sector to determine the needs of those experiencing homelessness.

Youth Outcomes. Online surveys were distributed to youth at program entry and when they were close to exiting the program or after they exited the program. Qualitative interviews were conducted with youth after they had exited the program. Administrative data was also analyzed.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data. Administrative data and survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Qualitative data. All qualitative data was analyzed using a thematic approach. Team members reviewed all transcripts. After an initial review, team members created codes for the data, guided by the evaluation questions. Similar codes were grouped together to create themes.

SECTION 6: PROCESS EVALUATION RESULTS

This section presents results from the process evaluation. It is separated into four different sections. The first section focuses on young people in the program, the second focuses on Host Home providers, and the third section focuses on staff and community partners. Finally, the fourth section is comprised of common comments and experiences stated by all three groups of participants.

Perspectives of Young People

Entering the Program

The process of entering the program and matching with a Host Home provider was an easy transition. All the young people interviewed stated that it was an easy process to enter the program. They felt that the interview process with staff members was helpful and they were satisfied with the time to be housed in a Host Home. They also said it was easy to find a Host Home provider that was a good fit. All the young people shared that they felt prepared as they were entering the program and the Host Homes. One young person commented on the process of finding the right fit for Host Home providers:

> They (oneROOF staff) interviewed me and then told me about [Host Home providers] along with other couples as well and then we just…as soon as I met them it was a match. They liked me, I liked them, and they let me into their home.

Another young person shared that they were able to find a Host Home that was not only a good fit for their personal needs but also was conveniently located to where they were living before entering the program:

> They called me in for an interview. I told them "[Be]cause this area is close to my school", so I told them about this area. And they had a house here [their current living area] so they actually sent me here [current Host Home]. It took me six months at the homeless shelter. And then, when I heard about the program, it took me not even a month to find this place.

Interview process with staff identified the needs of young people. The young people all agreed that they were able to find appropriate housing partly due to the intake interviews conducted by oneROOF staff. The young people found that completing an interview with staff regarding their own needs was very helpful. One participant shared:

So, the questions were good, and they were valid, and they provided a real picture of what sort of environment I could, you know, at least, get my life back on track and maybe some support you know, maybe just like some sense of like a home…you know cause that's what I was looking for. Yeah,100 percent it was really worthwhile.

Meeting Host Home providers. Meeting the Host Home providers was understood as an important process for young people in the program.   The meeting helped to ensure that all parties knew what to expect. Host Home providers could share their expectations and house rules and young people could determine if these expectations fit with their own needs. One participant shared:

Moving in was made easier when I came here to meet the Host Home and I was able to ask them a lot of questions and they were pretty transparent.   They asked me a lot of questions, and I was very transparent so when it came time to move in, when I was talking to the [one]ROOF people, there wasn't really much to talk about. It was just sign the papers, pay when you're supposed to pay and that was it.

What Young People Liked About the Host Home Program

Autonomy while staying with Host Home providers. All young people shared that they felt like they were able to make decisions about their lives and to live freely while living in Host Homes. Young people understood that while living in another person's home they may have to follow certain rules, but these rules were reasonable. In general, the young people felt as though they had their own space within the home and were able to live as they normally would in any other circumstance. One participant commented:

A lot of autonomy, a lot of independence you know, they let me do my own thing, they're kind enough to cook for me. I do help out around the house, just to give back and show my gratitude but a lot of autonomy, a lot of freedom, a lot of personal space. They really respect my space.

Host Home providers help with guidance, social support, and supporting youth to achieve their goals. The young people all stated that they appreciated the support they receive from their Host Home providers. The young people spoke of Host Home providers offering social support and guidance, as well as practical supports such as

help with their schoolwork, and providing access to resources. One participant shared the practical and social support they received:

> They really do respect my personal space and my independence, and they support me academically. If I need help with schoolwork or something or if I need something printed or if I need a perspective. They always like don't hesitate to come ask me or they invite me to come visit their friends you know if they're doing something they try and include me. Yeah, like they just made me feel like family and I appreciate that so much.

Youth in the program also stated the Host Home providers were able to create a living environment that felt like a family environment. One participant shared how they appreciated this dynamic:

> General life advice, I don't hesitate I can go to them because I know they have experience in that. Or you know general life advice you would get like a parental figure and telling [me] about experiences in their lives to see how they could you know help how they could help me. They're always willing. The most I don't take for granted, they're always willing to provide a shoulder to lean on and an ear to listen. I really appreciate that because I don't have family here, the way they make me feel like a part of theirs.

Moreover, all young people interviewed stated that they would give the highest rating possible to the housing they received through the program. One participant graded their Host Home with a: "*Ten out of ten!*" All other young people interviewed also gave high grades to the Host Homes they lived in.

Becoming financially responsible. Several of the young people stated that they feel like they have become more financially responsible since entering the program. This is in part because they are living in a secure home, as well as the financial advice they receive from their Host Home providers. One young person shared how being the program has helped him become more financially responsible:

> Money wise I got a lot more responsible. I have a certain amount that I save every two weeks when I get my paycheque. It's made me a lot more responsible because I do have to pay these guys on a weekly basis, so I have to put money aside for that. I was pretty reckless with money before, but it's made me a lot more financially responsible.

Goals While in the Program

Becoming self-sufficient and living independently. All young people interviewed stated that they want to become more independent and better prepared to live on their own. The program has enhanced their life skills, offered mentorship from their Host Home provider, and provided safe and secure housing. Youth felt that these three skills will assist them in achieving their long-term goals. One participant shared:

> *Long-term, it's made me want to at least be responsible in housing at least have a place of my own as opposed to coming to live under someone else's roof at the end of the day that's not what I came to university for so I guess I could say it's made me want to really be in control of my life as much as possible as opposed to relying on people.*

Participants expressed their desires to become self-sufficient and to attain their own housing. These goals were developed because of their experiences in the program as it helped them see firsthand what they need to work towards to secure housing and be a more responsible adult.

What Young People Did Not Like About the Program

When asked what the challenges were encountered in the program or weaknesses of the program, the young people we interviewed did not provide specific answers. This could indicate that the participants were highly satisfied with the program. It could also mean that young people were not comfortable providing an answer to this question.

Host Home Providers

Becoming Involved in the Program

Wanting to help youth in the community. A common reason Host Home providers joined the program was to offer young people in their community a safe place to live. In some cases, Host Home providers were at a stage in their lives where they felt they were better able to lend support. In other cases, Host Home providers had experiences working within the shelter system and thought by joining the program they could help young people avoid the system altogether. One participant shared:

[Individual's name] and I are paramedics in the region. We have been involved with the shelter system in drastically different ways. So, we thought this would be a nice way to sort of get involved and help out in a different [way] which has been nice.

One Host Home provider shared that they had enough space in their home to help young people in need and wanted to make a difference. They said, "*Just feeling that it's a big house and maybe I could use my place for something good.*" Overall, the Host Home providers' interest in joining the program stemmed from their desire to help young people in their community.

Entering the Program

Entering the program was an easy process. All Host Home providers stated that it was an easy process to join the program. Participants learned about the program through advertisements in their local papers. After inquiring about becoming a Host Home provider, all participants felt that it was a straightforward and convenient process. One participant shared:

I would say it was fairly straightforward. There were a few different interviews. Then we both had to get our vulnerable sector checks which is required anyway for our job so that was actually pretty easy.

The Host Home providers felt prepared when they were about to have their first young person move into their home. Overall, the process for entering and preparing to become a Host Home provider was successful.

Training was helpful. Host Home providers appreciated the in-person training they received from staff. Participants commented that having the opportunity to learn how to communicate with young people has been helpful and has somewhat bridged the generational divide between young people in the program and the Host Home providers. They also learned more about the challenges young people are experiencing today. One participant stated:

I would say the big ones have how they offered some training. We have to come in like a classroom setting for the Host Home providers to learn how to communicate with today's youth. We didn't think that we were too far removed from it, but kids around late teens or early twenties are drastically different from

what we were at that age. It is shocking. It's actually been good and sort of like what to expect from today's youth and also certainly in terms of their engagement with us and their lifestyles that they are living now.

Host Home Providers Experiences Once Young People Move-In

Need for greater transparency regarding timelines for length of stay. Several of the Host Home providers suggested that more transparency related to length of stay in their housing would be beneficial. Participants expressed that young people were having longer stays than anticipated. As one participant described:

> *At the beginning, the expectation was to house the young person for 30-60 days; however, in the end, when I did take someone in it was definitely expected to be longer than that.*

Participants understood that the program was still being developed and that there were going to be changes as the program continued to develop, but the Host Home providers suggested that staff could provide more realistic housing timelines to Host Home providers. The Host Home providers stated that it is very important for them to have a clear understanding of the length of commitment and the timelines. This helps providers to plan their schedule going forward and is important for them to mentally prepare for this commitment. Having unclear timelines and expectations led one Host Home provider to feel like they were "burnt out" and unsure whether they would continue to be a part of the program. They shared:

> *At that point in time, I didn't know whether I wanted to do this again. Now, with a little more time, I'm really glad I've had my house to myself for a while. At this moment I'm a little uncertain, I don't know. I think I need a little more time.*

Participants also made it clear that the outbreak of COVID-19 has caused the length of stay for young people to increase.

Adapting to living with youths. Several Host Home providers shared that they have had to learn and adapt to having a young person in their home. Participants shared that there are some generational differences that they had not anticipated. One participant commented:

Definitely a learning curve. I feel both (an individual's name) and I have struggled a little bit with getting used to a youth-aged person in the house. I think we both thought that we weren't so far removed from that age group that we remember what it was like to be a twenty-year-old person but clearly, we do not. There is some of that happening.

A different Host Home provider said:

I would say too that especially with the last two years they are more interested, in being in the same house and just sending you a text than talking to you face-to-face which I find challenging.

Several Host Home providers who have hosted multiple youth also shared that there is a learning curve with every new young person. This was attributed to generational differences, unique personalities, and needs of young people. The Host Home providers believed this learning curve to be a part of the process. They shared:

Each youth has been different and had different needs and personalities. So of course, every time there is a different person in the house you sort of relearn how to live together all over again.

Supports Provided to Young People

Host Home providers are helping young people with tangible and intangible supports. The Host Home providers all described the various ways that they support the young people they are hosting. Host Home providers shared that they provide practical supports like food and access to resources within the home, as well as social support, guidance, and emotional support. One participant commented:

I mean aside from a safe place to stay, our responsibility is to provide them with their breakfast and supper. They are supposed to be responsible for their lunch. For every youth we have tried to engage them fairly regularly and talk to them and find out where they are in life. We try to offer whatever we can to help to get them where they are going whether it is advice or some direction or something.

Host Home providers were also able to provide life advice based on their own experiences to help provide insight and guidance to the young people. Host Home

providers shared their knowledge relating to employment, buying, and renting homes, education, and social relationships. One participant stated:

> *I think sometimes too it's just nice for them to have somebody to chat with. It felt like they appreciated having someone to talk to. They appreciated that (an individual name) and I have careers and we have a home. We have a family. So, we are happy to share some of our experiences as well about how we got here.*

Support Host Home Providers Receive from Staff

Host Home providers shared that staff have in-person check-ins with young people, as well as phone calls. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic these in-person check-ins occurred less frequently. The participants stated that staff are available when Host Home providers need them but also thought that the check-ins could be more regular. One participant commented:

> *I think my big one is that they are supposed to be doing weekly check-ins with the youths. They are supposed to physically come to the house and check in on their rooms and whatnot. I have found that it hasn't been happening. I think the COVID was partially responsible for that.*

Supports that Host Home Providers Would like to See Implemented

More in-person training for Host Home providers to learn and share ideas. Several of the Host Home providers shared that they would appreciate more classroom-style training before and after entering the program. One participant shared: *"I was enjoying the training, but we haven't had that for obvious reasons (COVID-19)."* Participants stressed the benefits they received from completing the in-person training and how they would like to undertake more courses like that. One participant commented:

> *The courses were a couple hours long. What's a good example? So, like conflict resolution, learning about the teenage brains. They were very relevant and helpful. It also allowed us to interact with some of the Host Home providers which was a nice opportunity to see who else is out there.*

Moreover, participants believed that having more in-person teachings would help to create a better sense of community for all the Host Home providers. These gatherings would provide opportunities for Host Home providers to share their experiences

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supporting young people and could help increase the knowledge and skills of Host Home providers. As one participant said:

> *House rules are pretty individual to each Host Homes' providers. It's a good way to learn what's working for some people and what hasn't worked for other people. That was really good to just really speak with other Host Homes' providers.*

The Best Thing About the Host Homes Program

Helping young people has been a very rewarding process. All Host Home providers shared that it is very rewarding to be in the program and provide young people with safe housing and other supports. The Host Home providers all stated that they appreciate the opportunity to support young people in their homes. One participant stated that their involvement in the program has also helped them to better prepare for when their children are older:

> *It is nice to be able to help in a different way than you already do because of our jobs and how we deal with these youths. It feels a bit more rewarding taking some kids out the system and hopefully keeping them at a more successful track in life. It's been nice to engage with these kids. I guess it is giving us insights in what to look for in our own kids as they grow up so learning some different communication. It's just really being able to help. It makes me feel good.*

Host Home providers also stated that they received social support from the young people in the program. In some cases, the Host Home providers lived alone. Having young people in their homes has led to an increased feeling of support and a feeling of accomplishment to impart their knowledge onto another. One participant stated:

> *For me, having an empty house, having someone there that I was able to talk with and we were able to engage with and have interesting conversations, it just felt good to have somebody else in the house. Good for me to share some of my knowledge with her [young person in program] and most of the time she was open to sharing. I definitely learned from her as well. It was good having her here and knowing that she wasn't on the streets somewhere.*

Challenges of the Host Homes Program

Having young people understand expectations and house rules can be challenging. Host Home providers shared that there have been some challenges with effectively communicating their expectations of behaviour within the house. In some cases, the young people needed some time to learn what was expected in terms of cleanliness and responsibilities they may have. One participant commented:

> *Well, sharing my space with someone who doesn't have the same understanding of responsibility [is a challenge]. I would not say that we are neat freaks by any stretch of the imagination. We have two young kids. Our house is messy a lot.*

The Host Home provider believed that speaking up about any concerns early on is important to ensuring a successful relationship with the young person is achieved. This way there is little confusion, and the young person can begin adjusting to the rules as they are laid out. Participants also suggested that it is better to address issues as they occur, rather than ignoring them. This should always be done respectfully. One Host Home provider shared:

> *If there's anything that doesn't sit right, even if it might be a small thing, to address it. Obviously, you don't need to make a big deal out of a small thing, but at least address it. Something you can have a conversation about.*

Advice for Prospective Host Home providers

Be prepared to share their space and be prepared to continually learn and adjust. Several Host Home providers shared how they needed to change their behaviours after a young person was placed into their home. This was due to their respect for the young person's personal space and not wanting to impose. One participant commented:

> *You need to understand what comes with it too, right? You are sharing your space with another person so maybe there are some things you can't really do anymore. For example, when the kids go down for an afternoon nap, I go down in the basement and put on a movie or something. It's right beside the youth bedroom. Even though it's my own home, I still feel a little bit awkward and I feel like I am imposing on their personal space. I just don't do it anymore. It's just something that you, that you give up.*

Several of the participants suggested that prospective Host Home providers should ask a lot of questions before they commit so that they know what to expect. Though Host Home providers may be able to conceptualize how their time in the program could be, there may be some less obvious issues that arise. Program staff are a good resource to identify some of these unanticipated challenges. One Host Home provider stated:

It's a brief time. If you think this is something you would be capable of to ask more questions about it and to get more information because we didn't embrace this with open arms. We needed a lot of questions answered before we were committed for sure. Once we got those questions answered, we felt really comfortable and really safe entering into the program.

Prospective Host Home providers also need to be prepared to adjust to each young person who enters their home, and respect and understand each of their needs. A system that may have worked for one young person may not work for another. Participants suggested that Host Home providers have a clear list of rules and expectations outlined to the young person, but to also not have these rules set in stone, as part of the dynamic is an adjustment of the Host Home providers.

Staff and Community Partners

Essential Factors That are Needed for the Program to Work Well

Responsibilities of Host Home workers are diverse. Participants shared that Host Home workers have several responsibilities as part of their role. Their responsibilities include:

- Recruiting Host Home providers and young people.
- Training Host Home providers.
- Conducting assessment interviews and matching Host Home providers and young people.
- Providing case management supports to young people.
- Working with young people on their goals (e.g., finding housing).
- Making referrals to other community resources, and
- Marketing the program and raising program awareness in the community.

Host Homes workers require many different skills to support young people and Host Homes providers. Along with the responsibilities of Host Homes workers that were previously discussed, participants shared several skills required of an effective Host Homes worker. These were:

- Communication skills to communicate effectively with Host Home providers, young people, and community partners.
- Knowledge of mental health issues.
- An understanding of youth homelessness and social issues that impact youth.
- An understanding of the housing market.
- Strong advocacy skills.
- Ability to be open, mindful, and approachable; and
- Strong technical skills (e.g., conducting assessments).

Developing trust with Host Home providers and offering training and supports is critical. Participants noted that open communication is key to developing trust with Host Home providers. Program staff noted that they employ several strategies to strengthen this trust, which include providing consistent communication and training to Host Home providers and offering a 24/7 emergency response. Related to training, one participant said: "*The Host Home family needs to obtain proper and appropriate training to have the confidence to continue in the program and remain engaged.*"

An effective matching process. Matching young people and Host Home providers was described as one of the most important parts of the program. This starts with an accurate assessment process. As the program was dissatisfied with the current assessment tool used in the Region of Waterloo, the SPDAT, alternative tools were examined. The program chose the YAP tool and received training from the tool's creator. Staff thought that the use of the YAP tool led to more appropriate matching. A participant stated:

> *Successful matches require the staff to have a solid relationship with the youth in order to really understand their needs, behaviours, and issues so that they are placed in the most appropriate Host Home family.*

Adequate funding needed to operate the program. Participants indicated that it is important for the program to be adequately funded. Since the program provides supports to young people and Host Home providers, staff are providing supports that extend beyond typical programs. Since the program was funded for three years, there

was some uncertainty if the program would receive sustained funding from another source.

Marketing the program through newspaper, radio, and neighbourhood outreach. Participants stressed the importance of effective marketing strategies to build a base of Host Home providers. The most effective strategies involved newspaper and radio channels. A participant said that, "*Our local media has been a huge support in covering our program*." Other avenues for marketing included neighbourhood groups and churches.

Building strong relationships with other community partners and agencies. oneROOF staff and community partners agreed that it is vital to have strong relationships with community partners and resources within the community. Participants stressed the importance of these relationships because they can improve access to resources and services for young people in the program. One participant commented: "*The key component to have the model work is to have good relations with the community and other agencies.*"

Having a good working relationship allows staff to refer young people to services, which can improve young peoples' well-being and reduce caseload sizes for staff. One community partner stressed the importance of these relationships:

> *We ensure that we have positive relations with them so that they are trusting and open to the program. I think our relationships with other service providers and the community is the number one key component.*

Staff and community partners stated that community connections with other social service agencies were developed early on and have been well maintained. These strong partnerships have helped to raise awareness about the program in the community. Strong connections have also led to more agencies referring young people to the program. Participants suggested that it would be beneficial to further expand the number of community relationships that oneROOF has to improve services and increase the number of young people referred.

Continue to raise awareness among the general population and landlords about youth homelessness. Both staff and community partners commented on how difficult it is to address the stigma related to youth homelessness and how these entrenched beliefs can influence individual perceptions. Such strongly held beliefs can make it

difficult for young people experiencing homelessness to find housing because potential landlords, and even potential Host Home providers, may fear that having a youth on their property will lead to damages and noise complaints. One participant stated:

> *With youth, they just say 'They didn't want to follow the rules.' We know statistically speaking that is not the truth. It seems to be very hard in changing the mindset of community members around that and that has led to us experiencing struggles in having providers coming on board.*

Staff and community partners believed that it will be essential for the program going forward to work to dismantle the stigma that exists about renting to young people, particularly those experiencing homelessness. It is also important to advocate for more supports and housing options to be made available. One participant made this clear:

> *I think the one struggle that continues to be an issue is that we need to bring more awareness to the general population about youth homelessness and the factors that contribute to youth homelessness. We need to actively continue in our approach and fight to remove the stigma around youth homelessness.*

Program Components Leading to Outcomes

Young people are offered a stable place to work on their goals. The program has allowed young people to achieve stability in their life, which allows for the exploration of their goals. A staff member said:

> *Youth have had the time to exhale and face the issues that lead them to homelessness. They have found safety, support, and security to recognize their needs and explore their goals and aspirations.*

This stability has led some young people to return home or move in with extended family. Other young people have been able to remain in school and/or find employment.

Young people are developing new understandings of community. One staff member stated that the program helps young people to become more engaged in the community and develop different understandings of the community. The participant said:

> *Youth were able to meet families and be in new neighbourhoods where they were treated with respect and saw that a community can be caring and accepting.*

Host Home providers learn about youth homelessness and become advocates. Through the training offered to them and by getting to know the young people in their homes, participants noticed a change in some Host Home providers. A participant stated that some Host Home providers have:

> *…become more empathetic and understanding of the needs of the youth and [have become] community advocates for oneROOF and the work we do.*

In this sense, Host Home providers became ambassadors for the program and for oneROOF more broadly.

Biggest Strengths

Diverting young people from the shelter system. The program was able to divert young people with low support needs from the shelter system. Diversion was important, as young people in the shelter system may experience some deterioration after a lengthy stay. By providing space in a Host Home, young people with low needs will likely not experience this same deterioration.

Mentorship offered to young people by Host Home providers. Program staff noted that Host Home providers are offering supports to young people that extend beyond the practical (e.g., food, cleaning supplies). Host Home providers have often developed supportive relationships with young people that mirror mentoring relationships. This demonstrates that the Host Home program is more than just housing and offers young people an opportunity to learn from supportive adults.

Biggest Challenges

Staff turnover. Staff turnover impacted the program, as there were several staff changes during this evaluation. Staff turnover can impact the relationships that are built with Host Home providers and young people. However, staff turnover is common in the social service sector and to a certain degree, was to be expected. A participant shared:

People tend to leave relatively soon, and they tend to jump from position to position, to management of full-time positions from in other agencies. That is the struggle in the social service sector, especially the non-profit community…It impacts the program when there is a lot of turnover. It can impact structure, consistency, providers' faith in a program.

Host Home providers taking vacation. The program had to think creatively when Host Home providers went on vacation. One participant said that many families do not want to have young people in their homes when they are away on vacation. To address this, the program developed respite Host Homes, where young people could stay temporarily when their host family went on vacation.

Key Aspects of the Program that Need to Be Further Enhanced

Adapting to rural contexts through provision of transportation. oneROOF has supported some young people in more rural contexts. Given that sometimes there was a better fit in rural areas, adaptations had to be made to ensure the young person had access to needed resources. One key learning when housing a young person in a smaller region was ensuring that the young person has access to transportation resources. One participant shared:

Our program was developed with the mindset and knowledge that it is going to be in the city core. Waterloo and Kitchener are relatively large cities. They have a good transit system, things are easily accessible, there are a lot of services and support within the area. We have had times that we had to place youth in a more rural settings because of a lack of available housing at the time or they were kind of aligned with the demographics that they were requiring or needed some rest time from the city for a variety of reasons. How we have been able to adapt the program is to provide much more transportation than is accustomed to in the city.

Developing a collaborative and preventative approach can help improve the Host Homes program. The staff and community partners agreed that it will be important for the program to further develop a coordinated approach to providing supports and addressing issues that arise. Participants stressed the importance of clearly outlining what responsibilities fall into each community partner's purview to improve coordination and to efficiently respond to issues.

Schools were identified as important partners. Schools were sources of referrals and helped to support young people while in the program. One participant said:

> If we are unable to place youth in their designated school district, [we work with school boards] to keep them attending the school they are familiar with and/or of choice.

Participants felt that it will be important to have regular communication between staff and community partners to share information and to develop a care plan which defines each of their responsibilities before any potential issues arise. The care plan should make all needed actions explicit so that all parties understand their roles. Participants also suggested that there should be regular check-ins between staff and community partners before a crisis occurs so that it is 'normalized' to have ongoing conversations:

> Yeah, so when something bad happens, whatever conflict, we already know how to have that conversation because we had it before anything happens…we know it's acceptable...it's normal...it's not about shaming someone…it's about having a conversation. What happened and how are we moving forward.

Enhanced supports related to family mediation and mental health supports.
Participants expressed that there was a need for enhanced supports related to family mediation with a young person's own family. Although some young people returned to living with their families after participating in the program, addressing family conflict was not always possible. Participants also thought that the program could provide enhanced mental health supports to young people since some young people were experiencing mental health challenges.

Providing options in the program for young people with enhanced needs.
Participants recognized that some young people with moderate needs could benefit from the program. One participant thought that it would be optimal if seasoned Host Home providers, with enhanced training, could support these young people. It was acknowledged that staff may need to require more intensive supports to Host Home providers and young people with moderate needs, which could require more staff in the program.

Maintaining relationships with Host Home providers upon discharge. One participant shared that the program needs to develop options for young people who want to maintain relationships with their Host Home provider once they move out. It is

not surprising that some young people and Host Home providers may want to continue contact upon program exit, but standards may need to be developed around this relationship.

Shared Themes Between Groups

COVID-19

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the program. Participants from all interview groups stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced how the program operates and all parties needed to adapt in their own way. A common reflection by participants was that staff have been unable to conduct home visits during the pandemic which has changed how staff communicate with young people and Host Home providers. Program staff have enhanced safety procedures and physical distancing policies which have relied primarily on phone calls with young people. This was understood to be a necessary protocol by participants, however, it has also changed social dynamics for the program, as one Host Home provider shared:

> It's different when you are communicating with someone over the phone versus face-to-face. It's just easier to read a situation and to see things more accurately. There were some struggles. I think overall everyone adapted very well and were very understanding.

Program staff and Host Home providers have also had to make decisions out of concern for the wellbeing and health of the young people during provincial lockdown procedures and multiple waves of the pandemic. In some cases, staff and Host Home providers decided that it would be safer to extend the period young people live with Host Home providers to ensure that the young people in the program have a safe place to stay. One young person in the program described this decision:

> I came back to start second year in September of that same year, and I did second year and the pandemic started. Travel was restricted and they were kind enough and the relationship I had with them was good enough for me to ask if I could stay with them until the pandemic settles down and till it was safe for me to go home and that is where we are presently.

Though Host Home providers who were already a part of the program have found ways to better support young people during the pandemic, it has been difficult to engage new

Host Home providers to open their homes. Participants spoke of how stigma and prejudice directed at young people experiencing homelessness has been further magnified during the pandemic. Staff, community partners, and Host Home providers all commented on how the pandemic has created a heightened level of fear in the community that is directed at individuals experiencing homelessness, as they are perceived to be at high risk of contracting and spreading the COVID-19 virus. This has made it more difficult for young people to access services and for willing Host Home providers to join the program. A community partner described how there was a visible decline in people who were willing to host:

> *There is still a lot of fear and anxiety around individuals who are unknown to you in your home and personal space. I say during the pandemic that was very obvious because not only do you have that typical stigma that historically has been there. The homeless population also has stigma around hygiene and things like that and so people already kind of had those ideas in their head. They are even more fearful of bringing in a population that they feel that would be more prone to illness or not be able to maintain the same hygiene practice. The pandemic was hard.*

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has created some new challenges for the program, all participants believed that the program has been able to adapt and create new protocols that meet the needs of Host Home providers and to ensure that young people have a safe place to live.

Most Important Benefits the Program Offers

Host Homes provide a space for young people to feel safe and secure and to learn and grow. All participants stated that the program can provide a safe home for young people and provide them the opportunity to learn from their Host Home providers. Young people in the program shared that they will commonly ask for advice and insight from their Host Home providers. This can be related to employment, finances, life skills, and general ways adults are expected to behave. Host Home providers also shared that they try to help the young people in their homes with any issues or challenges they are experiencing and to act as a sort of role model. One community partner shared their perspective on this dynamic:

> *They are [Host Home providers] able to open homes to youth for a safe haven, for a period of 90 days or whatever the case. They have a safe place to lay their*

heads and trying to figure what their next step is, housing, employment, school. Sometimes it's just a respite from being in a shelter. It's a great opportunity for the community to connect with young people that often times had no support from families they were raised in. Great way to provide guidance, safe space to reconfigure, recalibrate.

Host Home providers, staff, and community partners all believed that the program is a needed support system for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness as it can help young people avoid the shelter system altogether. An important secondary benefit has been that young people in the program have been able to learn and reflect about their own lives, create new goals in their lives, and take steps to achieve those goals. One young person in the program articulated how their time in the program has influenced their perception of others, and changed their personal goals in life:

It's been eye-opening for me in terms of gratitude, point of view. There are good people in the world who are willing to help out. It kind of influenced my academics too, my major was economics, and my minor was political science, but its kind of showed me how you can use policies and non-governmental organizations to help out as much as you can where the government may not really be on the ground to help out. It made me switch from economics as my major to political science as my major.

Lesson Learned from Participating in the Program

Need to be respectful of all parties in the program. Participants commonly shared that all parties need to be understanding and respectful of everyone involved in the program (e.g., young people, Host Home providers, and staff). Staff stated that it is important that they are understanding of the needs of both Host Home providers and young people in the program, and to help foster successful relationships between hosts and young people. One staff member described how having trust is essential when having a young person who is experiencing difficult issues in their lives, move into a home with a stranger. Staff stressed that there needs to be trust between staff, hosts, and young people for the program to be successful:

Building that trust because it is a big ask to have a young person who has real struggles going on and having that on top of their own families and their own circumstances especially with COVID and everything. We have more trust especially during these times.

Developing trust among all parties is key. Both Host Home providers and young people in the program described how they experienced a learning curve as they entered the program and began sharing a home. This is because every person has different needs and ways of doing things, and every home has its own set of rules and expectations. Both hosts and young people in the program stated it was important for them to be understanding and respectful of the needs of the other party and to be flexible in their expectations of how to live in the home. Host Home providers often spoke of how being respectful to the needs of young people is important in building trust, and that respect involves being approachable and allowing young people to be independent. For hosts, it was understood that to be respectful they should offer guidance and help and being open-minded to the needs of the young people. As one Host Home provider described, being respectful also means not making assumptions:

> *Being respectful and understanding those needs rather than assuming. Assuming that they're homeless or just because they come from a troubled past doesn't mean they're not capable of doing something themselves or they just need a little help. That's also respect.*

Having a relationship built on trust was understood as being vital to the program by all participants, and an important way to foster trust was having respect for the needs, lifestyle, and expectations of others.

Everyone needs to be upfront with their expectations early into the arrangement. Both Host Home providers and young people in the program stated that it was useful to discuss house rules and expectations either before a young person moves in, or soon after. One young person in the program shared that discussing rules with their hosts before moving in was beneficial because it helped them decide if the home was the right fit and made the transition into the home easier. When asked if discussing house rules was useful, they commented:

> *One hundred percent, you know stuff like you know if you're going to have a friend over just tell us, don't play loud music at a certain time, don't smoke, stuff like that you know. Whatever rules or guidelines would fly at your household that's how they laid it out to me and then they'd ask If I want to compromise with any of these and I was like no and I already agreed with any of the rules. it was easy.*

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Several Host Home providers recalled that when they had their first young person in the program enter their home that they vocalized their concerns less because they did not want to impose on the young person. However, as they had more young people enter their homes the hosts learned that it is easier for everyone when they communicate clearly what their expectations are to the young people in their homes. By doing so less issues arise, cleanliness issues in particular, and the young people understand what is expected of them. One Host Home provider described their approach below:

> *That would also go back to our learning experience in the beginning. As we go, we are starting to recognize things that are important to us. In the beginning, we were sort of easy-breezy with the rules. We have learned as time has gone on that there are things we feel strongly about so then we made sure to address that with the next youth right at the beginning so that there are no questions about what the house rules are. Again, our expectations of each other as adults who have had our own home for a while. Often it is just about cleanliness and the way we expect their space to be treated.*

Having clear communication was also understood by participants to help foster trusting relationships between hosts and young people in the program. Effective communication strategies were important to ensure positive experiences for both hosts and young people and should be practiced by all prospective Host Home providers.

SECTION 7: YAP COMPARED TO THE SPDAT

The YAP and SPDAT were compared based upon the perspectives of staff who were responsible for administering both tools.

Are the YAP and SPDAT providing comparative assessments of young people?

Scores from the YAP and the SPDAT generally resulted in similar results. Of available data from 33 young people who completed the YAP and the SPDAT, an incongruence occurred four times. Four individuals were deemed as having a higher acuity on the YAP tool compared to the SPDAT tool. This has implications for the Host Homes program since it is targeting young people with low to moderate needs.

How does the implementation of the YAP and SPDAT compare?

Overall, the implementation of the YAP tool was thought to elicit a more accurate assessment of a young person. Although there was significant overlap between the two tools, the YAP tool was described as, "*asking questions in a way that are more telling of the individual's situation.*" For example, questions related to substance use in the YAP were thought to "*delve deeper into the kinds of substance uses used and their attitudes towards their substance use."* In contrast, the SPDAT tool approached substance use with less context.

The YAP tool was described as "*strengths-based*" and "*person-focused*", which was important for young people and staff. For young people, it allows them to think about areas in their life that they "*excel at and reflect on areas of improvement*". For staff, this approach gives them an understanding as to whether a young person is open to receiving support and if they are in a place where a Host Homes program might be a good fit. The SPDAT may not allow for the same level of understanding of a young person to emerge since the questions can be focused on the deficits of young people.

The YAP tool was also described as being more conversational than the SPDAT. The YAP tool encourages assessors to ask follow-up questions, which can "*delve more into thought processes and could give the assessor an idea of what supports they need.*" This was described as allowing for an individualized assessment process to occur, as it gives "*the assessors the freedom to ask more questions in areas that need more attention.*" Further, the YAP's more casual approach to assessment was beneficial for first-time encounters with young people as it "*allows the youth to feel more comfortable*

speaking on their experiences and current circumstances with someone new." As the SPDAT is less conversational, it was thought that young people are less comfortable with the assessment process.

It was acknowledged that both tools rely on the self-disclosure of young people, which may result in "*how participants present themselves and their circumstances.*" As a result, staff shared that young people may, "*hide truths or downplay obstacles to make them sound favourable to the assessor.*" One way that the YAP addresses this is through the conversational nature of its implementation. Having an open and honest conversation with young people, "*paints a better picture of who the young person is.*"

SECTION 8: OUTCOME EVALUATION

The outcome evaluation used three main data sources:

1. Administrative data collected by the program.
2. Online surveys of young people when they enroll in the program and when they exit the program, and
3. Qualitative interviews with young people currently enrolled in the program or who recently exited the program ($n = 4$).

The response to the survey was low. Although close to half of the youth ($n = 7$) participated in the baseline survey, only two participants completed the exit survey. Thus, results on the impact of the program, based upon results from the surveys, should be interpreted with some caution.

Administrative Data

Since launching, a total of 16 young people have enrolled in the Host Homes program. One-quarter of young people were under the age of 18. The average length of stay in the program was 2.31 months. However, many of the youths stayed with their Host Home providers longer than expected due to the pandemic.

Housing. The majority of young people who participated in the Host Home program were able to find their own independent housing (50%) or reconnected with their families (37%). Thus, 87% of participants who participated in the program had a positive housing outcome.

A small number of young people (13%) returned to shelter. Two young people returned to oneROOF's emergency shelter. These returns were related to young people not being able to follow program expectations (e.g., lack of goal setting) and being unable to find independent housing in the community due to housing discrimination based upon a young person's source of income (e.g., Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program) and their age (especially those under 18).

Employment and Education. Most young people were engaged in education while in the program. A smaller number were employed and/or volunteering during their time in the program.

Education. Sixty percent of young people were enrolled in school, including alternative school, high school, and post-secondary school.

Employment. Thirty-seven percent of young people were employed during their time in the program.

Volunteering. Nineteen percent of young people were volunteering during their time in the program.

Outcome Survey and Qualitative Interviews

Sample Characteristics. Seven (44%) of the 16 youths participated in a baseline survey and two participated in the exit survey. Baseline surveys took place within two weeks of program entry and exit surveys took place within two weeks before or after program exit. Due to the restrictions and public health guidelines put in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a limited amount of data was collected from youth who exited the Host Homes Program. Below is a breakdown of the demographics of the seven baseline survey participants.

- *Age.* The average age was 19.7 (Standard Deviation = 2.58); the age range was 17 to 22
- *Gender.* 57% of participants identified as cisgender male and 43% identified as cisgender female.
- *Sexual orientation.* Five of the participants identified as straight, one identified as gay, and one identified as bisexual.
- *Race/ethnicity.* Four participants provided information on their racial-ethnic identity. These four participants all identified as Black/African Canadian
- *Place of birth.* Three of the participants were born in Canada. The participants who were not born in Canada arrived in Canada within the last twenty years and two within the last year.

Baseline and Exit Survey Results

Housing Scale Ratings

Housing Quality

Participants were asked to rate the quality of their housing and their scores are presented in Table 1. These ratings were based on features like comfort, safety, and privacy of their housing. All participants were highly satisfied with the housing provided

by the Host Home program which is indicated by an average score of 42 out of 42 for quality of housing. This rating declined to 38.5 out of 42 for the two participants who responded after they exited their Host Homes and were living in their own apartments.

Table 1: Housing Quality

	Time Frame	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Total Possible Score
Housing Quality	Baseline	7	42	0	42
	Follow-up	2	38.5	3.5	42
Difference in Scores			-3.5		

When describing their housing while in the Host Homes program participants stressed that they were very satisfied with their housing because the Host Homes were perceived as being well-kept, spacious, in nice neighbourhoods, and provided participants their own space. As stated in the process evaluation, all young people in the program that were interviewed rated their Host Home residence with a 10 out of 10 rating. One young person commented: "*It's a nice house, man, it's a nice neighbourhood, so they [Host Home providers] must be doing something right.*"

Young people who had exited the program described how program staff assisted them in finding and securing their own independent housing. This made the housing search process much easier, as explained by one young person:

One of the Host Home staff showed me the place and I texted the guy. I went for a viewing of the place. One of the Host Home staff dropped me there and she was with me all the time and she helped me to sign the contract paper and everything for the house.

Several young people who have exited the program or who were about to exit stated that staff have made the transition to independent housing much less stressful. Importantly, young people shared that with the help of staff members they were able to secure housing that is in good condition and in a desirable neighbourhood. One participant shared:

Yeah of course. It does feel like home. I have nice people there. My job is like twenty minutes walk from there. So, it's perfect. It couldn't better than this me.

This participant gave their current housing a rating of 8.5 out of 10.

Impact of Housing and Neighbourhood

At baseline, participants were asked to rate the impact/effect that their Host Homes and neighbourhoods had on their lives (Table 2). Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction. Participants rated their Host Home as having a large positive effect on their lives (6.8 out of 7). Meanwhile, the neighbourhood they were living in had a slightly lesser, yet still large, positive effect on their lives (6.3 out of 7).

Likewise, the participants who exited the program were asked how their current housing and neighbourhood impacted their lives. In this case, their current housing was their own apartment. The participants rated their current housing as having a large positive effect on their lives which was slightly higher than the effect that the Host Home had on their lives (7 out of 7). Similarly, participants' current neighbourhoods had a moderate positive effect on their lives (5.5 out of 7) which was slightly lower than the rating for their neighbourhoods at baseline.

Table 2: Impact of Housing and Neighbourhood

	Time Frame	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Total Possible Score
Impact of Host Home	Baseline	6	6.8	0.4	7
Impact of Independent Housing	Follow-up	2	7	0	7
Difference in Scores			0.2		
Impact of Neighbourhood	Baseline	7	6.3	0.95	7
	Follow-up	2	5.5	2.1	7
Difference in Scores			-0.8		

Feedback about Housing and Neighbourhood

Housing. There were a range of different baseline responses when the participants were asked to name the best thing about the housing they were staying/living at. Three of the respondents talked about how they enjoyed spending time with their host families and roommates because they were very friendly and welcoming. One young person had this to say:

They (the Host Home Providers) have made everything so welcoming and comfortable to live with. They're very thoughtful and generous towards me. They invite me to be a part with everything. They really are wonderful people to be around and talk to.

Proximity to the participants' schools and the ability to develop a routine while living with at the Host Home were mentioned as positive features of their housing.

In comparison, when participants responded to the exit survey they listed living alone as the best thing about their current housing. Both participants felt that living alone helped them be more independent and self-reliant.

The findings from the survey are consistent with young people who participated in interviews. Participants understood that when living in another person's home, it requires that they follow the rules of the home. Youth in the program saw this as an acceptable requirement of the program and was a fair trade-off for the many different supports that they received through the program. As one young person described:

I can't say there's nothing that I don't like I mean there's stuff I have to compromise with [be]cause I'm 21 and these guys are heading towards retirement. We're in different stages of life so if I was living by myself there are certainly some things that I would be doing. My music would be louder, I would be staying up a lot later, but I'm definitely willing to compromise because if they're willing to share their space with me, I mean we feel like family.

The participants who exited the program indicated that there were times when they chose not to stay at their Host Home. Instead of staying at their Host Home, they stayed with family and friends or at another local organization that provides emergency shelter and services to youth. No specific reason was given for staying at the emergency shelter, but the reason for staying with friends and family was to spend quality time with them.

Neighbourhood. At baseline, the different amenities in the neighbourhood available to the youth were listed as positive features. This included a good trail system for walking/hiking, nearby parks, and university food places. One participant was happy that the neighbourhood where their Host Home provider lived was their old neighbourhood, so they were familiar with the area. Two participants also enjoyed that their neighbourhoods were quiet and that their neighbours kept to themselves and were

not intrusive. Living in a quiet neighbourhood where the young people felt they had privacy and freedom also contributed to their feeling of safety in that neighbourhood. A participant explained: "*It's quiet. I haven't met the neighbours personally, but there's no drama and no authority figures that I've seen come by.*"

Young people who were interviewed also commented that their neighbourhoods were very nice, quiet, close to school, and near the participants' previous homes. The young people noted that their Host Homes were conveniently located to schools that they were attending, and close to their place of employment. Overall, participants did not feel as though they had less access to important aspects of their life, such as school, employment, and social supports. One participant shared:

> *I think it actually made it better. [Be]cause I use to live here in this area. My school is here, my job is here, my friends are here. So, I get to go to like my friends or school. Everything is just easy here.*

One negative thing about their neighbourhoods and housing pointed out by participants on both the baseline and exit surveys was that they were located far from transit stops. This was a bigger issue for participants who were employed and used transit to get to work.

Quality of Life Before Entering the Program

At baseline, the participants were asked to rate their current quality of life based on different aspects of their lives including health, school, and recreational activities. Participants at baseline were also asked to rate their quality of life as a whole before the Host Homes program (Table 3). They rated their quality of life as slightly negative (3.6 out of 7) before Host Homes.

Table 3: Quality of Life

	Time Frame	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Total Possible Score
Quality of Life Prior to Host Homes	Baseline	7	3.6	3.2	7

Impact of Housing on Health

Almost all (86%) of the participants reported positive impacts to their physical and emotional health from living in their Host Home. The participants described feeling more emotionally supported and happier while one felt that they were more at peace since moving into their Host Home. One young person explained:

> I've been at oneROOF for three and a half months. It was very tough at first, but with all things, you tend to get adapted to the environment you're around. Although I definitely shouldn't have been there in the first place, but shit happens. I heard about Host Homes through a staff member at oneROOF and I asked if I was eligible to qualify for Host Homes. After one week I moved out and I came to a very welcoming warm and lovable family. They have been amazing and so understanding and flexible with me. I'm very thankful to be in this program and to be staying with them. Thank you!

Satisfaction Ratings

The participants were asked a series of questions about different aspects of their life at baseline (Table 4) and after exiting the program (Table 5).

Overall Life Satisfaction. When the participants were asked about their overall life satisfaction at baseline, they were either very satisfied or very dissatisfied. More participants (57%) felt very dissatisfied with their life before joining the Host Homes program while 43% felt very satisfied before joining.

Health. At baseline, most of the participants (86%) were at least slightly satisfied with their health while both participants were satisfied with their health after exiting the program. From the baseline survey, more participants were satisfied than dissatisfied with the healthcare system. On the exit survey, both participants were neutral about their experiences using the health care system.

Food. There were no major differences in the participants' satisfaction with the food they were eating at baseline or after exiting the program.

School. Four participants rated their schooling at baseline and only one was dissatisfied. The one participant that rated school after exiting the program was very satisfied.

Recreation and Family. When the participants were asked how they felt about their recreational and leisure activities like sports, reading, and watching movies at baseline none were dissatisfied. These ratings were consistent on the exit survey as well. Overall, the participants were satisfied with their relationships with family while in the program and after exiting.

In reviewing these findings, particularly the ratings of young people being very satisfied with their lives at baseline, program staff noted that some context was required. These young people may have found stability while living at oneROOF's emergency shelter, as it was a safer environment than where they were previously living. These feelings of safety and stability may have continued on to when they entered the Host Homes program.

Table 4: Satisfaction Ratings Baseline Data

N=7	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Slightly Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Slightly Dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Life Before Host Homes	3 (43%)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4 (57%)
Life Currently	3 (43%)	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	0%	2 (29%)	0%	0%
Health Currently	2 (29%)	2 (29%)	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	0%	0%
Experience with Health Care System* (N=6)	3 (50%)	1(16.7%)	0%	0%	1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	0%
Current Housing (Host Home)	6 (86%)	1 (14%)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Food	5 (72%)	0%	1 (14%)	0%	1 (14%)	0%	0%
Recreational activities	4 (57%)	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	1 (14%)	0%	0%	0%
Relationship with family* (N=5)	1 (20%)	0%	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	0%	1 (20%)	0%
School* (N=4)	2 (50%)	0%	1 (25%)	0%	1 (25%)	0%	0%

Table 5: Satisfaction Ratings Exit Data

N=2	Very Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Slightly Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Slightly Dissatisfied	Quite Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Life Currently	0%	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0%	0%	0%	0%
Health Currently	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Experience with Health Care System	0%	0%	0%	2 (100%)	0%	0%	0%
Current Housing	0%	1 (50%)	0%	1 (50%)	0%	0%	0%
Food	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Recreational activities	1 (50%)	0%	1 (50%)	0%	0%	0%	0%
Relationship with family	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
School* (N=1)	1 (50%)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Young people in the program who participated in interviews stated that their connection to family and friends was not dramatically affected by their time in the program. Some participants shared that they did not have much contact with their family anymore, but one young person did state that they were able to continue to have regular contact and interactions with their family. One participant shared that by being in the program, his family feels reassured that he is safe and living in a supportive home: "*It hasn't really affected my friendships that much. My family as I said they're just glad that I'm safe and I'm with two very good people.*"

All participants stated that they did not experience any difficulties contacting and spending time with their friends. The only stated challenge was that while in the program they were expected to be home at a certain time and may not have been allowed to have friends visit their Host Home residence. However, all participants did not perceive this as a difficulty to connect with their friends. Several participants commented that their Host Home providers now feel like friends or family: "*We are really good friends. I was in a really hard situation, so right now [when in the program] I feel way better.*"

Host Homes Satisfaction

Stay with Host Homes Provider

Young people who participated in interviews all spoke very positively of their time living with their Host Home providers. All participants stated that their Host Home providers were very supportive, helped the young people in their personal lives, and help the young people develop and work towards their goals. Several of the participants shared that they became quite close with their Host Home providers, thinking of them as family or friends. For some of the young people, the relationships they made with their Host Home providers have continued even after exiting the program. One participant commented:

> *The three months I was with her [Host Home provider] she was going through a bad time because her dog died. We became really close to one another. We become more of friend. We were like best friends. We still contact each other. We ask each other how the other person is doing. Sometimes we even go play volleyball together. Sometimes I go there and have dinner with her. So, it was kind of sad, but it isn't like we never speak. We still contact each other. She still worries about me. She asks how I am doing and how the job is going.*

Overall, the experiences of young people in the program who were interviewed were very positive. The support that young people received while living with the Host Home providers helped the young people to exit the program and secure their own housing. Moreover, the support that the young people received from Host Home providers was often extended to the young people after exiting the program, as both parties remained in contact and continued to have a friendly relationship. As one participant made clear:

> *As soon as I left, I moved to my house. After a week or so, I still went back to see how things were going over there. After that, I started my full-time job, but they still contact me, and they ask me how I am doing. They asked if I need any help or support. They said they're always there if I need any help or anything just give them a call. They also said I don't need to worry about anything, and I should just give them a call and they will try to help me as much as they can. They always worry about me.*

Experience with Host Homes Staff

The participants that exited the Host Homes program were very satisfied with their Host Home provider. They were somewhat satisfied with their Host Homes worker and the supports that they received from the program. The youths explained the best things about the Host Homes program:

> *They [Host Home Provider] were amazing and so nice and easy-going people. [Youth 1]*

> *I was able to settle in and get many things done. [Youth 2]*

The one thing that the participants felt could have improved their experience in the program was better communication.

The young people who participated in interviews expressed that their experience in the oneROOF program was very positive and helpful in providing them support in a time when they were in need. Participants felt that because of their time in the program they are now better able to make positive changes in their lives, find independent housing, and reach goals they set out for themselves. Even after exiting the program young people felt like they have a greater level of support now compared to the time before entering the program. This is because of the supportive relationships they developed with their Host Home providers, and the continued support received from Host Homes staff. All the young people interviewed shared that their time in the program has been very impactful and that their experience will continue to have a positive effect on their lives. One participant articulated this impact:

> *The Host Home staff, they did a lot for me to be honest. I will never forget them in my life. Wherever I am at today the credit goes the Host Homes worker and Host Home provider. If I wanted to move to new place, they always told me about the places. They helped me get back into high school. They help me with a job. Sometimes they help me with the interview. They helped me a lot, I will never forget them in my life. They're awesome!*

SECTION 9: INTERPRETATION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides an interpretation of the results and recommendations stemming from the results.

Overall Program Outcomes and Implementation

The Host Homes program is supporting young people to attain stable housing.
The evaluation has demonstrated that the program is supporting young people to avoid the shelter system and find independent housing or safely reconnect with family or natural supports. At the time of this report, only two young people had a return to the emergency shelter. Although this result is based upon a small number of young people (n = 16), it provides early evidence that the program is effective in its goal of supporting young people to attain stable housing.

> *Recommendation 1.* To examine if young people are having sustained exits out of homelessness, the program should continue to follow up with young people for at least one year.

The Host Homes program is supporting young people with educational goals and making inroads with the education system. More than half of the young people in the program were enrolled in secondary school or post-secondary education. This was facilitated by young people being placed in Host Homes that were close to their school and the program's ability to effectively work with school boards to keep young people in the same school.

> *Recommendation 2*. The program should continue to foster relationships with school boards. This includes supporting young people to maintain enrolment at their school, even if it is in a different catchment area, and promoting the program within schools, particularly among teachers.

Given the low sample size, it is hard to determine outcomes in areas outside of housing and education, but young people generally did not report poor ratings related to quality of life. Unfortunately, the evaluation was unable to speak with all the participants in the program, particularly at program exit. This limited the ability to make inferences on the program's impact beyond housing and education. However, the available qualitative and survey data does demonstrate that young people were generally satisfied with their lives.

> ***Recommendation 3***. The program should continue to implement data collection procedures to assess the impact of the program on housing, education, employment, and quality of life.

Young people were very satisfied with the quality of the Host Home and the neighbourhood. The ratings related to the quality of the Host Home were high, indicating that young people were very satisfied with the physical structure of the home and the Host Home providers. Young people also rated the neighbourhood of the Host Home favourably. These results are comparable to previous evaluations of Host Homes programs (Ecker, Sariyannis, Holden, & Traficante, 2019).

Young people and Host Home providers were generally satisfied with the supports received in the program. Young people were generally very satisfied with their time in the program. The young people we interviewed during the process evaluation were unable to identify any challenges they experienced. The one challenge identified by young people who exited the program was the limited communication that sometimes occurred between Host Homes staff, Host Home providers, and young people. Similarly, Host Home providers were generally satisfied with their experience in the program. However, Host Home providers did provide some areas for improvement, which are discussed below.

> ***Recommendation 4.*** The program should continue to provide feedback opportunities for young people and host providers. This could include brief surveys or focus group sessions.

The program was impacted by the length of time it took to recruit Host Home providers. The length of time to recruit Host Home providers was longer than anticipated. The program spent considerable time developing trust in the community and actively worked to enhance promotional strategies. Engaging with the media was one of the most successful strategies to recruit Host Home providers. This follows recommendations in the *Host Homes Canada Toolkit* (Sariyannis, 2018).

> ***Recommendation 5.*** The program should continue to dedicate time for recruitment of Host Home providers. This could include reaching out to media with "good news" stories about the program, both from the perspective of young people and host providers. At the same time, the program should be mindful of the capacity of the program in determining the ideal number of providers.

Host Home Provider Training and Support

Host Home providers may need a higher intensity of support when a young person first moves in. Host Home providers greatly valued the training that they received from the program. In particular, the training focused on how to effectively communicate with young people was appreciated. Several Host Home providers shared that they experience a "learning curve" when a young person enters their home. Therefore, the program should be prepared to provide an enhanced level of training and support to Host Home providers when a young person first enters their home.

> *Recommendation 6.* Enhanced training and supports should be considered for Host Home providers when a young person first enters the Host Home. By anticipating this need, program staff will be able to potentially prevent issues before they arise.

Intake and Matching Process

The intake and matching process is working well, particularly the opportunity for young people and Host Home providers to meet and the use of the YAP. Young people shared that they were very satisfied with the intake process. This included the intake interview and the matching process with Host Home providers. Young people emphasized that meeting the Host Home providers beforehand was key. It allowed for the hosts to outline their expectations and for young people to see if they were comfortable living in the environment. This process follows recommendations from the *Host Homes Canada Toolkit* (Sariyannis, 2018) and should therefore be sustained. The use of the YAP tool also provided staff with a comprehensive understanding of the needs and goals of the young people prior to matching them with a Host Homes provider.

> *Recommendation 7.* The program should maintain the intake and matching process, particularly the use of the YAP and the meeting between the young people and Host Home providers.

The needs of young people in relation to the location of Host Homes is an important consideration for the program. Some young people felt that it was difficult to get to school or work, particularly when their Host Home was not close to transit. The program should consider these factors when matching young people and Host Home

providers. The program could target their recruitment to find hosts that live close to major schools and transit routes in the Region of Waterloo.

> **Recommendation 8.** The program should continue to consider placements based upon the Host Home's proximity to a young person's work and school.

Program Activities

A strong relationship between young people, host providers, and program staff is built on trust. Trust was a major theme to emerge in the interviews. For the program to operate at its full potential, there must be reciprocal trust among all parties involved. Trust is built through respecting the autonomy of young people, respecting the rules of host providers, and the receipt of support from program staff.

Young people appreciated the sense of autonomy in the program, which supported their goals of independent living. Young people in the program explained that they felt a sense of privacy and independence while living in their Host Home. There was an understanding that there were certain rules to follow, but the young people did not feel like these rules were overbearing. Fostering this sense of autonomy, while establishing parameters around expected behaviours, aligns well with the goals of young people. Young people in the program wanted to become independently housed after their time in the Host Homes program. By providing a structured, but independent, living arrangement in the Host Homes program, it may set up young people for success in the future in their own apartment. Further, since independence was a prevalent goal, the Host Homes workers should work with young people to identify areas that will support their independence. This could include education, employment, and/or life skills (e.g., budgeting) development.

> **Recommendation 9.** The program should continue to ensure that young people are provided the opportunity to foster their sense of independence while in the Host Home. This should be an important focus of the work program staff engage in with young people and host providers.

The relationship between young people and Host Home providers is generally positive but could be enhanced through involvement of program staff to address potential conflicts. Young people shared that they feel at home within their Host Home and that they receive supports from their Host Home provider. This demonstrates the importance of identifying a good match between young people and Host Home

providers. When young people feel comfortable in the home, they can ask for support when it is needed. It will be important for Host Homes workers to monitor the relationship between young people and Host Home providers to ensure that both parties feel comfortable and are maximizing the potential of the supportive relationship.

> *Recommendation 10.* Host Homes workers should continue to act as an impartial mediator in the relationship between young people and Host Home providers and address challenges when they arise.

Host Home providers would like to connect. Several Host Home providers shared that they would appreciate the opportunity to learn from other Host Home providers. Therefore, the program could create a monthly drop-in space for Host Home providers to come together and share successes and challenges they are experiencing in the program.

> *Recommendation 11.* The program should develop more opportunities for Host Home providers to connect with one another. This could come in the form of a Host Home provider network facilitated by oneROOF.

Relationships with family and natural supports could be enhanced. There was no uniform path leading young people to the program, however, the key informants and young people both mentioned conflicts with family and friends as one contributing factor. Therefore, the supports offered to youth in the program should continue to include opportunities to strengthen family and natural supports.

> *Recommendation 12.* The program should look to the *Family and Natural Supports Framework* (Borato, McMillan, & Gaetz, 2020) for guidance on how to work with young people to address relationships with family and natural supports.

Program Adaptations

The creation of respite Host Homes is important. Having respite Host Home providers was an important adaptation of the program. Since some Host Home providers will not feel comfortable having a young person in their home when they are not present (e.g., on vacation), having temporary housing options for young people is important.

Recommendation 13. The program should continue to develop a repository of respite Host Home providers.

Expanding to rural areas in the Region of Waterloo will require considerations related to transportation and access to services and supports. This finding mirrors previous findings from evaluations of Host Home programs (Ecker et al., 2019). oneROOF's program has great potential to support young people in rural areas who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Having Host Homes in a young person's community will prevent a young person from having to access supports in a different community. Helping young people to stay in their community is important, as it helps to maintain connections to supports (Gaetz, Morton, Borato, & Story, 2020). Host Homes placed in rural settings may require special considerations, such as transportation and access to services and supports.

Recommendation 14. The program should develop transportation and support plans for young people who choose to live in rural Host Homes.

Expanding the program to support young people with moderate needs will require an enhanced offering of support from the program. The program currently works with young people with lower support needs. This may result in a larger number of young people in oneROOF's emergency shelter having moderate and higher support needs. This means that the emergency shelter should anticipate having to provide a greater level of support than before. It also means that the Host Home program could consider expanding their eligibility requirements to work with young people with moderate needs.

Recommendation 15. The program should conduct an assessment with current Host Home providers to examine their capacity to support young people with moderate needs. The program should also consider what added supports will be needed to support young people with moderate needs, particularly those focused on mental health and harm reduction. This process should take place before admitting young people with moderate needs into the program.

Limitations of the Evaluation

This evaluation had several limitations. The first is the low sample size. We were unable to survey several young people who participated the program, particularly upon their exit from the program. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant role in this. The

second is the delay in program implementation. As previously discussed, it took a significant amount of time to recruit Host Home providers. This limited the number of young people who could have participated in the evaluation. However, this delay afforded the opportunity to conduct a deeper examination of the Host Home recruitment process, which could provide great value to other communities interested in implementing a Host Homes program. The third limitation was the inability to conduct in-person surveys and interviews due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It would have been beneficial to conduct the process evaluation in-person, as it would have allowed the team to witness program operations firsthand.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding these limitations, the evaluation demonstrated the potential impact of the Host Homes model in diverting young people from emergency shelters. The Host Home providers offer a space where young people can develop a sense of autonomy and work toward their future goals. Program staff are important to the model, as they provide support to both the host home provider and the young person. In sum, oneROOF's Host Homes program demonstrates great potential as an intervention to address youth homelessness in the Region of Waterloo. Further research and evaluation activities are warranted to examine the program in greater detail.

SECTION 10: REFERENCES

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