



taking action on
YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

PREVENTING AND ENDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN ST. THOMAS-ELGIN

Impact Evaluation of a Youth Homelessness Protocol and Intensive Housing Based Case Management
March 2016 - July 2018



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The YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin would like to extend their appreciation to their community partners who diligently supported the development and implementation of a Youth Homelessness Protocol and Housing First aligned intensive case management services for local youth experiencing homelessness. The YWCA would also like to thank all of the courageous young people that trusted them to walk along in their journey to housing stability and improved wellness.

Without the continuous collaborative efforts of the Youth Homelessness Protocol team, preventing and ending youth homelessness would not be possible. The ongoing work of each agency plays a critical role in delivering a community rapid response to ending youth homelessness and improving the lives of youth in St. Thomas-Elgin.

Protocol Partners Include:



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INTRODUCTION

OrgCode Consulting, Inc. has been assisting the YWCA of St. Thomas-Elgin and the Taking Action on Youth Homelessness Subcommittee of the Community Action Network (CAN) for Children and Youth of Elgin to improve their responses to homelessness and housing crises since 2012. Funding secured through the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy (OPRS) and other local sources have ensured that adoption of the recommendations put forward in OrgCode's 2013 report entitled *Responding to Youth Homelessness in St. Thomas and Elgin County*. As stated in the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy, "a person without a home is unable to get out of poverty" (2014). This YWCA project is dedicated to ensuring that homeless youth are returned to safe housing and supported effectively to increase their wellness and stability

Much has been learned about the strategies, approaches and tools required to prevent and end homelessness for youth in an integrated and evidence informed way. In communities achieving the results required to prevent and end homelessness, historical approaches to service have been replaced with evidence informed assessment tools, a dedication to coordinated service pathways that are generated from the youth service user's perspective and the incorporation of re-housing and support models that are dedicated to a youth centred and outcome driven approach to service. For the homeless service delivery system in St. Thomas-Elgin, the adoption and implementation of a Youth Homelessness Protocol (YHP) as well as the addition of a Social Worker trained in housing based case management served as an impetus for transformative change in how local service delivery partners collaborated to support youth clients. Within a service culture that promoted the use of trauma informed and evidence aligned strategies and practices designed to prevent and end homelessness, 220¹ local youth have benefited from the supports provided by the YHP from March 2016 to July 2018. With the support of the Local Poverty Reduction Strategy fund the community enhanced service delivery to homeless youth in February 2016 to include professional training of front line workers across a variety of sectors with SPDAT and Housing Based Case Management tools. This was integral in establishing a new community of practice around providing intensive case management for youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. In March 2016, the role of Housing Based Case Manager was introduced in the community along with the use of the SPDAT and consistent data collection. The YWCA adapted their service delivery model to include intensive case management following evidence informed practices to better serve the needs of homeless youth along with the use of SPDAT tools. Between March 2016 and July 2018, 220 youth accessed the Youth Homelessness Protocol. 150 of these youth received intensive case management supported by use of the SPDAT tools by YWCA staff. The remaining youth were supported by other existing service providers such as Youth in Transition Workers from YWCA and Family and Children's Services, CMHA Case Workers, Salvation Army Youth Workers. The majority of youth entering the youth homelessness protocol were matched with a trained YWCA Housing Based Case Manager. Of the 150 youth receiving intensive case management from the YWCA, 99 achieved long term housing stability due to the intensive housing based case management. These 99 youth have already experienced successful exits from the case management supports. There are more than 30 additional youth that are still being supported by the YWCA, CMHA and the Family and Children's Services in maintaining their initial housing stability, even though this pilot project has ended. The community based training sessions provided as part of this OPRS initiative increased the adoption of Housing First as a service philosophy that espouses harm reducing and recovery oriented policies and strategies – ensuring that youth experiencing homelessness and multiple vulnerabilities identified the YHP and the housing supports as a safe, respectful and welcoming space to address barriers to improved housing and health outcomes.

¹ Of the 220 youth served through the Youth Homelessness Protocol, 14 youth entered the Protocol more than once.

For St. Thomas-Elgin, the collaborative implementation of the Youth Homelessness Protocol exceeded the initial goal of improving service coordination locally. Throughout the 3 years of this evaluation project, OrgCode has witnessed an evolution in the services and supports available to assist adults, youth and families that are experiencing housing crises and homelessness and the Youth Homelessness Protocol Project provided a blueprint for local service delivery partners that were attempting to improve communication, collaboration as well as enhance health and housing outcomes for their clients. Three years into this coordinated access project for youth, communities across Ontario and the country are preparing for the national implementation of Coordinated Access as a mandatory component for all federally funded communities receiving Homelessness Partnering Strategy investments. The YWCA and its community partners are to be congratulated on their innovative spirit and steadfast commitment to improving the lives of young people locally.

In addition to the service prioritization and program matching activities achieved through the implementation of a Youth Homelessness Protocol in St. Thomas-Elgin County, this OPRS initiative also introduced the delivery of specialized housing stabilization supports for youth experiencing homelessness. The intensity, duration and frequency of these supports were customized to meet the unique needs of each youth participant. Since the inception of intensive case management using SPDAT tools, 220 youth were served through the Youth Homelessness Protocol that utilized homelessness prevention and shelter diversion activities to ensure that, when possible, youth were not exposed to the trauma of homelessness. Of the 220 youth that were supported through the Youth Homelessness Systems Developer, 150 young people with varying degree of acuity were matched with the Housing Based Case Management (HBCM) workers at the YWCA. These housing professionals ensured that the youth received assistance in finding safe and appropriate housing and the supports required to transition from homelessness and survival to housing stability. This report provides a summary of the findings and successes of this youth homelessness project.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE OPRS PROJECT

Responding to the findings of the 2013 youth homelessness report, community partners worked diligently for two years designing an innovative, large scale, community response to youth homelessness and in March 2014 launched the Youth Homelessness Protocol. The problem this protocol solves is to prevent and reduce homelessness for the target population of youth in the community and, in doing so, prevent or lift youth out of poverty. Through the OPRS initiative, the YWCA has led community efforts to evaluate, expand and strengthen the protocol by adding components including: the hiring of a registered social worker to provide intensive case management to appropriate youth; the implementation, on a community-wide basis, of an acuity assessment tool to assist with program matching; financial resources to assist youth find and obtain adequate housing; and assets to evaluate the project as a whole.

Given the trajectory of youth who experience homelessness and the many risks and challenges associated with the trauma of homelessness, early intervention that focuses on getting young people connected/re-connected to the right intervention at the right time to prevent or end their homelessness quickly and permanently is essential. Communities that are getting the results that they need to end homelessness have recognized the value of establishing a coordinated access and common assessment protocol to ensure a person-centered approach to service delivery dedicated to long term housing stability and improved wellness.

In alignment with the evaluation component of the OPRS portfolio, YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin contracted with OrgCode Consulting, Inc. to assist in the training, technical assistance and evaluation of this 3-year project dedicated to ending youth homelessness in the region.

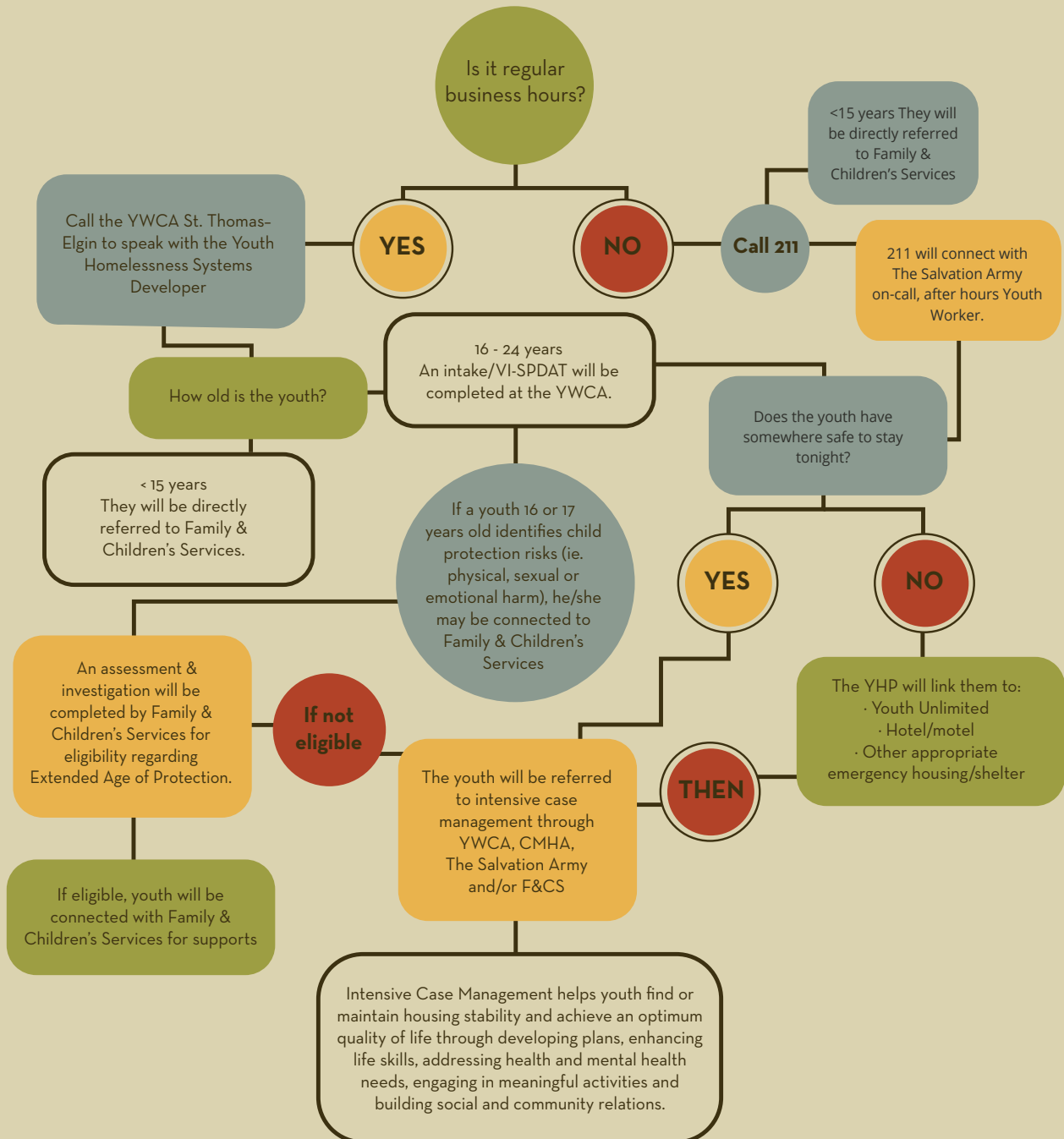
ABOUT ORGCODE CONSULTING, INC. THIRD PARTY EVALUATOR

OrgCode Consulting, Inc., are experts in housing and homelessness. Our core services include action-oriented research, data-informed analysis, robust facilitation and program evaluation, and training and technical assistance. The expertise of our firm in homelessness and housing takes us throughout North America and this experience is an asset to each of our clients. We can infuse promising practices from other jurisdictions where they fit within the local context. In our work, OrgCode works from an empowering and anti-oppression framework, sensitive to issues pertaining to gender, culture, age, economic inclusion, health and wellness, language, and other considerations.

With over 50 years of combined professional experience, our staff combines a dynamic mixture of multi-talented individuals. In the OrgCode team you'll find policy analysts, program developers, front-line practitioners, public sector executives, trainers, graphic designers, coaches, and facilitators.

ST. THOMAS-ELGIN YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PROTOCOL FOR YOUTH AGES 16-24 YEARS OLD

To be followed when a youth is experiencing a housing crisis and is currently homeless or will be homeless within the next 48 hours



THE REALITY OF HOMELESSNESS FOR YOUTH IN ST. THOMAS-ELGIN

In April 2018, the City of St. Thomas as the local provincially appointed Service Manager facilitated its first Homelessness Enumeration Project to gain a better understanding of the scope and depth of homelessness locally. During the 2018 Enumeration, 26 unaccompanied youth between the ages of 16 and 24 were identified as experiencing homelessness. Youth represented 20% of the population experiencing homelessness in the area, matching the national average². Youth specific agencies and programs ensured that as many unaccompanied youth as possible were connected with during the April event. The urgency to continue enhancing the homeless and re-housing services locally is heightened by the reality that 41% of the youth met the definition of chronic homelessness (6 or more months of homelessness in the past year). It must be acknowledged that given youth development needs and influences, youth tend to acclimate to their reality of homelessness quickly, leaving them vulnerable to the risks and harms affiliated with long term homelessness. It is also clear that youth experiencing homelessness are generally unwell. Of the youth surveyed during the enumeration project, 64% identified living with a mental health concern, 32% identified struggling with both a chronic/acute medical condition and a substance use concern.

Aligning with the national homelessness statistics³, 73% of youth identified that family breakdown (including conflict and/or abuse) caused their current period of homelessness in St. Thomas and Elgin County. With 77% of local youth experiencing hidden homelessness, a coordinated access approach must be well advertised and deliver a flex service delivery model to be successful in meeting the needs of youth experiencing homelessness.

The table summarizes the issues impacting unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness and identifies the need to continue enhancing outreach, shelter, and re-housing supports for these youth locally.

YOUTH (BETWEEN THE AGES OF 16 AND 24)

Number of Youth Surveyed	22
Percentage Chronically Homeless	41%
Percentage Episodic Homelessness	27%
Percentage Aboriginal (N=1)	5%
Percentage Reporting a Mental Health Condition (N=14)	64%
Percentage Reporting a Chronic Health Condition (N=7)	32%
Percentage Reporting Substance Use Issues (N=7)	32%
Percentage Reporting Tri-morbidity (N=4)	18%

Family Breakdown, including conflict and abuse as the cause of Homelessness (N=16)

73%

² Stephen Gaetz, Erin Dej, Tim Richter, & Melanie Redman (2016): The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

³ As seen as <http://www.evas.ca/facts@youth-homelessness>

EMERGING TRENDS IN PREVENTING AND ENDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

It is acknowledged that the journey into and out of homelessness is different for youth than adults. The impact of family breakdown is predominant in the journey of youth entering homelessness. It is understood that **77.5% of youth⁴** experiencing homelessness reported that their inability to get along with their parents played a significant role in why they left home. Given the stage of development and their previous dependence on the adults in their lives for structure, social development and getting their basic needs met, youth experiencing homelessness are often more vulnerable to exploitation, risk and harm than their adult counterparts.

On any given night there are at least 6,500 young Canadians who experience homelessness and either sleep unsheltered or access emergency shelters. Over the course of a year, the number is closer to 50,000. An even greater number are part of the hidden homeless population and temporarily stay with family or friends (couch surfing). **More than a third of young people who experience homelessness in Canada are from Ontario⁵.**

When investigating strategies to prevent and end homelessness, empirical research lends credence to Positive Youth Development, Housing First and Youth Engagement strategies in ensuring an effective service model to combat homelessness locally. The use of a coordinated access approach such as the Youth Homelessness Protocol is an indicator of progressive service and local innovation to meet the needs of youth.



⁴ As seen as <http://www.evas.ca/facts@youth-homelessness>

⁵ Gaetz, Stephen & Redman, Melanie. (2016). Towards an Ontario Youth Homelessness Strategy. Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Policy Brief. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press.

THE EVALUATION PLAN FOR THE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PROJECT

1. Engaging Partners – Training on the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) and Excellence in Housing Based Case Management

The Youth Homelessness Project began with the delivery of training sessions to the YWCA and its community partners. Training focused on dispelling the myths about homelessness and the approaches used to address this trauma in our communities. Housing based case management training was facilitated to ensure that support professionals were aware of the tools, strategies and case planning techniques that would be most helpful as they assisted youth through the 5 essential and sequential stages from homelessness to housing stability; and using the SPDAT assessment as a prioritization and case management tool. Trauma informed and recovery oriented strategies and approaches were highlighted to ensure that service delivery aligned with evidence informed practices. During the project OrgCode met with the TAYH committee to gather information, make recommendations and provide updates on the research.

2. Data Collection focused on Demographics and Depth of Need

This project relied on qualitative and quantitative data collection. Working with the project team, we developed data collection forms to ensure that data was accurately collected at intake into the project, throughout the provision of front line support, as well as at program exits. With the implementation of an evidence informed assessment tool, there was a structured framework for the completion/updating of SPDAT assessments at set intervals that aligned with the housing stability journey. Building upon the literature review completed on youth homelessness, this project also benefited from the perspective of youth focus groups stakeholder surveys and quality of life surveys completed with youth.

3. Protocol Encourages a Community of Practice Approach to Respond to Youth Homelessness:

Continuing its tradition of community building, the YWCA invited its community partners to consent based, bi-weekly system matching meetings to discuss new youth through the protocol, share updates on shared clients and to increase access to community supports for case managed youth. Data sharing and partnership agreements governed the level of discussion required to ensure that youth experiencing homelessness would get their needs met as quickly as possible. This bi-weekly system matching meetings also helped to illuminate the many “drivers of homelessness” and the impact of current re-housing and support services, including specialized funds to access counselling and mediation services to promote family reunification and rent assistance.

4. Program Monitoring and On-Site Coaching of Youth Centred Housing Based Case Management

To examine the connection between supports provided and the changes in housing stability, community re-integration, depth of need (acuity) and goal achievement over time, OrgCode completed program monitoring and coaching visits with the YWCA team. File audits were completed roughly every 6 months of the project to investigate the intensity, duration and frequency of support provided relative to the current acuity of participants, individual service plans and the establishment of SMART goals.

For those youth that were provided case management or other supports as a result of their depth of need, the SPDAT provided guidance for case planning and support conversations. Focusing attention on those areas of the SPDAT where the youth demonstrated higher acuity has been successful in helping to identify specific areas of risk and threat to housing stabilization and, when used to inform service planning, can support ‘homelessness proofing’ for youth participants.

4. Data Analysis

OrgCode used a holistic approach to data analysis. Our belief is that data measures should provide useful information that can feed back into the operation of a program. We were interested in understanding inputs, outputs, and outcomes, as well as a systems-based approach to understanding how the programs being analyzed fit into the broader picture. Data analysis focused on gaining improved understanding of the demographics of youth experiencing homelessness in St. Thomas and Elgin County; the impact of housing focused case management supports for youth, the challenges of re-housing young people in the St. Thomas housing market and the successful end to homelessness in the lives of youth. Throughout the project we strived to better understand the following research questions:

1. “Does coordinated access affect the outcomes of homeless or at-risk youth?”
2. “Does Intensive Case Management affect the outcomes for homeless or at-risk youth?”
3. “Does a coordination of acuity assessment and related program matching affect the outcomes of homeless or at-risk youth?”
4. **Client File Audits & On-Site Coaching of Support Professionals:**

In addition to the data analysis related to the SPDAT, OrgCode Consulting Inc. also provided on-site shadowing and coaching with YWCA staff to ensure the implementation of evidence informed strategies and case planning tools. Case management file audits were also completed to monitor the connection between case management/support activities provided through the project to the changes in SPDAT assessment scores over time. These file audits were also helpful in identifying policies and processes happening in the agency and/or the community that could be improved. Recommendations for enhancements were provided after each site visit.

THE IMPACT OF INTRODUCING THE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PROTOCOL AND HOUSING BASED CASE MANAGEMENT

The introduction of the Youth Homelessness Protocol changed the landscape of homeless serving system for youth in St. Thomas-Elgin. For the first time, community partners collaborated to ensure that any youth experiencing a housing crisis or homelessness would be connected to the YWCA Youth Homelessness Systems Developer. The youth's current housing situation would be assessed with the goal of preventing homelessness if at all possible. Family reconnection was investigated and when deemed not appropriate, the worker would work with the youth to identify other safe, appropriate places that he/she could stay in the community. Recognizing that the experience of literal homelessness is traumatic, efforts were made to identify opportunities for the young person to stay connected with their natural supports in the community prior to examining admission into a local shelter option. If diversion was not advisable or possible, shelter options were explored.

To assist in identifying if case management services would be needed to assist youth experiencing homelessness, the YWCA Youth Homelessness Systems Developer administered the SPDAT assessment to identify recommended intensity, duration and frequency of supports to assist in the re-housing supports. Youth would then be prioritized for referrals to YWCA Housing Based Case Managers, YWCA Youth in Transition Worker, the CMHA Case Management, Family and Children Services Youth in Transition Program or the Salvation Army Community Alternatives for Youth Program. Once attached to case management supports, youth were assisted in locating housing opportunities, move-in supports and then housing stabilization case management to increase their long term housing stability, improved wellness and enhanced community integration.

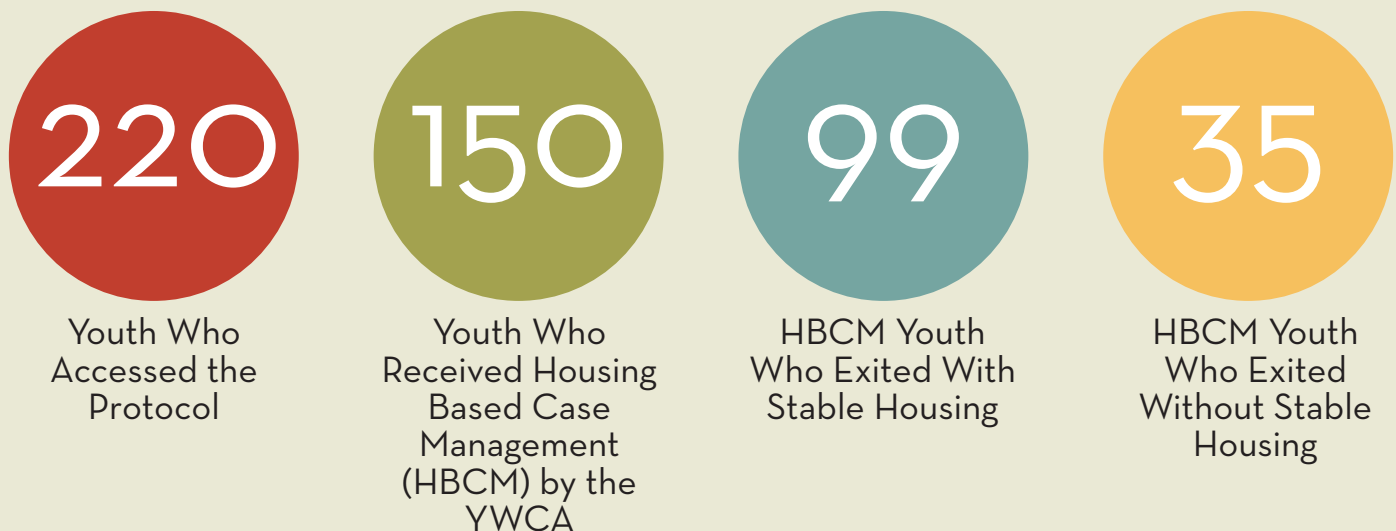
YOUTH ACCESSING THE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PROTOCOL

Their Characteristics and Needs

INFLOW AND OUTFLOW OF YOUTH

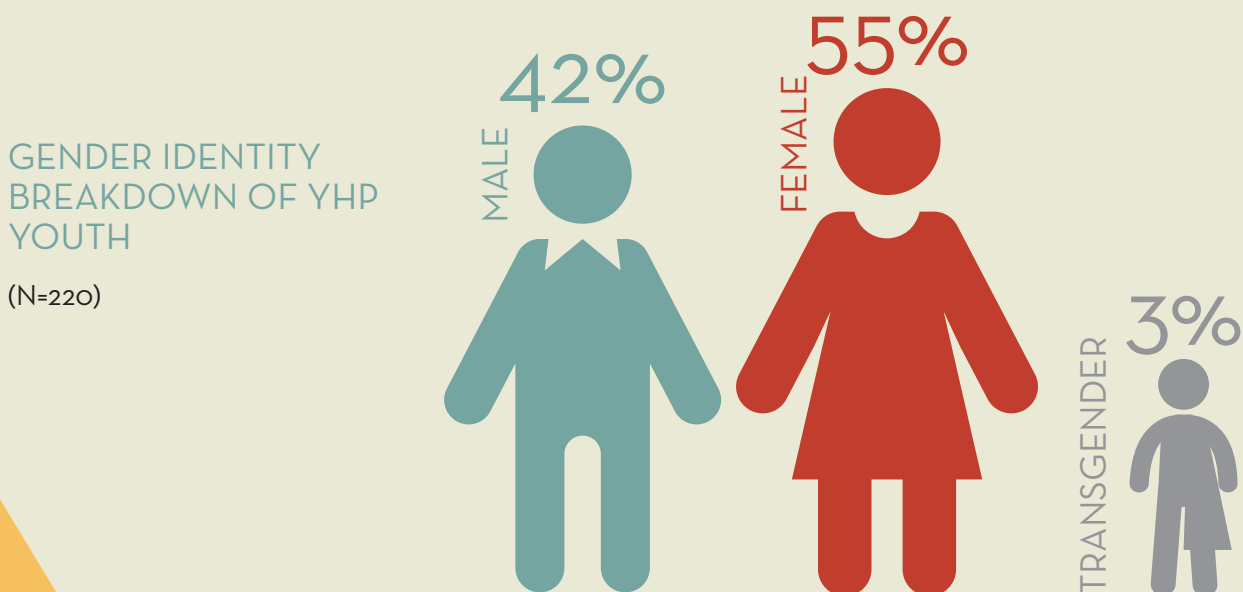
During the research period, 220 local youth accessed supports and services through the Youth Homelessness Community Protocol, an additional 48 youth accessed the protocol prior to this pilot project. Five percent (N=14) of these youth accessed the protocol more than once. Youth were connected to the Protocol by accessing the YWCA during business hours or contacting Ontario 211.

With 220 youth presenting as homeless and at-risk of homelessness during the pilot project 150 received housing based case management from the YWCA. 99 youth who received intensive case management exited successfully to stable housing with an additional 16 continuing to receive intensive case management past the pilot project end date. The remaining 35 youth exited case management without housing stability. Unsuccessful exits may include: couch surfing, left area without supports, lack of contact or incarceration.



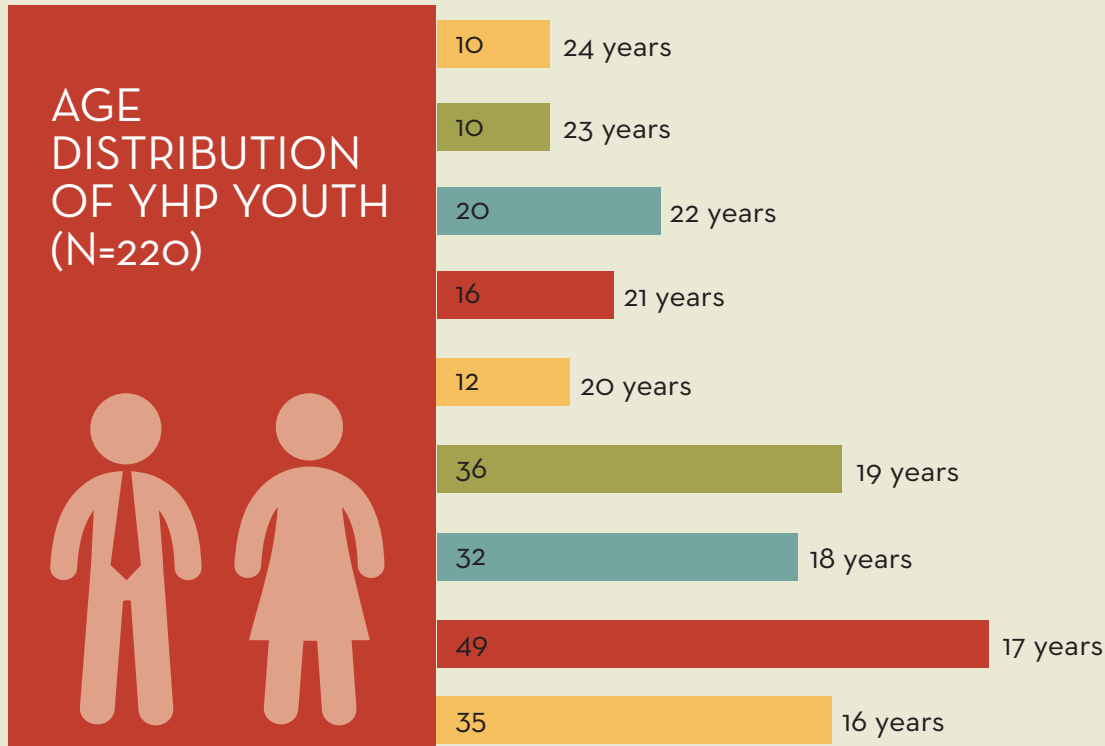
GENDER IDENTITY OF YOUTH ACCESSING THE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PROTOCOL

Of the 220 youth served through the Protocol, 121 identified as female, 92 identified as male and 7 identified as transgendered.



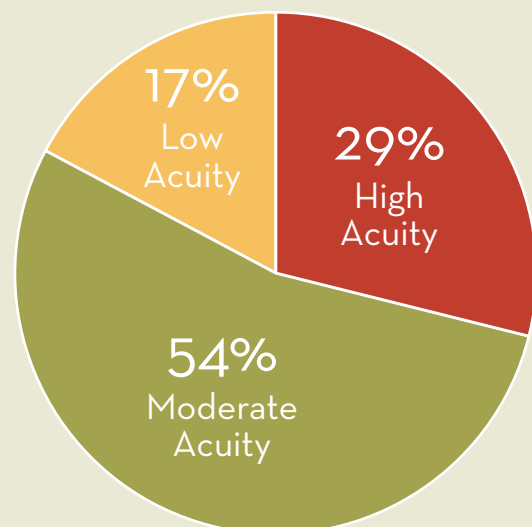
AGE OF YOUTH ACCESSING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PROTOCOL

Examination of the ages of the youth revealed that 16% of the youth were 16 years old and 22% were 17 years old. The following chart provides the age distribution of the youth served. The Youth Homelessness Protocol was indeed working with the youth population targeted for this project. It is surprising, and somewhat concerning, that 38% of the population of youth served were under the age of majority. Involvement in child protection (past or current) was a reality for 38 of the youth (17%).



ACUITY LEVELS OF YOUTH SERVED

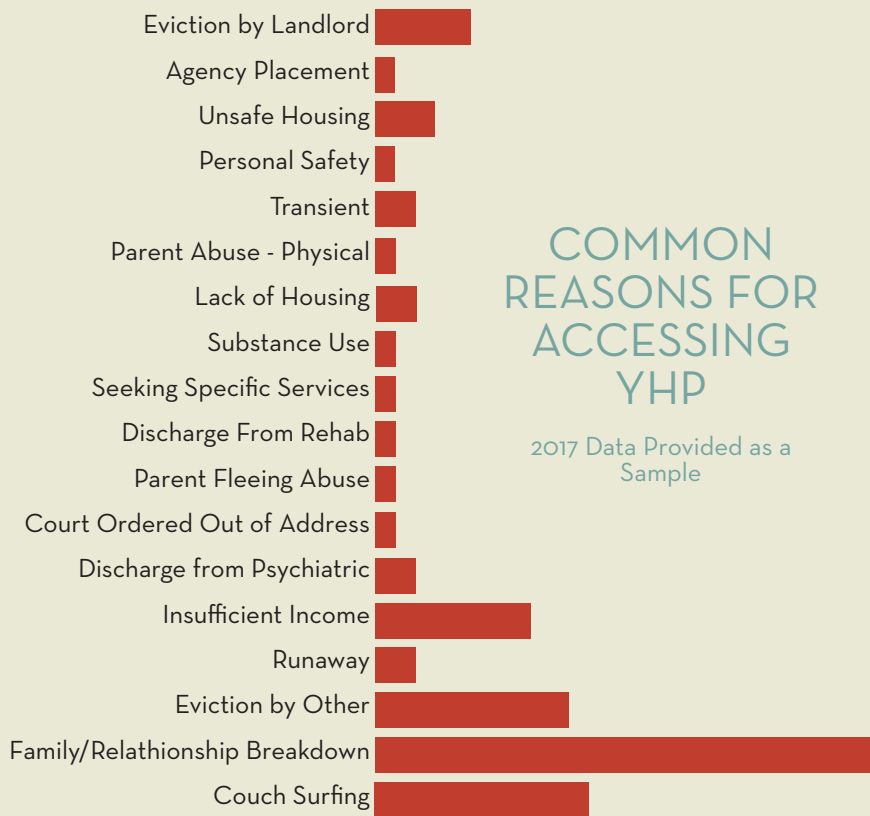
Ensuring that youth experiencing homelessness received the frequency, intensity and duration of supports that met their needs, the Youth Housing Based Case Managers implemented the SPDAT assessment to identify their depth of need related to housing and support provision. The following chart reveals that local youth are indeed demonstrating higher than expected levels of vulnerability. The following chart reveals the different acuity levels identified for the youth served between 2015-2018.



As can be seen in the graphic, 29% of the youth demonstrated a high depth of need (which is slightly higher than expected for this region) and it is recommended that these youth would benefit from a high intensity case management program with a deeper financial assistance for a longer duration of time. Such a high intensity support program would align with a Housing First Intensive Case Management Program Model. Moderate acuity was demonstrated by 54% of the youth. These youth would benefit from a medium intensity support program that aligns with a Rapid Re-Housing Program Model. An additional 27% of youth revealed a low depth of need and they would benefit from short term supports to return to housing in the community.

COMMON CAUSES OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN ST. THOMAS-ELGIN

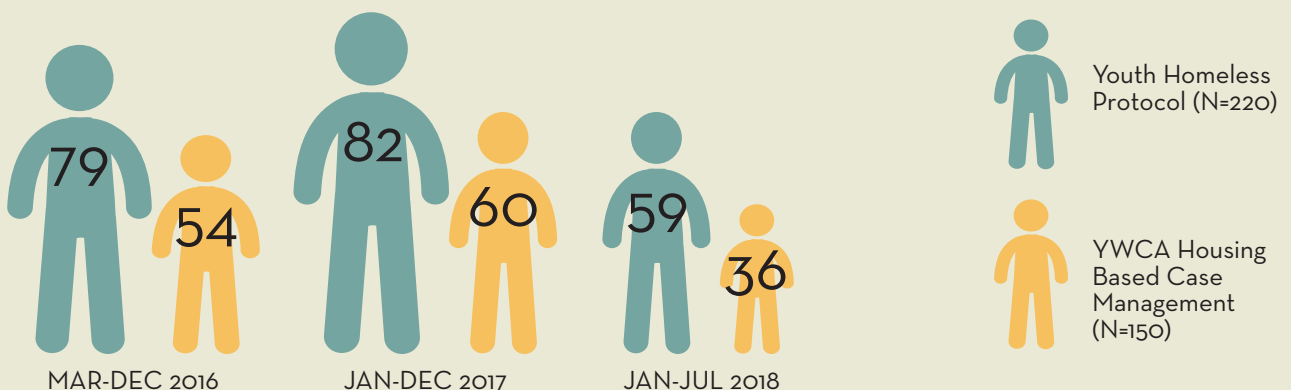
In examining the reasons for the current homelessness experience, the insights gleaned from the 2017 data provides a typical snapshot of what causes youth homelessness in St. Thomas-Elgin County. As can be seen below, family breakdown is the primary driver of youth homelessness. This aligns with the national results on causes of homelessness for youth.



YOUTH RECEIVING INTENSIVE CASE MANAGEMENT

Most youth accessing the protocol were matched with a YWCA Housing Based Case Manager in an effort to improve housing stability and minimize the effects of homelessness on a young person.

The chart below provides the breakdown of youth participants served by the Youth Homelessness Protocol and the YWCA Housing Based Case Managers by year.



YOUTH ACCESSING THE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PROTOCOL AND/OR RECEIVING INTENSIVE CASE MANAGEMENT BY THE YWCA

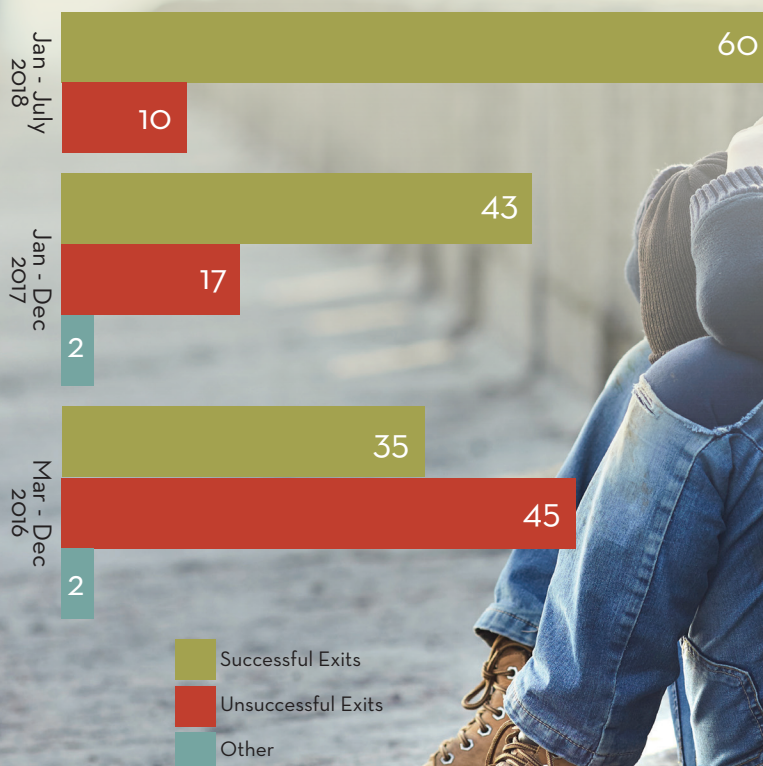
THEIR CHARACTERISTICS AND NEEDS

PROGRAM EXITS TO STABLE HOUSING AND RETURNS TO HOMELESSNESS

Examination of the exit data available for the 3-year evaluation project demonstrates the progression in skill and capacity of housing based workers to deliver support services with alignment to Housing First philosophy. The result was improved housing and support outcomes with each year of service, even though the depth of need of youth continued to climb throughout the YHP pilot project.

As can be seen below, the outcomes for the first year of operation resulted in the greatest number of unsuccessful exits from the YHP and HBCM programs. Given the shift from traditional case management approaches used with youth and the initial discomfort in working with a higher acuity population of youth – the very youth that historically would not have been deemed eligible for re-housing services - such analysis is not surprising. With YWCA and its community partners (specifically Family and Children's Services, CMHA and Salvation Army) utilizing their training and on-site coaching to implement the tools and approaches required to assist youth in the journey from homelessness to housing stability, housing and stability outcomes improved, in part, because of the commitment of housing professionals to deliver quality, evidence informed services to youth. The success of these professional approaches that incorporate harm reduction, recovery orientation and trauma informed care ensured improved service standards and housing outcomes in 2017 and 2018.

ANNUAL EXIT DATA FOR YOUTH LEAVING YHP AND HBCM (N=216)



YOUTH EXITS FROM HOUSING BASED CASE MANAGEMENT

Between March 2016 and July 2018, 150 youth were matched with a Housing Based Case Manager at the YWCA for housing assistance and intensive case management supports. When feasible, referrals for housing supports were also made to the CMHA, YWCA Youth In Transition Worker, Family and Children's Services and the Salvation Army teams for the remaining youth accessing the protocol. Exit data was collected for 133 youth which is broken down below. Out of these homeless youth 133 exited intensive case management with 109 exiting to stable housing and 24 exiting without stable housing.



Stable Housing
82%

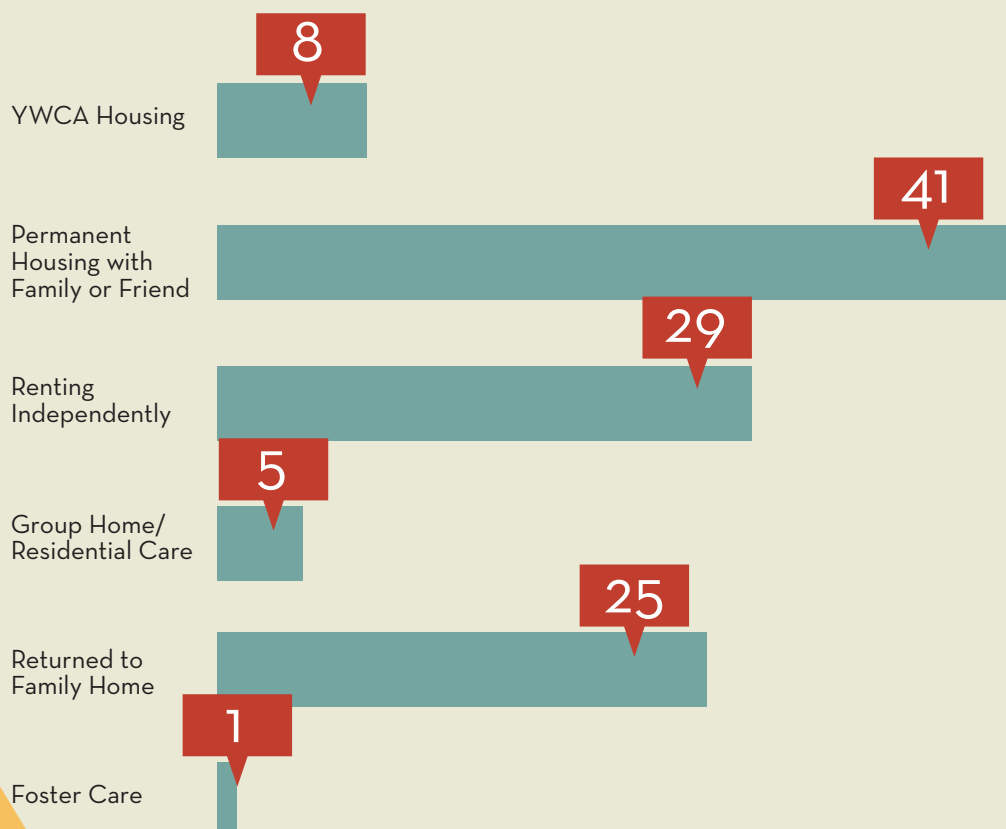
Lack of Stable
Housing
18%

Youth Exits (N=133)

HOUSING STABILITY UPON EXIT FROM HOUSING BASED CASE MANAGEMENT

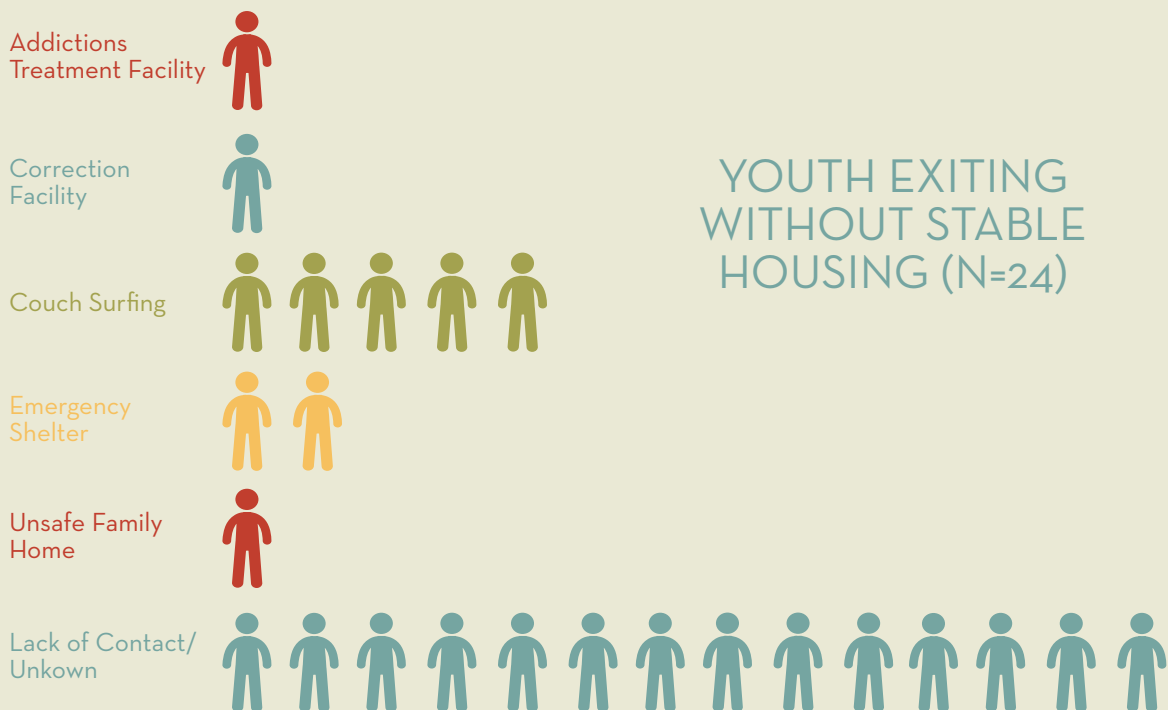
Youth who exited from YWCA housing based case management during the project found stability through a variety of ways. Family reunification is explored whenever safe and feasible. Putting an emphasis on this strategy is evident within this exit data. Upon exit, 41 youth were permanently settled in a family or friends home and 25 youth returned to their family home. This demonstrates 61% of youth found stable housing due to the support of a family member or friends.

In examining the destinations of youth that exited housing supports successfully, 28% were paying rent in subsidized or fair market value units.



LACK OF HOUSING STABILITY UPON EXIT FROM HOUSING BASED CASE MANAGEMENT

18% of youth exited from housing based case management without stable housing. These outcomes for youth varied but were often due to lack of engagement. In examining the 24 youth that were discharged from the program without resolution of their homelessness from 2016-2018, 58% were exited due to lack of contact.



YOUTH INVOLVEMENT WITH JUSTICE SYSTEM

Of the 133 youth who exited housing based case management, 37 identified involvement with the justice system with a total of 12 days served in jail.



YOUTH ACCESSING THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

In examining the youth's interaction with the health system, 17 youth were admitted to hospital for medical and/or mental health needs. The average stay was 12.8 days with the longest stay being 90 days. 37 youth in need of urgent medical/mental health care accessed Emergency Department services 104 times.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT WITH CHILD PROTECTION

Youth involved with child protection services are often at greater risk for homelessness. Of the 220 youth accessing the Youth Homelessness Protocol, 17% or 38 youth were involved with child protection services. These youth were matched with a Youth in Transition Worker from the YWCA and/or Family and Children's Services. This number does not include all youth in care or former youth in care experiencing homelessness who were already connected with a Youth in Transition Worker, just those who accessed the Protocol.



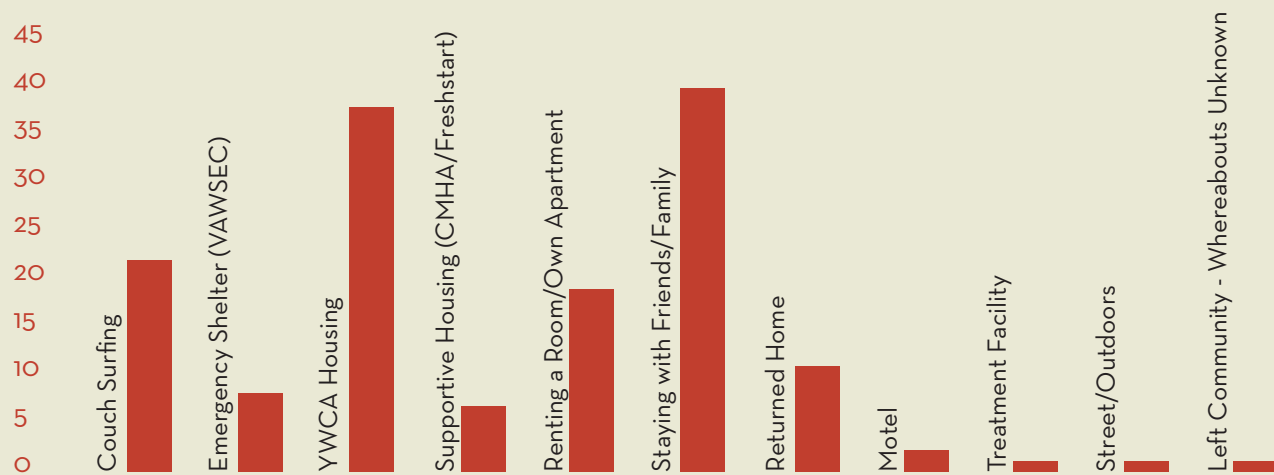
HOUSING STATUS AT 30 DAYS

Upon access to Housing Based Case Management Supports, the housing status of the youth participants was identified at the 30-day mark. As can be seen in the graphic below, 40 of the 150 HBCM youth were staying with friend/family on a temporary basis, 38 were stably housed in YWCA housing, 7 were stably housed in CMHA/Freshstart supportive housing, 19 were either renting a room or their own apartment, and 22 were couch surfing but these locations were identified as 'safe' by the youth. Eight youth were staying at an emergency shelter while housing options were explored, 1 youth was at a treatment facility, 2 youth were staying at a motel temporarily, 1 youth was experiencing absolute homelessness and 1 youth left the community with the whereabouts unknown.

It needs to be noted that 11 youth returned home which is a key principle of the Youth Homelessness Protocol. The following chart reveals the results of this analysis.

HOUSING STATUS AT 30 DAY MARK WITH HBCM CLIENTS

(2016-2018) (N=150)



IMPROVEMENTS IN SUPPORTIVE SERVICES, FAMILIAL RELATIONS, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT.



SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

YHP partners ensured that youth participants were connected to the local services and supports they needed to increase their wellness, housing stability and community re-integration. When youth participants were asked if they had knowledge of, and comfort in, accessing local services, 100% of the respondents identified “yes”. Youth were provided with referrals to the following support services: employment, education, income supports, mental health, developmental services, counselling & mediation, legal services, hospital and health care, addiction services, Aboriginal services and housing.



FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Family reunification was a priority in the work of the YHP partners when such reunification was safe and appropriate. Of the 109 youth who successfully exited from Housing Based Case Management 41 returned to their family home and 25 youth gained housing with family or friends. This demonstrates 61% of successful youth exits were supported by support and reconnection with family members and caring adults. Twenty youth identified that they had a stronger relationship with their family since entering the Protocol.



EDUCATION

Education indicators were also monitored for youth that had participated in Housing Based Case Management. In examining high school completion rates, 39 of the youth had either graduated from high school prior to accessing the protocol or graduated during the time they were supported by the case managers. Examination of available exit interview dataset for 133 youth revealed that 34 of the youth participants were attending education classes/earning educational credits upon exit (26%).



EMPLOYMENT

26 youth identified that they were employed full time or part time upon exit of Housing Based Case Management. An additional 26 youth were involved with employment training and support programs to improve their income security. This demonstrates that 39% of the homeless youth supported were working towards gaining employment.

GRADUATION RATES (N=133)



ADDITIONAL OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS EXPERIENCED BY YOUTH

Beyond the initial positive housing destinations gained by the youth supported by the Youth Homelessness Protocol and the Housing Based Case Management Program we examined youth participants' overall well being. To explore the additional wellness and stability indicators experienced by youth supported by the Housing Based Case Management Program, youth were provided with an opportunity to provide feedback on changes they had noticed in their life. As can be seen below, most youth identified improvements in their outlook on life, their quality of sleep, positive relationships and mental wellness since being housed and supported by case managers.

YOUR FRIENDSHIPS OR RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY



55%
IMPROVED

45%
STAYED THE
SAME

In alignment with Trauma Informed care and Positive Youth Development, engagement with the housing supports offered via the Youth Homelessness Protocol demonstrated increased positive relationships with trusted adults in the lives of the youth participants.

THE NUMBER OF ADULTS IN MY LIFE THAT I TRUST



50%
GONE UP

15%
GONE DOWN

30%
SAME

5%
NO ADULTS
TRUSTED

YOUR OUTLOOK ON LIFE



70%
IMPROVED

15%
SAME

15%
WORSE

In addition to improvements in relationships and mental wellness, supported youth also identified feeling safer with enhanced hope for the future. All of these indicators of wellness identify an improved opportunity for positive youth development.

When examining impacts on physical health concerns, access to housing with supports assisted in improved well-being for youth. Youth surveys also identified revisions in other activities and behaviours after being supported in housing. For example, 35% of youth self-reported that their alcohol consumption had reduced since being housed and 30% identified that the number of times they “got high” went down.

YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH

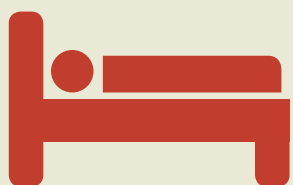


70%
IMPROVED

15%
SAME

15%
WORSE

THE AMOUNT YOU SLEEP



40%
IMPROVED

55%
SAME

5%
WORSE

YOUR SAFETY



75%
IMPROVED

25%
SAME

YOUR HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



75%
IMPROVED

25%
SAME

THE AMOUNT OF ALCOHOL YOU DRINK



15%
GONE UP

20%
SAME

35%
GONE DOWN

30%
DIDN'T &
DOESN'T DRINK

HOW FREQUENTLY YOU USE DRUGS



15%
GONE UP

25%
SAME

30%
GONE DOWN

30%
DIDN'T & DOESN'T
USE DRUGS

IMPACT OF THE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PROTOCOL ON THE SERVICE COORDINATION LOCALLY

The Youth Homelessness Protocol introduced a new method of coordinating and collaborating to ensure that a shared youth population would have streamlined access to housing and support services to assist in achieving housing stability and improved wellness. The bi-weekly system matching meetings created an increased understanding of the needs and system barriers impacting local young people as they attempted to secure safe and appropriate places to stay. It also ensured that access to services such as income benefits from Ontario Works, Family and Children's Services, Voluntary Youth Service Agreement (VYSA) assistance and mental health services via CMHA Elgin were more easily and efficiently accessed. The capacity building activities incorporated in the project ensured that the YWCA and all of its community partners in the region received the training and tools to effectively and efficiently serve the most vulnerable youth, single adults and families by focusing on a Housing First approach to preventing and ending homelessness. It is the hope of OrgCode Consulting that the transformation experienced within the youth serving sector will be replicated for all populations experiencing housing instability and homelessness in St. Thomas and Elgin County.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

With 20% of the homeless population in St. Thomas-Elgin identified as youth between the ages of 16 and 24, the quest to prevent and end youth homelessness remains paramount for community partners. The development of a collaborative Youth Homelessness Protocol that generated a single point of access for youth experiencing housing crises and homelessness ensured that a youth centred process for assessment; service prioritization and program referral could be created. As the Government of Canada begins the nation-wide implementation of Coordinated Access across all designated communities, the St. Thomas-Elgin County partnership identified itself as an innovator in improving youth homelessness strategies. With a focus on trauma informed care and positive youth development, the YWCA and its community partners are to be applauded for their work in preventing and ending homelessness locally.

OrgCode Consulting, Inc.

OrgCode Consulting, Inc. has prepared this report for the YWCA. Conclusions and insights are based upon data compiled by OrgCode Consulting, Inc. OrgCode Consulting, Inc. is responsible for errors and omissions.

