

Pathways into Youth Homelessness

An Arts-Based Study in Peterborough, Ontario



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Executive Summary

The approach to youth homelessness in Peterborough is a reflection of the approach used in municipalities across Canada. This approach channels resources into crisis responses such as emergency shelters. Not only does this approach not reduce rates of youth homelessness, it puts youth at risk of further harm and often entrenches them in homelessness (Gaetz, O’Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016). The experience of youth homelessness increases the likelihood of victimization, sexual assault, mental health issues, and the likelihood that the young person will experience long term homelessness (Gaetz, 2010). This report contributes to the knowledge about youth homelessness in Peterborough and provides a local perspective on the factors associated with entrance into homelessness. This report begins with a detailed literature review of the established pathways into youth homelessness in Canada and details the characteristics of the homeless youth population both locally and nationally, as well as the individual, relational, institutional, and structural factors that contribute to youth homelessness. The methodology employed for this research was qualitative, arts-based interviewing that engaged three formerly homeless participants. Participants were asked to use modelling clay throughout the interview to help represent their experiences. Interviews were transcribed and individually analyzed for consistent themes and connections to the literature. This methodology was chosen as a way of generating accessible knowledge of participant experience and providing participants with increased agency in the portrayal of their narratives. A set of key recommendations emerged in four central areas through this research; an overview of these recommendations is provided below, with more detail provided in the final section of this report.

Recommendation Area 1: Develop the capacity for identification and intervention

Finding(s)	Recommendations
Opportunities for intervention in the lives of the participants were not taken up	The City of Peterborough should engage other sectors in taking responsibility for recognizing the risk of youth homelessness and connecting youth to appropriate resources

Recommendation Area 2: Develop the resources necessary for family mediation and support programs

Finding(s)	Recommendations
One participant lacked support from a caring adult, a result of strained family relationships	Local youth-serving recreational organizations and programs, such as the YMCA, Peterborough Baseball Association, and Peterborough Youth Soccer Club should explore ways to get at-risk youth involved.
	The City of Peterborough should invest in the promotion of the recreation subsidy program

	The City of Peterborough should continue to invest in programs such as Strengthening Families for Parents and Youth, and Family Reconnect
One participant experienced difficulty parenting with limited resources	The YES Shelter for Youth and Families, YWCA Crossroads, The Brock Mission and Cameron House should ensure that information about parenting resources and programs are made available at shelters

Recommendation Area 3: Increase availability of affordable, appropriate housing for families and youth

Finding(s)	Recommendations
Low income contributed to family instability and conflict	The City of Peterborough should consult with the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board and the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board to ensure they provide sufficient school supplies and nutrition programs for students
After entering homelessness participants struggled to regain housing stability	The City of Peterborough needs to increase investment in affordable housing for families and youth

Recommendation Area 4: Develop inter-sectoral partnerships and an integrated system

Finding(s)	Recommendations
One participant experienced family conflict as a result of substance use and delinquency	The City of Peterborough should partner with the Central East LHIN to allocate funding for mental health and addiction programming specific to youth and families
One participant experienced family breakdown after being charged through the criminal justice system	The City of Peterborough should partner with the John Howard Society to provide specific counselling and mediation for youth involved in the criminal justice system and their families
Two participants were discharged from the criminal justice system into homelessness	The City of Peterborough should partner with the John Howard Society and the Youth Criminal Justice System to ensure youth are provided with adequate discharge planning
One participant experienced confusion about the CAS	Provide plain language fact sheets for families in contact with the Child Welfare System

Introduction

The recently released United Way report, “Giving Voice... Peterborough’s 2016 Point-in-Time Count of Homelessness” found that 64% of participants entered homelessness before age 26 (United Way Peterborough & District, 2016). The PIT Count also revealed that 27% of participants surveyed were 24 years or younger (United Way Peterborough & District). These findings demonstrate the prevalence of youth homelessness in our community and the urgency of addressing its’ prevention. The approach to youth homelessness in Peterborough is a reflection of the approach used in municipalities across Canada. This approach channels resources into crisis responses such as emergency shelters. Not only does this approach not reduce rates of youth homelessness, it puts youth at risk of further harm and often entrenches them in homelessness (Gaetz, O’Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, 2016). An approach that emphasizes prevention has been established by the literature as the key to ending youth homelessness in Canada (Gaetz et al., 2016). In order to prevent youth homelessness in Peterborough, it is important to hear the voices of youth experiencing homelessness and understand their pathways into homelessness in the context of the structural and institutional conditions in which they exist.

This research was initiated by the City of Peterborough Social Services Division in response to the PIT Count findings. Following the release of the PIT Count report, Dorothy Olver, City of Peterborough Social Services Division Program Manager, and Linda Mitchelson, City of Peterborough Social Services Division Manager, sought a student through Dr. Buccieri to conduct further analysis of the report’s findings. Dr. Buccieri has an ongoing research partnership with the City of Peterborough in relation to housing and homelessness. The current project was designed with the support of the Social Services Division and has since gained the support of the YES Shelter for Youth and Families.

This research report begins with a detailed literature review of the established pathways into youth homelessness in Canada. The literature review details the characteristics of the homeless youth population both locally and nationally, as well as the individual, relational, institutional, and structural factors that contribute to youth homelessness. The methodology employed for this research was qualitative, arts-based interviewing that engaged three formerly homeless participants. The student researcher developed questions informed by the literature and interviewed participants about their childhood, relationship with family, involvement with social services, their first entrance into homelessness, and how their first experience could have been prevented. Participants were asked to use modelling clay throughout the interview to help represent their experiences. They were prompted at the beginning of the interview to create something that represented ‘home’ and asked about their art throughout the interview. Pictures were taken of each piece of art and were captioned by participants and included in this report. Interviews were transcribed and individually analyzed for consistent themes and connections to the literature. This methodology was chosen as a way of generating accessible knowledge of participant experience and providing participants with increased agency in the portrayal of their narratives. This research

is not meant to be representative of every experience of youth homelessness in Peterborough but provides three detailed case studies of pathways into youth homelessness that highlight key themes in the literature.

Following an explanation of the methodology, this report provides a detailed description of each participants' pathway into homelessness. The first participant, James, highlights the connection between difficult family situations in the context of poverty and youth homelessness. James' childhood was characterized by feelings of not being cared for because of a lack of both emotional and financial family resources. The second participant, Salena, describes her pathway into youth homelessness as related to her experience of physical and emotional abuse. Salena's experience of homelessness has been shaped by surviving with limited resources and by her experience of navigating the complex child welfare system in an attempt to regain custody of her daughter. The third participant, Sean, depicts a pathway into youth homelessness that was the result of family conflict, substance use, and involvement with the criminal justice system. Sean's story is an example of one of the harms associated with youth homelessness and an inadequate response. At the time of the interview, Sean who is now in his late 40's, was still transitioning out of homelessness. Each participants' pathway into youth homelessness was paved by layers of difficult experiences, trauma, and failed system responses. While travelling on their pathways, each participant encountered an institution that recognized that they were struggling but failed to respond appropriately. One of the key recommendations of this report is to develop the capacity for identification and intervention by providing training to front line staff such as police officers, teachers, and child welfare workers on identifying youth at risk of homelessness and supporting them appropriately. Other recommendations include continuing to invest in family support and mediation programs; increasing the availability of affordable housing for families and youth; as well as fostering inter-sector collaboration particularly for youth involved in the criminal justice system and their families.

The literature demonstrates that the experience of youth homelessness increases the likelihood of victimization, sexual assault, mental health issues, and the likelihood that the young person will experience long term homelessness (Gaetz, 2010). As demonstrated by the PIT Count findings, it is essential to prevent youth from entering homelessness in order to effectively reduce the rates of homelessness in Peterborough and prevent the harms associated with homelessness. This research contributes to the knowledge about youth homelessness in Peterborough and provides a local perspective on the factors associated with entrance into homelessness. A summary of the research findings and corresponding recommendations will be presented to the City of Peterborough, the United Way, and other community stakeholders. As such, the voices of people with lived experience of youth homelessness will be available to inform policy on prevention strategies.

Literature Review

The following section provides a description of the characteristics of the homeless youth population from surveys conducted across Canada and in Peterborough. It will also summarize the harms associated with experiences of youth homelessness that provide evidence for the urgency of addressing its prevention. This section will then provide an overview of the pathways into homelessness established in the literature and describe the ways in which individual, relational, institutional, and structural factors intersect to create and reproduce experiences of homelessness.

Characteristics of the Homeless Youth Population: National and Local Perspectives

The first Pan-Canadian study of youth homelessness, the National Youth Homelessness Survey (NYHS) provides insight into the characteristics of the homeless youth population (Gaetz, O' Grady, Kidd & Schwann, 2016). The authors estimate that between 6,000 and 7,000 people between the ages of 13 and 24 experience homelessness each night (Gaetz et al., 2016). Of 1,103 young people surveyed, 57% identified as cisgender male, 36.4% as cisgender female, 1.8% as transgender, 2.5% as gender non-binary, and 1.8% as two spirit. Among those surveyed 29.5% identified as LGBTQ2S, 30.6% identified as Indigenous, and 28.2% as members of racialized communities. The authors attribute the overrepresentation of these communities in the findings as a result of homophobia, systemic racism, and racialized discrimination (Gaetz, et al., 2016). The average age that participants experienced homelessness for the first time was 15.7 and 40.1% of participants were younger than 16 (Gaetz et al., 2016). This finding is supported by a study of 102 Maritime youth that reported that 62% participants experienced homelessness before or during their 16th year of age (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010).

The recently released United Way report, "Giving Voice... Peterborough's 2016 Point-in-Time Count of homelessness" produced findings similar to that of the NYHS. The report found that 64% of participants entered homelessness before age 26. (United Way Peterborough & District, 2016). Locally, a smaller percentage of youth entered homelessness before the age of 16 (16%), however this is still significant given that homelessness services typically begin at age 16. The PIT also revealed that 27% of participants surveyed were 24 years or younger (United Way Peterborough & District, 2016). Of the youth surveyed, 13 were experiencing chronic homelessness meaning they had spent more than 6 months without housing. Of the youth surveyed, 26% identified as Aboriginal. Of the total sample, 10% identified as LGBTQ and 34% reported spending time in a group home or foster home (United Way Peterborough & District, 2016).

These findings indicate that both locally and nationally, youth are becoming homeless before they are eligible for homelessness-related services that typically begin at age 16. The population of homeless youth is diverse and their needs are not homogenous (Buccieri et al., 2016). Both locally and nationally, members of marginalized communities are at a greater risk of experiencing youth homelessness. The findings of these studies depict the scope and severity of

youth homelessness and provide context for the purpose of this research. There is a need to better understand what is contributing to youth homelessness and what can be done to prevent it from occurring.

Risks Associated with Experiences of Youth Homelessness

Homelessness is an experience that is inherently harmful. The risks of experiencing homelessness as a young person include increased likelihood of repeat episodes, poor employment and educational achievement, negative health and mental health outcomes, and victimization. The NYHS found that 31.4% of participants were homeless for more than one year and 75.9% had experienced more than one episode of homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2016). The response to youth homelessness that channels resources into emergency shelters makes it difficult for young people to access the support necessary to obtain and maintain housing. Not only does this response fail to reduce rates of youth homelessness, it puts youth at risk of further harm and often entrenches them in homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2016).

Experiences of homelessness that are characterized by instability make it difficult to excel at school or maintain employment. In a comparative demographic analysis of homeless and housed youth in Canada, 76% of homeless youth had not completed high school compared to 33% of housed youth (Buccieri et al., 2016). The NYHS found similar results of a 53.2% drop-out rate among homeless youth compared to national average of below 9%. Homeless youth are also less likely to be employed. Only 7% of the homeless youth sample stated they were employed compared to 56.1% of the housed sample (Buccieri et al., 2016).

Homelessness also has negative health impacts. Half of the youth experiencing homelessness do not have access to nutritional food on a regular basis (Gaetz et al., 2016). Youth homelessness is also associated with deteriorating mental health. Of the NYHS respondents, 42% reported a suicide attempt, 32% reported a drug overdose, and 85.4% were experiencing symptoms of distress. Homeless youth experience more pregnancies and have more children than their housed counterparts (Buccieri et al., 2016).

Gaetz (2004) states that, “being young and homeless invariably means winding up in dangerous places, engaging in risky behaviours, and being exposed to potential offenders” (p. 445). Experiences of homelessness are inherently related to risk of victimization. Well over half of homeless youth report being the victim of a violent crime compared to 39.7% of housed youth (Gaetz et al., 2016; Gaetz, 2004). In a study of homeless youth in Toronto, 31.9% reported being sexually assaulted (Gaetz, 2004). Lack of access to public space and the subsequent relegation to less visible areas, combined with the lack of protection of a home, engagement in survival activities, and lack of social capital to access protection from authority figures all contribute to the reasons homeless youth are among the most victimized populations in Canada (Gaetz, 2004).

The harms associated with experiencing youth homelessness demonstrate the urgency of addressing its prevention. An approach that emphasizes prevention has been established by the

literature as the key to ending youth homelessness in Canada (Gaetz et al., 2016). To develop effective prevention strategies, it is important to understand the pathways into youth homelessness.

Pathways into Youth Homelessness

An extensive body of literature outlines the complexity of the pathways into youth homelessness. Entrance into homelessness often occurs as a process rather than a single event (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010; Collins, 2013; Hyde, 2005; Winland 2013) and is the result of an intersection of individual, structural, relational, and institutional factors (Gaetz et al., 2016). The first entrance into homelessness for youth means the loss of connection to people upon whom they are economically and socially dependent (Gaetz, 2014; Winland, 2013). This social and economic dislocation combined with a lack of experience with independent living, and the daunting transition to adulthood makes youth homelessness a distinct issue from that of adult homelessness. For youth, a successful transition out of homelessness also requires a successful transition into adulthood (Gaetz et al., 2016).

Trauma and Childhood Stressors

The causes of youth homelessness often involve individual circumstances, characteristics, and relationships rooted in social inequalities. The literature identifies childhood stressors as both an individual and relational factor that contributes to youth homelessness. Childhood stressors include traumatic events and circumstances such as “parental conflict, physical/ sexual abuse, [and] alcohol and/or drug abuse” (Collins, 2013, p. 54). Traumatic events can be defined as meeting the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010) and have a lasting impact on one’s well-being. Results that analyzed a sample of 10,000 homeless individuals from the Toronto Hostel Data Base suggest that early childhood factors such as abuse, unstable housing history, and poverty make it more difficult to obtain and maintain housing (Goering, Tolomiczenko, Sheldon, Boydell & Wasylenki, 2002). This finding is supported by the literature that consistently identifies childhood stressors as a pathway into youth homelessness. In a study conducted with 156 youth experiencing homelessness in Ottawa, Ontario, 56% of female participants and 48% of male participants cited childhood stressors as contributing to their homelessness (Klodawsky et al., 2006). Other studies report that the average number of childhood stressors experienced by homeless youth is between 5 and 7 (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010; Collins, 2013).

One of the most frequently cited sources of childhood stress and trauma in the literature on homeless youth is abuse (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010; Collins, 2013; Gaetz et al., 2016; Hyde, 2005; Karabanow & Naylor, 2013; Klodawsky et al., 2006; Slesnick, Zhang, & Brakenhoff, 2016; van den Bree et al., 2009). Reports of both experiencing and witnessing physical, emotional, and sexual abuse range from 43% to 65% of homeless youth (Collins, 2013; Klodawsky et al., 2006). Coates and McKenzie-Mohr (2010) state that this extensive trauma forces youth to leave

their homes. This statement is supported by research that finds significant correlations between abuse and homelessness. In a study of 79 homeless youth, sexual abuse was significantly correlated with housing instability (Slesnick, Zhang, & Brakenhoff, 2016). Experiences of victimization in adolescence, defined as being threatened or injured, were independently associated with homelessness in a population-based sample (van den Bree et al., 2009). Both Collins (2013) and Gaetz et al. (2016) determined that youth who reported abuse became homeless at a younger age than those that did not. Experiences of trauma and abuse mean that the home is not a safe place for youth. In a review of the academic literature on the notion of home, Mallet (2004) identifies the romanticization of home as a safe haven and contends that for youth and partners that experience domestic violence, home is not a refuge from the outside world. Mallet (2004) states that “home for these people is a site of fear and isolation, a prison rather than a place of absolute freedom and ontological security” (p. 72). For youth who experience abuse, entrance into homelessness can be an escape from the prison of their homes.

Trauma is especially problematic when experienced in the context of marginalization. A lack of economic resources often means the inability to access appropriate services for coping with trauma (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010). Collins (2013) suggests that multiple childhood stressors and inadequate support has a compounding effect on an individual’s well-being. Coates and McKenzie-Mohr (2010) attribute high incidence of mental health issues among homeless youth to the impact of high numbers of traumatic events. They found that half of the participants in a cohort of 102 homeless youth experienced negative effects of trauma (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010). Both Collins (2013) and Coates and McKenzie-Mohr (2010) identify a continuum of traumatic experiences and stressors that commence years before youth become homeless and continue after being housed. Coates and McKenzie-Mohr (2010) find that the average number of traumatic events that occur in the lives of youth after becoming homeless is 6.4. They suggest that once youth become homeless, the family violence that brought them to the streets is replaced by street violence (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010).

While the evidence to support the notion that childhood stressors contribute to the causes of youth homelessness is significant, Collins (2013) warns that childhood stressors should not be minimized to causes of homelessness. Rather, they should be addressed as situations that have lasting impacts on health and well-being of individuals. Collins (2013) suggests that homelessness makes visible the troubling circumstances in a youth’s life and that these circumstances need to be addressed in order to facilitate a successful transition out of homelessness.

Difficult Family Situations

In addition to childhood trauma, homeless youth have often been subject to other difficult family situations that have lasting impacts on personal well-being. The literature suggests that family conflict is a significant factor identified by youth as contributing to their homelessness (Collins, 2013; Gaetz et al., 2016; Hyde, 2005; Klodawsky et al., 2006; Mallet, Rosenthal & Keys, 2005). Youth have attributed conflict to things such as school performance (Gaetz et al., 2016;

Hyde, 2005), substance use (Mallet et al; 2005), conflict with the law (Gaetz et al., 2016) personal style, religion, and sexual orientation (Hyde, 2005). Frequent family conflict can lead to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and rejection and as Mallet et al. (2005) state, lead youth “to seek out places and people where they feel more at ease” (p. 191).

Other difficult family situations experienced by youth include physical and emotional neglect (Gaetz et al., 2016), poor family relationship quality (van den Bree et al., 2009), and family instability. Poor family relationship quality (defined as unsupportive, lacking care and affection, and involving conflict, rejection, and abuse) was independently associated with homelessness in a population-based study (van den Bree et al., 2009). In other studies, participants had experienced family disruption manifesting through divorce, living between parents and other family members, or being in Children’s Aid Society care (Collins, 2013; Hyde, 2005). Mallet et al. (2005), found that some youth in blended families stated they experienced feelings of displacement, alienation, and victimization by their step-parent.

Despite the challenges associated with difficult family situations, Winland (2013) demonstrates that not all familial relationships should be characterized as problematic. Findings from research conducted with Eva’s Family Reconnect Program in Toronto found that 69% of homeless youth maintained some connection to family, and that involvement in the program resulted in 62% of participants becoming more involved with family (Winland, 2013). These relationships can be key to facilitating the transition to adulthood (Winland, 2013).

As Hausman and Hammen (1993) suggest, experiencing difficult family situations as a young person can influence one’s ability to parent effectively. The authors discuss the continuum on which parenting exists. They state that poor attachment and adjustment experienced as a child can translate into difficulty creating secure, attached relationships with their own children. Parenting in public spaces, particularly shelters, increases exposure to criticism from authority and subsequent feelings of confusion and inadequacy. Hausman and Hammen (1993) suggest that the stress of living in a shelter is intensified for mothers who might lack parenting knowledge and skills such as effective problem-solving, stress-management, and the ability to maintain supportive relationships.

This theory is supported by research conducted with homeless Aboriginal youth in Toronto, Ontario. The majority of the youth were involved with the child welfare system as children and have since had children of their own. The youth felt that they were ‘under a microscope’ (Baskin, 2007, p. 37) in their involvement with CAS specifically because they were young. The youth also expressed frustration with the Child and Family Services Act that fails to account for cultural values, often conflates poverty and neglect, and lacks focus on prevention (Baskin, 2007).

Individual Factors Contributing to Youth Homelessness

Gaetz et al. (2016) define individual factors as those “that may be generally characteristic of adolescence and young adulthood, including the desire for independence or leaving home to look for work, as well as factors that may pose more significant challenges, such as mental health

problems, addictions, or trouble with the law” (p. 43). While individual characteristics and relational circumstances may not have a direct cause and effect relationship with youth homelessness, when compounded with each other and other factors the entrance into youth homelessness is more likely (Collins, 2013; Gaetz et al., 2016). Some of the individual factors related to experiences of youth homelessness are poor adjustment to school (van den Bree et al., 2009), emotional issues (Hyde, 2005), experiences of bullying (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010; Gaetz et al., 2016), being tested for a learning disability, and substance use (Cheng et al., 2013; Collins, 2013; Mallet et al., 2005).

The Complex Role of Substance Use

The contributing factor of substance use provides an example of the complex ways in which factors interact to lead to youth homelessness. In a sample of 302 youth, one-third identified that substance use impacted their pathway into homelessness (Mallet et al., 2005). However, this was not a direct relationship. The authors identified 4 ways in which substance use impacted the pathways into youth homelessness that involve a complex relationship between substance use, family conflict, and homelessness. The pathways identified are youth’s substance use, leading to family conflict and subsequent homelessness; family conflict leading to youth’s substance use and subsequent homelessness; family conflict leading to homelessness and subsequent substance use; and family member’s substance use leading to family conflict and subsequent homelessness (Mallet et al., 2005).

For the youth whose pathway was coded as beginning with drug use, leading to family conflict and subsequent homelessness, the authors characterized the youth’s substance use as a way of assuming “their entitlement to freedom and independence” (Mallet et al., 2005). Substance use was identified by the majority of these youth as a social act that caused family tension (Mallet et al., 2005). Mallet et al., (2005) state that “freedom and independence was asserted and gained by ignoring and opposing their parents through rebellious activities, typically drug use, school refusal and hostility at home... Their drug use was often a reactive response to their parents’ efforts to restrict their behaviour” (p. 188). As Gaetz et al. (2016) state, the desire for independence is typical to the adolescent experience. However, when this desire coincides with substance use that leads to family conflict, a pathway into homelessness emerges.

For other youth, the role of substance use in their pathway into homelessness was their parent’s use of substances. Youth in Mallet et al.’s (2005) study identified parental substance use as causing family instability and leading to family breakdown. Youth in these situations are often responsible for taking up parenting duties. Mallet et al. state that youth experience significant stress related to parental substance use and “much of this stress was associated with feelings of responsibility for parenting their younger siblings and/or parent, responsibilities they found particularly difficult to manage with their schooling” (Mallet et al., 2005, p. 194). This stress is multiplied for youth subject to parental substance use in the context of poverty in which the family lacks adequate food and basic needs (Mallet et al., 2005).

The example of substance use demonstrates the complex ways in which factors contributing to homelessness interact. While the individual characteristics and relational circumstances discussed may not lead directly into youth homelessness, when compounded with each other and other factors the entrance into youth homelessness is more likely (Collins, 2013; Gaetz et al., 2016). It is important not to minimize the pathways into youth homelessness as only being comprised of individual and relational factors. Structural and institutional failures are significant causes and will be discussed in depth below.

Structural Factors Contributing to Youth Homelessness

The structural factors that contribute to homelessness include racism, homophobia and neoliberal economic policy and ideology. These factors have implications for what groups are more at risk of homelessness, the length of the transition to adulthood and, what services are provided for struggling youth. Structural factors are often invisible as they are deeply imbedded in society. The systemic nature of these issues means that they are difficult and time-consuming to address.

Internalized Biases: Homophobia and Racism

Experiences of racism and homophobia can force youth to leave their families and communities (Gaetz et al., 2016) as well as place them at greater risk for experiencing the other factors associated with youth homelessness such as poverty, family conflict and child welfare system involvement.

Recall that the NYHS found that 29.5% of participants identify as LGBTQ2S (Gaetz et al., 2016) and the Point in Time Count of Homelessness conducted in Peterborough found that 10% of participants identify as LGBTQ2S. Abramovich (2012, 2013) explains the overrepresentation of LGBTQ2S youth in the youth homelessness population as a result of family conflict surrounding gender identity. Many youth are forced to leave home after coming out (Abramovich, 2012). Unfortunately, shelters often serve to further marginalize LGBTQ2S youth through erasure, violence, and discrimination (Abramovich, 2013). Heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions mean that LGBTQ2S youth are made invisible by shelter intakes and measurement tools that do not account for non-binary identities. LGBTQ2S youth are further discriminated against when shelter spaces are defined by binary gender categories such as gendered washrooms and dorms. Shelter staff often lack knowledge of LGBTQ2S issues and the skill to address homophobia and transphobia. Abramovich (2013) states that the inability of shelters to meet the needs of LGBTQ2S youth means that these youth often feel safer on the streets making it even more difficult to transition out of homelessness. Abramovich (2013) states that provinces and municipalities need to develop LGBTQ2S specific youth homelessness plans that focus on strengthening families, developing LGBTQ2S specific services and spaces, and mandating training for shelter staff.

For Indigenous people the “factors associated with homelessness are connected to the omnipresent concept of colonization” (Baskin, 2007, p. 33). The process of conquering Indigenous peoples and land and economic exploitation has included territorial dispossession and attempts at assimilation via the Canadian state. For many Indigenous communities, the loss of traditional lands meant the loss of food sources, the means to sustain the community, economic possibility, and livelihood. Colonization imposed institutions such as residential schools that disrupted the transference of parenting skills and led to intergenerational trauma. Homeless Indigenous youth have cited experiences of overt racism in CAS care that made most youth feel forced to leave their foster and group homes (Baskin, 2007). Klodawsky et al. (2006) demonstrate the ways in which racialized and gendered differences influence a range of experiences including violence, school involvement, and wages. The authors found that in a study of youth experiencing homelessness in Ottawa, Ontario Indigenous youth were more at risk for violence and less likely to be attending school (Klodawsky et al., 2006). Systemic racism bred by a history of colonialism is both a direct and indirect pathway into youth homelessness.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberal policy and the accompanying ideology have significant implications for youth homelessness. Gaetz (2010) identifies neoliberalism as the ideological and economic force underscoring the homelessness crisis in Canada. Neoliberalism is referred to in this context as the privileging of market relations, deregulation, and privatization (Giroux, 2008). This regime manifested in Canada through the privatization of public goods such as affordable housing and a prioritization of corporate needs over the needs of citizens. Beginning in the 1980’s, the Canadian government shifted policy from the subsidization of affordable housing to the subsidization of home ownership. The federal government terminated spending on affordable housing stock in 1993 (Gaetz, 2010). This shift was justified by the expectation that the private housing market would compensate by providing affordable housing, and that a reduction in corporate taxation would create wealth that ‘trickled-down’ to the poor and middle class (Gaetz, 2010). However, as Gaetz (2010) states, these benefits have never materialized. Rather, neoliberal policies have dismantled the social safety net through the reduction in social spending and direct transfers to citizens. Market principles such as profit-maximization have led to wage stagnation, reduction in benefits, and increased percentage of low wage and precarious jobs (Gaetz, 2010). As Giroux (2008) states, “by constructing the public good as a private good and the needs of the corporate private sector as the only smart investments, neoliberal ideology produces, legitimates, and exacerbates the existence of persistent poverty, inadequate health care, racial apartheid in the inner cities, and growing inequalities between the rich and the poor” (p. 54).

The ideology that precedes, accompanies, and perpetuates neoliberalism is one that holds up the values of equal opportunity and social mobility and subsequently individualizes blame for failures. As previously mentioned, the socioeconomic conditions created by neoliberalism are those of increased poverty and inequality. However, there is a commonly held notion that

individuals are capable of achieving high social status and accumulating wealth should they work hard enough (Jo, 2012; Webster & Perkins, 2001). This means that individuals experiencing poverty in the context of static inequality (Jo, 2012), are expected to take responsibility for the structural conditions in which they exist. Webster and Perkins (2001) state that “the discrepancy between the haves and have-nots is justified by the myth of the “American Dream” which implies that there *is* equal opportunity for every individual to pursue wealth and happiness” (p. 1). In this sense, the conditions of poverty created by neoliberal policy are justified by neoliberal ideology that characterizes these problems as the fault of the individual and occludes structural explanations. Giroux (2008), characterizes this as social Darwinism where-in-which “self-reliance is the ultimate virtue” (p. 87) and public issues become the responsibility of private individuals.

Neoliberalism has exacerbated poverty and made affordable housing difficult to access. Cheng et al. (2013) demonstrate how a lack of affordable housing contributes to youth homelessness. In a sample of 685 youth, difficulty accessing housing was the factor most strongly associated with transitions into and out of homelessness (Cheng et al., 2013). These issues alone are enough to foster individual and relational circumstances such as family instability and conflict that contribute to youth homelessness. Neoliberalism is further implicated in the pathways into youth homelessness in the lengthening of the transition to adulthood. The transition from youth to adulthood has been elongated throughout the latter half of the 20th century (Cote & Bynner, 2008). Cote and Bynner (2008) attribute this to the decreased financial stability associated with neoliberalism. As Gaetz et al. (2016) state, “if it is difficult for housed youth to move out and live independently, for young people who are forced to leave or who exit institutional care with little or no family support, the challenges of obtaining and maintaining stable housing and an adequate income are that much greater” (p. 35).

Neoliberalism expects youth to mitigate their own conditions of marginalization including a lack of family support. Policies directed at struggling youth focus on self-sufficiency rather than self-determination and interdependence (Klodawsky et al., 2006). Market ideology breeds policies that construct youth narrowly as potential workers without addressing the other areas of their lives such as housing and emotional well-being (Klodawsky et al., 2006). Klodawsky et al. (2006) state that “care is generally not part of current senior government agendas geared to marginalized youth and that as a result, there is a gap in funding that supports efforts of community organizations who work with homeless youth” (p. 420). The consequences of a lack of care means that youth experiencing the individual and relational factors that contribute to youth homelessness do not have access to the resources necessary to forge a new path.

Neoliberal economics, ideology, and policy influence the pathways into youth homelessness in many ways. A lack of social infrastructure and affordable housing means that youth experiencing the contributing factors to homelessness may not have access to the support and services they need. Increased educational requirements for jobs, increase in job precariousness and low wages make it difficult for youth to establish the financial stability necessary to transition into adulthood. Neoliberal ideology shifts the lens through which these issues are perceived from social to individual, subsequently blaming the inability to thrive in inherently unequal conditions

on the individual. This ideology is especially harmful for LGBTQ2S and racialized groups as the rhetoric of ‘being successful’ does not account for the issues of marginalization that these groups face. The resulting policies seek to increase youth’s employability without addressing other areas in which they may be struggling. Neoliberalism is intertwined with many factors that contribute to youth homelessness and weaves itself into the complexity of the pathways.

Institutional Factors Contributing to Youth Homelessness

Institutions and failed inter-institutional relations are responsible for a steady stream of youth entering homelessness (Nichols, 2016). As Nichols (2016) suggests, the failures of these institutions to adequately meet the needs of their clients, means that involvement with certain institutions can increase marginalization and the likelihood of entering homelessness. These institutions include the child welfare system, the criminal justice system, and the inpatient mental health system, among others.

Inpatient Mental Health System

The inpatient mental health system acts as a pathway into youth homelessness, through the discharge of patients from hospital psychiatric wards into homelessness directly or indirectly through homeless shelters (Nichols, 2016). In a survey of 98 homeless individuals who were inpatients at a hospital in the year prior to the study, only 44% reported that their housing was discussed during their stay (Doran et al., 2015). Of these participants, 67% were discharged to a shelter, 21% to friends or family, and 11% to the street (Doran et al., 2015). In 2002, Forchuk, Russell, Kingston-Macclure, Turner and Dill (2006) conducted a descriptive analysis of discharge data in London, Ontario. Of 2678 discharges, 167 were labelled ‘No Fixed Address’ (Forchuk et al., 2006). Data from shelters collected during the same period indicated 194 instances of individuals being discharged from hospital to shelter. These findings are a result of both individual and systemic issues that contribute to inadequate discharge planning. Forchuk et al. (2008) states that an individuals’ lack of life-skills, non-compliance to medical advice, symptoms of paranoia, and self-discharge complicates their ability to obtain housing. Systemically, an inadequate number of psychiatric beds results in individuals being discharged without housing plans to make room for patients in crisis (Forchuk et al 2006; Forchuk et al., 2008). A lack of affordable and appropriate housing means that it is difficult to procure housing and rent supplements during a patient’s stay (Forchuk et al., 2006; Forchuk et al., 2008).

When individuals are discharged into housing instability, their mental health issues are exacerbated (Nichols, 2016). Shelters often have a low staff-to-resident ratio and lack the capacity to respond to the needs of individuals with complex mental health issues (Forchuk et al., 2006; Nichols, 2016). Residents of shelters lack privacy and can be exposed to triggering activities such as the drug and sex trade (Forchuk et al., 2006). Forchuk et al. (2006) state that “practitioners need to realize that a shelter is not an appropriate ‘address’ for discharging individuals recovering from

mental illness” (p. 306). This statement reflects what Nichols (2016) deems as a lack of knowledge on the part of hospital staff about the homelessness sector’s ability to adequately serve individuals living with mental health issues.

The intersectoral gap between the inpatient mental health system and the housing and homelessness system was addressed in a study by Forchuk et al. (2008). The research team developed an intervention that involved a CMHA (Canadian Mental Health Association) housing worker assigned to psychiatric patient participants as well as the coordination of immediate access to a rent supplement (Forchuk et al., 2008). This intervention successfully prevented repeat hospital visits and homelessness for 14 participants 6 months after being discharged from hospital (Forchuk et al., 2008). This intervention demonstrates the service coordination necessary to prevent the pathway from the inpatient mental health system to homelessness.

Child Welfare System

The relationship between involvement with the child welfare system and youth homelessness is well documented in the literature (Baskin, 2007; Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010; Collins, 2013; Dworsky & Courtney, 2009; Gaetz et al., 2016; Karabanow & Naylor, 2013; Klodawsky et al., 2006; Mann et al., 2007; Nichols, 2013, 2016;). The NYHS found that 57.8% of youth surveyed had some involvement with the child welfare system (Gaetz et al., 2016). This involvement can range from families being investigated by child welfare agencies to youth having to leave home to live in group or foster homes. Karabanow and Naylor (2013) found that of 128 youth surveyed from cities across Canada, over 50% entered homelessness after living in a group home or foster home. In a sample of 321 young people that were formerly in care, 14% had spent one or more nights homeless (Dworsky & Courtney, 2009). Of the 42 youth in this study that had experienced homelessness after exiting care, the authors found a statistically significant relationship between homelessness and experiences of neglect and abuse prior to being in care. This suggests that the relational variables of experiences of abuse combined with the experience of child welfare system involvement increase the likelihood of experiencing homelessness (Dworsky, & Courtney, 2009; Gaetz et al., 2016; Mann et al., 2007). The relationship between child welfare system involvement and youth homelessness could also be indicative of the child welfare system failing to adequately support youth while in care.

The child welfare system’s failure to adequately support youth in care was cited by Baskin (2007) as contributing to youth homelessness specifically for Indigenous youth. Of 24 homeless Indigenous youth in Toronto, most participants grew up in the care of, or were involved with, Children’s Aid Societies. Most participants experienced instability as they were transferred from home to home or between foster and group homes and family members. Participants experienced abuse, neglect and racism while in the care of the state (Baskin, 2007). Other research indicates that homeless youth experienced “uncaring, abusive, and unstable” (Karabanow & Naylor, 2013, p. 41) care and identified the experience of moving from home to home as making them feel unwanted or like a delinquent. For youth who have likely been subject to difficult family situations,

the additional trauma of being removed from the home and subject to more instability, neglect, and abuse has a compounding effect on their well-being. It is also important to note that while Indigenous youth are more likely than racialized communities and white youth to be involved with the child welfare system, they are not more likely to report abuse (Gaetz et al., 2016).

Nichols (2013) describes the way in which child welfare policy in Ontario shapes youths' experiences of homelessness. The child welfare system is a complex institution that is poorly understood by its' users (Nichols, 2013). As Nichols (2013, 2016) demonstrates, youth are often discharged from care into homelessness especially when emergency shelters are used as long term solutions for youth in care with barriers to housing. The reliance on emergency shelters for 'hard to house' youth in care demonstrates the lack of housing options for youth involved with the child welfare system. Nichols cites a case manager's explanation that Children's Aid Societies are reluctant to adopt someone as a crown ward when they are 15 or 16 (Nicholls, 2013). Instead, Societies opt for temporary care agreements that last a maximum of 6 months. According to the Child Family Services Act youth are no longer deemed to be children after age 16 (R.S.O. 1990, c. C.11 s. 37(1)). This means that struggling youth are often not given adequate support past the age of 16. For youth who are crown wards, Nichols (2013) identifies that many youth are not considered to be good candidates for the Extended Care and Maintenance agreement with CAS that provides support beyond age 18 because they are hard to serve (Nichols, 2013).

Dworksy and Courtney (2009) demonstrate the negative outcomes of ending support at age 18. The authors found that one in seven young people not still in care at age 19 had experienced homelessness, justifying the need for extended care and support beyond age 16. The reliance on emergency shelters as solutions for hard to house youth and the lack of support provided to transition aged youth is an institutional gap that results in youth exiting care and being discharged into homelessness without a concrete plan in place.

Criminal Justice System

The relationship between youth homelessness and the criminal justice system is complex in that the criminal justice system can be implicated as a pathway into homelessness and homelessness can act as a pathway into the criminal justice system (Baskin, 2007; Cheng et al., 2013; Mann et al., 2007; Nichols, 2016; O'Grady, Gaetz, & Buccieri, 2011). The intersectoral gap between the criminal justice system and the housing and homelessness sector means that youth who become involved in the system often enter homelessness (Nichols, 2016). The experience of homelessness lends itself to increased attention from the criminal justice system as a result of policies such as the Ontario Safe Streets Act as well as the disproportionate enforcement of laws against offences such as loitering (O'Grady, Gaetz, & Buccieri, 2011).

For youth, involvement in the criminal justice system can exacerbate family conflict. Youth discharged from custody without a plan often become homeless and are re-criminalized as a result. Nichols (2016) states that the criminal justice system lacks "appropriate and coordinated diversion and re-entry supports' (Nichols, 2016, p. 246). The lack of coordination between the justice system

and the housing and homelessness sector means that youth often become homeless after being charged. As families of charged youth are not offered mediation services, conflict between youth and their families exacerbated by criminal justice system involvement means that youth who have been charged are often not welcome at home (Nichols, 2016). Without pre-trial housing options, youth are detained on remand before being convicted (Nichols, 2016).

For youth who are convicted, the justice system's community reintegration process fails to support successful transitions out of the system. Youth often go to court and do not go back to custody, making discharges unplanned and uncoordinated (Nichols, 2016). Because of a lack of pre-trial-detention housing options, unplanned releases, and inaccessible programming, youth are often discharged to the streets (Nichols, 2016) making the criminal justice system a pipeline into youth homelessness.

Homeless youth are subject to criminalization in part as a result of being forced to carry out private activities in public spaces (O'Grady, Gaetz & Buccieri, 2011). Homeless youth and homeless individuals generally are villainized by the media, politicians, and the general public as threats to public order and portrayed as needing to be controlled. This narrative can be attributed to the neoliberal ideology discussed earlier that individualizes the blame for social problems such as homelessness. These narratives inform and motivate policies such as the Ontario Safe Streets Act that criminalizes survival activities such as panhandling and squeegeeing. In a study that surveyed 244 homeless youth in Toronto, O'Grady, Gaetz & Buccieri (2011) determined that the participants were subject to increased negative police attention. The study found that 59.8% of participants were subject to a 'stop and search', 36.8% had been asked to 'move on', 33% had been ticketed for offenses such as drinking in public and loitering, and 44% had been arrested (O'Grady, Gaetz & Buccieri, 2011). Most participants perceived this attention to be the result of appearing 'young and homeless' (O'Grady, Gaetz & Buccieri, 2011). The criminalization of homelessness results in the targeting of homeless youth before they enter the justice system. The cycle of criminal justice system involvement is initiated when youth are discharged to a place of high visibility and criminalization. Inadequate discharge planning and subsequent homelessness makes it more likely that a young person will be in contact with the justice system again as a result of street involvement and breaches of probation (Nichols, 2016).

Mann et al. (2007) provide a more critical analysis of the role of the criminal justice system in youth homelessness. Through a textual analysis, the authors criticize the nature of the Youth Criminal Justice Act as it uses the constructs of community, partners, and responsibility to occlude state responsibility for crime and responsabilizes youth for their own marginalization. Through research with 85 youth and their interactions with the YCJA, the authors demonstrate the ways in which the 'partners' identified in the YCJA fail to serve vulnerable youth. Police are not perceived as a source of protection from violence rather a catalyst to further harm; CAS support is not offered in appropriate ways for youth age 16 – 18; schools offered some positive support through the Child and Youth Worker on staff, however punitive policies often result in expulsion for infractions such as poor attendance and student welfare is inaccessible to youth 16 – 18 lacking a trusting adult to

act as a trustee (Mann et al., 2007). The authors argue that the Youth Criminal Justice Act further alienates youth by responsabilizing youth rather than giving them voice and supporting them.

The literature on pathways into youth homelessness is extensive. It provides a comprehensive picture of the ways in which individual, relational, structural, and institutional factors intersect to result in homelessness. Individual and relational factors correlated with youth homelessness include difficult family situations characterized by conflict and abuse. Structural factors, such as racism and neoliberalism that create conditions of inequality and subsequently place the blame on individual actors for social problems, make it difficult for youth lacking the support of a family to thrive. Gaps between and failures of institutions such as the criminal justice system, child welfare system, and inpatient mental health system, mean that youth are often discharged from these institutions into homelessness. The complex interactions of these factors result in unique pathways into youth homelessness. Following the discussion on the methodology used in this research, the remaining chapters will use the narratives of individuals that experienced youth homelessness in Peterborough to illuminate the key themes identified in the literature.

Methodology

This research was developed with the support of the City of Peterborough Social Services Division. Following the release of ‘Giving Voice ... Peterborough’s 2016 Point-in-Time Count of Homelessness’, Dorothy Olver, City of Peterborough Social Services Division Program Manager and Linda Mitchelson, City of Peterborough Social Services Division Manager, sought a student through Dr. Buccieri to conduct further analysis of the report’s findings. Dr. Buccieri is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Trent University and has an on-going research partnership with the City of Peterborough in relation to housing and homelessness. One of the Point-in-Time Count findings that was of interest to the City is that 64% of participants entered homelessness before age 26 (United Way Peterborough & District, 2016). This finding demonstrates the prevalence of youth homelessness in Peterborough as well as the necessity of understanding the pathways into youth homelessness in order to develop effective prevention strategies. The research questions were developed and approved by the City of Peterborough Social Services Division and the findings will be presented to the City, the United Way, and other community stakeholders. The steps taken throughout this project are outlined below.

Literature Review

A review of contemporary Canadian scholarly literature was conducted to determine the known pathways into youth homelessness that are recognized in Canada. This review included both quantitative and qualitative approaches that investigate a range of institutional, structural,

individual and relational factors. In addition, some literature on adolescent development in the current socioeconomic context as well as literature on arts-based interviewing was reviewed. The review of the literature informed the questions that were developed for the semi-structured interviews which will be discussed in depth below.

Ethics Process

In order to conduct interviews with human participants, this research was required to undergo an ethics application and review process through the Department of Sociology at Trent University. An ethics application was filled out that provided a description of the project, the recruitment process, level of risk to participants, risk mitigation measures, and information about the level of confidentiality and anonymity guaranteed to participants. The application required appendices of the recruitment script, an interview guide, and the forms requiring participant signatures that detailed informed consent, consent for use of art-work, and confirmation of receipt of the honorarium.

The ethics application also disclosed the potential conflict of interest in the student researcher's dual role as a current employee at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families (YES) which was the site of participant recruitment. As an employee conducting research with former residents of the YES Shelter, there was a potential risk of harm to participants in that they may have perceived that participation would influence their relationship with the organization. This was mitigated by ensuring that participants were aware that the research was being conducted by a YES employee and that the research was separate from the researcher's employment duties at YES. This was communicated to participants in the recruitment script, orally at the beginning of each interview as part of the informed consent form, and once was reiterated during an interview with a participant. The researcher's employment at the site of recruitment may have influenced the data in that participants may have tailored their answers accordingly. Participants who discussed YES were open about offering their criticisms of the organization despite not being asked directly about experiences at YES. This suggests that there was minimal influence on the data.

Upon review of the ethics application, the student researcher was required to clarify several aspects of the research and provide letters of support from the City of Peterborough and the YES Shelter for Youth and Families. The letter of support from YES included a statement of confidence from the Executive Director that the research could be conducted without harm to the researcher's professional relationships. The second submission of the ethics application included a clarified description of how the project came about, the way in which art would be used in the research, and the recruitment criteria. The researcher was also required to coordinate an on-call crisis support worker from YES at the time of the interviews. This was to mitigate the risk of harm to participants should they wish to speak to someone following the interview for emotional support. After the second revision of the ethics application, the research was approved.

Participants

The participants in this research were three formerly homeless individuals. Each participant was recruited through the YES Shelter for Youth and Families. YES serves clients aged 16-24 and families with children. It is the only shelter in Peterborough that serves individuals younger than 18 and the only shelter that accepts men with children. YES was chosen as the site of recruitment as it is the primary homeless-youth serving organization in Peterborough and the most convenient way of connecting with individuals that experienced homelessness before age 26. Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling method. They were required to meet the criteria of: 1. Not having resided at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families for at least 6 months 2. Having stable housing for at least 30 days prior to recruitment 3. Have the ability to reflect on life experiences without foreseeably invoking emotional crisis and 4. Have the ability to give informed consent to participate. These criteria were developed in order to reduce the vulnerability of the participants. Individuals that are housed are significantly less vulnerable than individuals currently experiencing homelessness.

The original recruitment strategy was to employ the three outreach workers at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families. The outreach workers were provided with the recruitment script and participant criteria. They were asked to forward the names of individuals interested in participating to the researcher. The researcher was to conduct the final recruitment to protect participant confidentiality. However, in two instances the individuals suggested by the outreach workers were not eligible to participate, and in another, the participant did not attend the scheduled interview time. As a result of these challenges, the recruitment strategy was changed to recruiting participants through the food bank at the YES Shelter. This allowed for recruitment from a larger pool of individuals. The food bank is open a few days a week to former residents of the shelter. The YES employee working during food bank hours was provided with the recruitment script and asked to forward the names of interested individuals to the researcher. Three of these individuals met all four eligibility requirements to participate.

The ages of the participants ranged from early 20's to late 40's. One participant was female and two were male. Their first experiences of homelessness occurred between the ages of 13 and 16. This sample is useful in exploring the pathways into youth homelessness in Peterborough as it provides three case studies that illuminate what is known about pathways into youth homelessness in the literature. Participants were asked to identify, in writing, whether they wanted to be identified by their real name or a pseudonym in this project. All participant choices have been respected in this write-up.

The limitation of the sample is that the data is not generalizable to all experiences of youth homelessness in Peterborough. However, the limited number of participants allows for a more detailed description of their experiences which is useful for understanding the complex processes and situations that lead to youth homelessness.

Research Setting

The research took place in boardroom in a building on City of Peterborough property. The building is located downtown and was easily accessible to participants. The boardroom in which the interviews took place was private to protect the confidentiality of participants. It contained a long table, several chairs, and a kitchenette so that coffee and water could be offered during the interviews. The boardroom is modern and well maintained. The interviews were conducted by the student researcher. Dr. Buccieri was present for all interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

The methodology employed was arts-based interviewing. Arts-related research “uses the arts, in the broadest sense, to explore, understand and represent human action and experience” (Baden & Wimpenny, 2014, p. 1). Arts-related research can take many forms. This research is both arts-based and arts-informed. The interview process was arts-based as it included the creation of art to facilitate understanding of participant experience. The way in which the findings are represented includes the art created during the interviews, making the findings arts-informed. The purpose of using arts-related research in this study was to generate knowledge about participant experience, make knowledge accessible, and to give participants agency in the portrayal of their narratives. Arts-based research has been used in other research with marginalized participants as a successful method facilitating the representation of participant experiences (De Leon, Ashbourne, & Robson, 2015; Sjollema, Hordyk, Walsh, Hanley, & Ives, 2012).

The material used was modelling clay. Modelling clay was chosen as a low barrier material that does not require artistic skill to engage with. Participants were asked at the beginning of the interviews to make something that represents home. Throughout the interview, both the participants and the interviewer worked with the clay. The interviewer asked the participants questions while they worked. Participants were asked to revisit their art at the end of the interview and provide a caption for it. With the permission of the participants, the interviewer took a picture of each piece of art that was created. When presented with this prompt all three participants initially expressed that it would be difficult to use clay to represent the concept of home, but all then proceeded to create one or more designs. One participant enjoyed the activity so much that they decided to take the box of clay with them at the end of the interview. Two of the three participants engaged by creating several things symbolic of home. One of the participants created a physical representation of a house. Analysis of the art will be discussed in the participant chapters.

Interviews were chosen over other research methods as a means to explore the complexity of the pathways into youth homelessness. Quantitative analysis would not have produced an adequate depiction of the ways in which the factors leading to youth homelessness intersect. The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed for participants to direct the interviews and describe the aspects of their experience they perceive as relevant to their pathway into homelessness. The interview guide included questions that asked about participant’s childhood,

relationships with parents and guardians, experiences with CAS, school, their first experience of homelessness, and what participants identified as leading to their first experience. These questions, informed by the review of the literature, probed participants on their experiences of the individual, relational, structural, and institutional factors that lead to youth homelessness. This method allowed for a nuanced, non-linear description that is characteristic of pathways into youth homelessness. Interviews were recorded by the researcher and notes were taken by Professor Buccieri. Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim by the interviewer.

The written transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed for consistent themes. Given the small number of participants, the interviews were analyzed individually. The student researcher and Dr. Buccieri sat together in a conference room to conduct collaborative coding. Using notes taken by Dr. Buccieri during each interview as well as printed transcripts of each interview, the interviews were analyzed line by line through discussion of what each statement represented. Through this analysis, the student researcher and Dr. Buccieri identified themes reflected in the literature as well as a central theme of each interview. Recommendations were discussed throughout this process.

The next section will discuss the analysis of each participants' pathway into youth homelessness. The first chapter discusses James' experience of struggling in the context of poverty. His narrative demonstrates the way in which poverty has the potential to strain family relationships, limit resources, and create family conflict and subsequent homelessness. The second chapter depicts Salena's story of surviving circumstances beyond her control. Salena's story is an example of the way in which home can be a place of violence and rejection. Salena's experience since entering homelessness has been shaped by her relationship with the child welfare system as she attempts to regain custody of her daughter. The last chapter discusses Sean's story of delinquency and highlights the relationship identified in the literature between the criminal justice system and youth homelessness. These chapters are followed by recommendations to the City of Peterborough and its partners on ways to prevent entrance into youth homelessness.

James' Story of Struggling in the Context of Poverty: Care and Self-Reliance

James is a cisgendered male in his early 20's. He grew up in a small town outside of Peterborough and moved to Peterborough as a teenager. His first entrance into homelessness was at age 16. Since this time, he has experienced homelessness three additional times. One of those times occurred after being released from custody without a discharge plan. James is now housed and lives with his mom who moved in with him after being evicted from her own house. For James, the notion of care is central to his pathway into and out of homelessness. James' home-life was characterized by a lack of both material and emotional care in the context of poverty. This lack of care led to his first entrance into homelessness. For James, as well as for other youth experiencing homelessness,

being rehoused has meant caring for himself and the internalization of self-reliance as “the ultimate virtue” (Giroux, 2008). James’ pathway highlights what has been established in the literature about the connection between difficult family situations, a lack of support, poverty, and experiences of youth homelessness.

Home as Related to Notions of Care

When invited to make something from clay that represents home, James made a fishing rod. James stated that he grew up near a lake and “had a lot of time to go out and do fishing and stuff like that.” When prompted to describe his art James stated “it’s just a fishing rod.” However, when contextualized with his depiction of his adolescence, the fishing rod is symbolic of time spent in solitude “fending” for himself.



Photo 1: “It’s just a fishing rod”

Throughout the interview, James referred to care as related to both emotional support and material resources. In talking about what led up to his first entrance into homelessness, James spoke about his mom’s inability to care for him as a result of her work schedule and substance use. He stated, “that’s how I became homeless and she was going through a lot of stress; she was working and stuff and couldn’t really take care of anybody cause she was working the whole time. And I had to stay home the whole time and just do nothing and just fend for myself. I didn’t really want to stay there anyway to be honest.” James’ feelings of boredom, loneliness, and isolation are evident in this statement. The absence of his Mom resulted in James spending long periods of time alone. James stated “I don’t want to just sit there in my house and just be like sit there and like, like coagulate ... I want to be good.”

He implies that a lack of support from an adult made it hard for him to move forward. James was forced to navigate adolescence without the presence of a caring and supportive adult. When asked whether there were any other adults that provided support he stated “nah, I was the only one.” In this statement, he identifies himself as an adult, demonstrating the necessity that he took responsibility for himself in his adolescence. James identified that if he was provided with the support of a caring adult, he may not have experienced homelessness. He stated, “maybe if someone was, like, there for me, like if she had a babysitter or someone I could talk to while she was at work.” James’ experience of homelessness following an unsupportive family relationship is a connection supported in the literature. The findings from van den Bree et al.’s (2009) population based study demonstrate the connection between poor family relationships characterized by lack of support, care and affection, and youth homelessness.

James also identifies care as related to the provision of material resources. He stated that before he became homeless his mom was “not really doing the best to take care of me, so I had to like get my own school supplies and stuff like that.” This statement is indicative of a family struggling in the context of poverty. Despite working all the time, James’ mother’s income was not enough to provide the necessities. As a result, James had to provide these things for himself. The connection between James’ fishing rod as a representation of home and his experiences of home as lonely and lacking material resources is evident. James emphasizes his mom’s inability to care for him as a central theme of his adolescence and the factor that led to his first experience of homelessness.

Difficult Family Situation

James’ experience of not being cared for coincided with his difficult family situation. When asked about what it was like to be a teenager in his home, James stated “it was actually pretty stressful.” James’ attributes this stress to his younger brother with autism, his mom’s substance use, and the instability of a blended family. James stated, “so my little brother has autism so I had to live with him basically throughout my whole teenage years, which is pretty stressful.” James spoke about how this put strain on the relationship with his mom and his stepdad. He stated, “uh she was like drinking a lot and not really doing the best to take care of me.” This suggests that the family’s limited emotional and physical resources were allocated to James’ younger brother, leaving James to look after himself.

This experience is similar to what Mallet et al. (2005) found in a study of the relationship between substance use and pathways into youth homelessness. Mallet cites the significant stress that youth with substance using parents experience when forced to take up parenting responsibilities for themselves or for siblings. This stress is amplified in the context of poverty when the family lacks adequate food and basic needs. James’ family’s struggle was evident to outsiders as eventually James’ brother was apprehended by the Children’s Aid Society.

James experienced significant instability which is represented in his second piece of art. The second item that James created was a fish tank. The fish tank was present in James' childhood homes and is a fixture in his home now. James' fish tank represents an element of consistency in an otherwise physically and emotionally unstable adolescence.



Photo 2: James' Fish tank: "It's the same one I had from a while ago"

When asked whether there was anything else that reminded him of home James stated "not really of home-home cause I've had a lot of homes, right? Too many to make, right?" This is evidence of the physical instability that characterized James' adolescence and is present in his current housing situation. In speaking about his relationships with his parents, James identified the challenges of a blended family. James stated that his mom would "go through all these stepdads and it would be really messed up for me too."

James' experiences of a lack of care in the context of poverty, and difficult family situations characterized by instability and parental substance use, led to a relationship breakdown and his first experience of homelessness. James stated that "the reason why I was homeless is cause, like, me and my mom were going through a lot of stress right and I didn't want to stay with her." He also stated that "the first time I left home my mom kind of just like kicked me out. Like, straight on the streets, right". This situation was the outcome of a cascading number of factors that contributed to James' entrance into homelessness.

James' pathway into youth homelessness highlights key themes in the literature. Family conflict is frequently cited as contributing to youth homelessness (Collins, 2013; Gaetz et al., 2016; Hyde, 2005; Klodawsky et al., 2006; Mallet, Rosenthal & Keys, 2005), as well as family instability (Collins, 2013; Hyde, 2005), physical and emotional neglect in the context of poverty (Gaetz et al., 2016), and parental substance use (Mallet et al., 2005). James' experiences of stress associated

with his mom's substance use are consistent with Mallet et al.'s (2005) findings of the relationship between parental substance use, family conflict, and subsequent youth homelessness. In Mallet et al.'s (2005) study of the participants who identified substance use as contributing to their homelessness, one quarter attributed their homelessness to parental substance use. James' narrative demonstrates the way in which poverty can lead to feelings of not being cared for and the ways that difficult family situations result in strained relationships and potential relationship breakdown.

Becoming Housed: Internalizing Self-Reliance as the 'Ultimate Virtue'

A lack of care characterized James' adolescence and led to his first experience of homelessness. Taking up the responsibility of caring for himself is what James identifies as central to his experience of being housed. Since his first experience of homelessness, James has been homeless three times. One of those times was the result of being discharged from custody without a discharge plan. James maintains a complex relationship with his mother, who now lives with him as a result of her own homelessness. In describing this relationship, James asserts his independence from his mom, despite her paying the rent. This trajectory demonstrates that James has experienced episodic homelessness, criminalization, and instability since his first entrance into homelessness.

Throughout the interview James spoke of gaining independence, 'smartening up', and planning in relation to his current housing situation, which demonstrates an internalization of neoliberal ideology. The only agencies from which James has received support are a local employment counselling centre and the YES Shelter for Youth and Families. James described obtaining housing when he stated, "I found my own place and then from there I've just been working and stuff like that, like not a whole lot. It's kind of boring but you try and do what you can, right?" This demonstrates the character of the supports that are offered to youth experiencing homelessness, as they often focus on youth as potential workers (Klodawsky et al., 2006).

James expressed pride in his ability to have maintained his current housing for four months. He stated, "yeah I've smartened up, I've kept this one for almost four months now, so it's been pretty good for me there." James' definition of home has changed as he has developed the capacity to provide for himself. When asked whether home means something different now than when he was younger, he replied, "Um, yeah it does cause when I was home when I was younger I had everything just given to me right? But now I have to go home and put stuff in my own house right or there's going to be nothing there." This is evidence of the internalization of 'self-reliance as the ultimate virtue' (Giroux, 2008). In the context of poverty and marginalization, James locates himself as responsible for providing the material resources necessary to create a home. This individualization is also evident in James' statement that "it's good to plan, that could be the reason why people are homeless is cause they don't think ahead." James reflects the neoliberal ideology that places blame on the individual for social problems.

In describing his current living situation, James is insistent that his mom lives with him and not the other way around. While making his fish tank James stated:

It's the same one I had from a while ago so my mom had one at her house and then she actually got evicted from her house too, so she is homeless and now she's at my house cause I'm taking care of her and she brought my fish. So she brought her fish over to my house, so yeah it's just been sitting at my house now and I've been taking care of it so yeah that's why I made that.

The subsequent exchange demonstrates the importance of establishing his sense of independence from his mom despite them still living together:

Interviewer – So your mom's staying with you right now?

James – Yeah! Legit yeah. Well, she's not really staying with me; she's paying rent to stay there, but like I can't like take care of her so she has to take care of herself. She can stay there, but yeah

Interviewer – Yeah um, is that, does your landlord know about her staying there?

James – Yeah, she's the one that's paying him

Interviewer – Ohhh ok, ok so, so you're back living with your mom

James – Um no no no no no she's living with me.

Interviewer – Ok

James - Yeah, I've had my house for four months and then right at the fourth month she just moved in so, I don't really say that I live with her but...

Interviewer – She lives with you

James – Yeah, I do live with her but I don't *live* with her (*laughs*)

Interviewer – Yeah

James – Yeah, it's kinda hard to explain

The observation that James has internalized the virtue of self-reliance is not to discount James' efforts to maintain his housing nor to minimize the importance of developing the skills necessary for independent living. Rather this observation serves to demonstrate that despite James' lifetime of marginalization at the hands of factors outside of his control, internalization of neoliberal policy and ideology have made him the sole actor in his narrative.

James' pathway into homelessness highlights the themes in the literature of difficult family situations and instability in the context of poverty, the role of substance use as a factor in family dissolution, the challenges of family reorganization, and a subsequent lack of support. His conception of his experiences involves not being cared for and developing the ability to care for himself in order to maintain his housing. This demonstrates the ways in which neoliberal ideology is adopted and how the virtue of self-reliance is internalized.

Salena's Story of Control, Survival, and Navigation: Family and the Child Welfare System

Salena is in her early 20's and identifies as a racialized minority. At 16, she left a difficult family situation characterized by emotional and physical abuse. Since her first entrance into homelessness, she has experienced chronic and episodic homelessness, including lacking a place to sleep as many as twelve times in one month. Salena gave birth to her daughter during this period of instability and her daughter has since been apprehended by CAS. Salena is now housed and temporarily employed but her child remains in the care of the state.

Salena's narrative is peppered with references to choice and control. Salena's perceptions of her control over her circumstances are nuanced in that in some instances she asserts her own agency and in some instances, she expresses feelings of a lack of control over the events in her life. Salena's pathway into homelessness involved a difficult and dangerous family situation in which she was punished for things outside of her control. Since her entrance into homelessness, her life has been characterized by survival with limited resources and navigating complex institutions. Both circumstances limit her ability to choose and reinforce her feelings that the events in her life are the result of chance. Salena's pathway into youth homelessness illuminates issues of difficult family situations, abuse, and involvement with the child welfare system that have been established in the literature.

The theme of choice and control is present in Salena's artwork. One of the pieces Salena created was a dice. She stated that "it could be about my life, like roll a dice and never know what you're going to get." This demonstrates Salena's feeling of a lack of control over the events in her life in that, like rolling a dice, the outcome is a result of chance. Gaetz (2004) relates the experience of homelessness to a lack of control over one's life. When youth are homeless, they are often subject to the perceived whims of institutions such as shelters and the child welfare system and their choices are constrained by limited resources. Gaetz (2004) describes these challenges in his statement that "being without secure shelter has a profound impact on a person's ability to exert greater control over her life and to develop a lifestyle that allows her to eat and sleep with greater consistency, be healthy, and maintain employment" (p. 429). Salena's experiences of control will be explored throughout the chapter.

Photo 3: "It could be about my life like roll a dice and never know what you're going to get."



Abuse and Difficult Family Situations

Salena's representation of home through art provides insight into the way in which her experiences did not conform to the normative notions of home. Recall that for some youth, home is not an idealized space of safety and acceptance but a place of danger (Mallet, 2004). When asked to create something that represents home, Salena made a heart to symbolize her daughter. She stated, "she's the only reason that I'm still here pretty much." Salena's daughter was born after Salena entered homelessness for the first time. For Salena, home began after she left her parents' house.



Photo 4: A symbol of Salena's daughter. "Why I'm still alive, it's basically the whole heart and soul."

Salena's family emphasized the need for achieving high grades in school. From Salena's perspective, grades were a determination of worth. Referring to her parents, Salena stated "grades meant everything. Grades meant like, high expectations. Grades will get you a scholarship. Grades will get you far. If you didn't have a scholarship or an apprenticeship on your shoulders well you didn't really mean jack- squat to them." Salena explained that a learning disability prevented her from being able to achieve the same grades as her two sisters. As a result, her relationship with her parents was characterized by feelings of inadequacy. This is demonstrated by her statement, "I always felt when I was underneath their roof, I always felt like I wasn't good enough. Like, why I am getting compared to my older sister and my younger sister?" Salena also described feeling that

she was not loved or cared about. The experience of family conflict as a result of poor school performance, as well as feelings of emotional neglect are common among youth who experience homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2016; Hyde, 2005; van den Bree et al., 2009). As a result of a learning disability, Salena's control over her school performance was limited. Salena stated that she often wondered what her life would have been like had she not had a learning disability. This demonstrates her feeling that her reality was constrained by circumstances outside of her control.

The experience of family conflict and emotional neglect was compounded by the accompanying physical abuse from her father. Salena described the treatment that she and her sisters received as physical and mental abuse. She stated that it was "just for stupid things; if we didn't listen to him or didn't want to talk or didn't want to eat at the table with him, didn't want to really interact." While Salena's siblings were also subject to this, because of Salena's challenges at school, she experienced especially harsh treatment. Salena's description of the events that took place after receiving a poor grade on an exam are demonstrative of this:

There's only so much you can take physically and mentally. Like for instance, the day before I left [home], I had my exam for math and it was ... I got a 64 percent and that wasn't good enough for them. They wanted me to be like my sisters and get like 80s and 90s but obviously math is my weakness I can't do that. So my father told me 'you need to go to your room' and I went to my room, I didn't lock my door. I didn't have a lock at the time so I tried blocking the doorway but he put force on it ... So he got agitated and I panicked and my sisters were in the other room listening to it so I was kind of yelling 'help' and they don't help and I have my mom on my shoulder looking away and my dad jams me into the window and its one of those windows that you have to turn the knob so I had that jammed into my back and so I pushed him and the minute I pushed him it was a different story. After that I was on the floor.

While Salena mentioned several instances of physical abuse, she described the above as a definitive event in her pathway into homelessness. Throughout Salena's adolescence, there were at least two opportunities for intervention. Salena mentioned that her younger sister had reported the abuse to a teacher and CAS was contacted, but nothing came of this. Salena also mentioned one instance of her running away and being returned home by the police. Salena explained that "it was a different story when the police were there" implying that the difficult family situation was not made obvious to the police. The experience of abuse is consistently identified by the literature as contributing to youth homelessness (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010; Collins, 2013; Gaetz et al., 2016; Hyde, 2005; Karabanow & Naylor, 2013; Klodawsky et al., 2006; Slesnick, Zhang, & Brakenhoff, 2016; van den Bree et al., 2009). Recall that reports of both experiencing and witnessing physical, emotional and sexual abuse range from 43% to 65% of homeless youth (Collins, 2013; Klodawsky et al., 2006). Salena's experiences demonstrate one of the ways in which these experiences can be a pathway into youth homelessness. In discussing her decision to

leave home Salena stated, “I got to make my own choices. I got to do my own things. I didn’t have to live up to anybody.” Salena’s entrance into homelessness was an escape from a dangerous home that made her feel inadequate and unworthy of love.

It is important to note that Salena’s understanding of her experience is nuanced. She identifies that she was the victim of circumstances outside of her control, but she also recognizes her agency in the situation. Salena mentioned that she had thoughts of suicide before leaving home as a result of her parents’ treatment. This indicates both the severity of the situation as well as Salena’s attempt to gain control. Salena defines her departure from home as a rebellion. She states, “I rebelled. I didn’t want it anymore. No matter what, I wasn’t good enough.” By understanding herself as a ‘rebel’ Salena gains control over her narrative and rejects the identity of a passive victim. She differentiates herself from the rest of her family in her statement, “I’m the only one in my family that ever ran away, the only one that’s been treated like shit and the only one that had a grandkid. I’m the only one that rebelled so it’s like that’s a lot of ‘I only’ in one sentence. It’s a lot.” The construction of this identity is consistent with Hyde’s (2005) findings that youth leaving abusive homes understand themselves as active agents and not solely victims.

Surviving with Limited Resources

Since entering homelessness, Salena’s experiences have been characterized by surviving without support and shaped by her contact with the child welfare system. In reference to gaining independence since leaving home, Salena stated “it’s like if you only had a flashlight and matches how would you survive?” This analogy demonstrates Salena’s perception that she lacked both material and supportive resources. Salena overtly emphasized this in her statement “I didn’t have supports and I had nowhere else to turn to.” The challenges of surviving without support were exacerbated with the birth of Salena’s daughter. When Salena found out that she was pregnant, she called her mother, who reported the pregnancy to the Children’s Aid Society. Salena’s daughter was born while she and her partner, Nathan, were experiencing homelessness. Salena’s descriptions of parenting highlight several key themes in the literature. Salena experienced parenting challenges as a result of parenting in a public space, parenting without adequate support, and parenting as a young person who experienced childhood abuse.

Salena described her experience of trying to parent in a shelter under the scrutiny of a Children’s Aid Society worker. She stated, “especially when the worker was there you feel more pressured when she’s there and you can’t do what you’d usually do with your kid, like bond with them.” Salena also described an instance in which her daughter suffered a minor fall while the family’s CAS worker was present:

So, I take her out of the play pen and I just put her on the bed for a quick second and I turn around and she accidentally fell down and bonked her head and the CAS worker saw that and heard it and I brought my daughter to the hospital ...It was just a minor fall, that’s what babies do. But no, CAS saw me as a bad mom that didn’t

really watch her kid but I didn't really watch her for a second and I get told that I didn't watch my kid. Like it was bad timing. It was really bad timing.

By describing this event as the result of bad timing, Salena alludes to her perception of the role of chance in her life. Parenting in a shelter meant that the odds were stacked against her as a result of the increased exposure to criticism from authority described by Hausman and Hammen (1993). Recall that young parents involved with CAS in Baskin's (2007) study also felt that they were "under a microscope" (Baskin, 2007, p. 37). By parenting in a public place, Salena was subject to surveillance that she might not have experienced if she was parenting in her own home. Increased exposure to criticism meant that events that occurred as a result of 'bad timing' were more likely to be witnessed, documented, and used as evidence that Salena was an inadequate mother.

As a young mother, emancipated from her own family, Salena did not have the support to develop the skills necessary to successfully parent in the eyes of the Children's Aid Society. Salena's lack of support and resources is demonstrated in her description of an incident in which her daughter, as well as the other children staying in the shelter, got diaper rash from the diapers provided by the shelter:

Now the diapers that they were using I don't know what brand it was, but every single baby on that floor including my daughter had a rash and she was bleeding from her vagina. So I thought she was Cause I was like I've never seen that ever in my entire life.

Salena's shock and confusion about her daughter's diaper rash indicates that she was not exposed to, or provided with, the skills or knowledge to treat it. She also lacked the resources to choose what brand of diaper was best for her daughter. This experience is consistent with Hausman and Hammen's (1993) findings that the stress of parenting in a shelter is intensified for mothers who might lack parenting knowledge and skill. Despite participating in a parenting program, Salena's Children's Aid Society worker was not satisfied with her skill level. Salena stated that, "she wanted more support system for me and I was doing a program down there so that's a community support that I was in with like mother programs and like a bunch of other stuff but she didn't feel like that was enough."

Salena's understanding of her experiences with CAS is that she was targeted as someone who had contact with CAS as a child as a result of the abuse from her parents. Salena stated:

It was very hard. I was never that loved kid and never got that affection and that's probably why they tried targeting me with CAS, with my daughter because as you know it's very hard to show affection when the person never got it. So they probably were wondering 'how are you going to show love and affection to your daughter?'

Salena aptly identified what is suggested by Hausman and Hammen (1993). The authors state that experiences of abuse as a child can inhibit one's ability to create secure, attached relationships with their own children. In this context, the 'matches and a flashlight' that Salena described can be understood as the limited tools that she was expected to use to thrive as a parent. Unfortunately, the limited tools were not enough to satisfy CAS's expectations. The family's CAS worker deemed that to maintain custody of their daughter, Salena and Nathan had to move in with Nathan's parents so they could be supervised. Eventually, the relationship between Nathan's parents and the couple broke down and they were asked to leave. This meant the apprehension of their daughter. Salena describes the lack of control over the apprehension of daughter in this scenario:

They told us we could not carry my daughter with us otherwise she gets apprehended from us. You cannot carry her and you cannot be with her and you cannot stay in the house with her. Where were we to go? We couldn't go to a shelter, we couldn't stay in that house with her, we couldn't even have our daughter, bring her anywhere. Where the hell are we supposed to go? Try having two cops escort you from that house, outside the premises. That's hard. I had to leave my daughter there and I can't take her. That's hard. That's what I had to do. And they tell me that I gave up on my daughter. I didn't give up on my daughter. I was told that I had to do that.

Salena's perception of her lack of choice and control in this situation is evident. The circumstances in which she gave birth to her daughter meant that she was subject to increased scrutiny, Salena's limited parenting resources meant that CAS viewed her as an inadequate mother despite her strides to improve her parenting skills, and a relationship breakdown forced her back into homelessness without her daughter.

Navigating Complex Institutions: The CAS Forest

Since her daughter's apprehension, Salena has attempted to take the steps necessary to regain custody. She stated "I tried bettering myself. I went from roommates to living on my own. The reason why I left them was because they didn't pass the CPIC, so I need somebody that passes the CPIC in order for me to get my daughter back." She described this process as finding the right path in a forest. She stated, "but I mean that's just some things you have to do to get where you're trying to go. It may not be the right path; it takes a while for you to find the right one. It's like a forest." This analogy demonstrates Salena's struggle to determine what is expected of her and how to meet those expectations. For Salena, the path to regaining custody of her daughter has not been made clear to her. Salena described her interactions with CAS post apprehension as a continuation of her experience while her daughter was in her custody. She stated, "right now she's two years

old and still in CAS care in Toronto and I am still fighting ‘my behind’ for her. It’s hard when you’re doing everything you can and The Society thinks you’re not doing enough.”

Similarly to Salena’s experience of completing the parenting program and still not being deemed an adequate mother, Salena has attempted to do what she thinks of required of her and still fails to meet the expectations of CAS. This was echoed several times throughout the interview, demonstrating the difficulty of navigating a complex institution. Salena’s frustration is evident in her statements, “I just don’t understand what they want from me, what everyone wants from me” and “so it’s more like ‘what else do you need or want from me that I can’t already provide?’”

Not only has Salena encountered challenges in determining what is expected of her, she expressed confusion about the way the system works. She stated:

Would I even be able to have another kid? Or would it be torn out of my arms? Like that’s the amount of trauma that’s kind of taken me and like consumed me basically. Cause I don’t know the rules and guidelines of that. All I know is what I want to plan for our future. Right? Like I don’t know the law quite as well as most people would but I think they’re just tearing away families that kind of need a family but they don’t realize that in the process. So I don’t know.

This statement suggests that the Children’s Aid Society’s policies are inaccessible to its clients. Recall that Nichols (2013) described the way in which institutions such as the child welfare system shape the lives of homeless youth and that they are poorly understood by their clients. This inaccessibility has made it impossible for Salena to discern what she needs to do to get her daughter back, and plan for her future. Her relationship with her mom has also been coloured by the institution as Salena blames her mom for CAS’s involvement in her life. This has prevented any kind of reconciliation between Salena and her family. Her experience since becoming homeless has been shaped by interactions with the Children’s Aid Society.

Salena’s experience demonstrates the way in which control is limited by structural conditions and relationships with institutions. While transitioning into adulthood involves developing the ability to self-determine, for Salena, this transition has been shaped by the Children’s Aid Society. Her narrative was centred around regaining custody of her daughter and taking the steps necessary to do so. Salena’s experience of childhood abuse highlights what has been established in the literature about the relationship between abuse and youth homelessness. Salena’s experience also demonstrates the ways in which homelessness limits resources and subjects one to control by institutions.

Sean's Story of Delinquency and the Criminal Justice System

Sean is in his late 40's. He began spending time away from home when he was 13 and left permanently when he was 16 after becoming involved with the criminal justice system. He has experienced episodic and chronic homelessness and criminal justice system involvement since entering homelessness for the first time. Sean was homeless at the time of the interview but had secured housing for the following month. Sean's pathway into homelessness involved substance use, family conflict, and criminal justice system involvement. This pathway demonstrates the way that issues in lives of youth intersect to lead to homelessness. Throughout the interview, Sean mentions several instances of his friends engaging in the same activities but not experiencing the same consequences. For Sean, a lack of private space to engage in private activities put him at further risk of criminalization. The family conflict around substance use was compounded by involvement in the criminal justice system, and the criminal justice system failed to divert him from incarceration. Sean's pathway highlights key themes in the literature and demonstrates the cascading effect of singular factors that lead to homelessness.

Family Conflict: Pursing Fun and Freedom

Like the other participants, Sean experienced conflict with his parents. He described his parents as "pretty strict so if I didn't do as I was told I was told to get out." The most contentious issue between Sean and his parents was his substance use. Sean described experimenting with substances starting at age 13. He mentioned that among his friends, the mission was often to get high or drunk. He stated, "a lot of my friends, you know, even went to school; that was the mission on the weekends but ... they decided to stay in the school maybe um and I think I was just defiant because my parents were like basically if you didn't do as you're told you're out". This statement suggests that Sean engaged in substance use and other transgressive behaviours as a reaction to his parent's restrictions. This is consistent with Mallet et al.'s (2005) finding that youth identified their drug use as an act of rebellion from strict parents.

While Sean was using, he was not welcome at home. Sean identifies this as when he first entered homelessness. He stated that by the time he was 13 he was:

Not 'homeless' because I could have always went home but I wasn't welcome there if I was intoxicated, I wasn't welcome if I wasn't going to school, I wasn't welcome at all if I wasn't doing as I was told. So where, you know, with a lot of other parents, you know, that I knew at the time, my friends, they were more so parents that said you know 'if you're going to drink then you guys stay in the back yard and drink. I want you to stay here in my back yard and if you're going to drink stay here. You know I don't want you out roaming around and all that stuff.' Where my parents

were like ‘no, no if you’re going to drink not in my house, see you.’ So I decided that I was going to be one of those people that was going to not stay home then.

Throughout the interview, Sean asserted that young people are apt to experiment with substances. Recall that Mallet et al.’s (2005) study found that youth who identified substance use as a factor leading to their homelessness “assumed their entitlement to freedom and independence” (p. 188). Mallet (2005) found that the youth engaged in substance use in the pursuit of fun and freedom and through this act they were “seizing rather than discovering their independence from their parents” (p. 188). In this sense, Sean’s substance use can be understood as a means of becoming independent.

Sean’s parents attempted to address the conflict over his substance use by enrolling him in a program. However, from Sean’s perspective the issue was his parents’ lack of acceptance and understanding and not his substance use. He stated “it felt like cause my mom signed me up it felt like she was saying that I had some sort of mental issue and I needed to go there to deal with that when it wasn’t that at all. It was more so that my other friends at the time had parents that were more accepting and knowing that, you know, your child is going to drink, your child is going to um experiment with stuff, right?” Sean did not attend the program as he “would have been too proud to go to any of that stuff anyways because that would have admitted that there was something wrong.”

Sean’s parents’ approach to substance use contrasted that of his friends’ parents’. Sean noted that when he was not allowed to stay at home:

I had my buddy down the street that, you know, his mom would be like, ‘that’s definitely not right; your parents shouldn’t be kicking you out on the street, just stay here.’ And then from there that’s when I stopped getting in trouble because his mom would say, you know, ‘go down in the basement, keep it quiet ... do whatever you want down there. Just stay home.’ So we stopped getting in trouble right because we weren’t out on the street right we weren’t wandering around getting in trouble.

In this statement, Sean identified that when he lacked a place to stay he was at greater risk of criminalization. His parents kicking him out of his house did not prevent him from using substances, it robbed him of the privacy to engage in private activities. Gaetz (2004) states that “by definition, street youth lack the safety and security that stable housing provides and are typically relegated to living very public lives” (p. 445). Because Sean lacked a permanent residence, he was often using substances in visible places.

Sean went on to discuss that after becoming homeless he lacked support and guidance from adults. He stated that “being a kid, that’s the last place you need to be is out on the street. You know when I was a kid there was no YES Shelter, there was no place to turn like that. And I’ve always said that about the YES ... Cause you’re still a child when you’re a youth... you’re still learning things about life in general.” Sean indicates that he could not predict the long-term

consequences of his actions which is consistent with themes identified in Mallet et al.'s (2005) study. He stated that he “got caught up into the lifestyle of ‘oh this was fun’ right. And I shouldn’t have and it wasn’t fun cause I didn’t realize what time I was wasting right in my life. What valuable time I was wasting.” Sean’s substance use and subsequent family conflict led to increased time spent ‘on the street’ lacking adult mentorship and guidance. It is important to contextualize Sean’s substance use with that of his peers and recognize that because Sean lacked stable housing and supportive adults, the harms associated with substance use were magnified.

Criminal Justice System Involvement

Sean identified an altercation between he and his teacher as a definitive moment in his pathway into homelessness. Sean described a situation in which he attempted to leave his school but was prevented from doing so by one of his teachers. The situation escalated and led to both Sean and the teacher being charged with assault. It was later discovered that the teacher was intoxicated at the time of the incident. Similarly to youth in Mallet et al.'s (2005) study, once Sean was involved with the criminal justice system, the already fragile relationship with his parents broke down. Sean stated:

That basically, that whole situation changed my life because I ended up getting in trouble and being on a probation order and the probation order ended up making it so that every time I got pulled over instead of being taken home, like you know, normally a kid ain’t in trouble if he’s drinking; they take him home say ‘uh your child was found drinking you know here’s a little fine for him, and take him in and sober him up.’ Well I went to jail right.

Sean was subject to the failures in the criminal justice system that Nichols (2016) mentions. Like many youth, after being charged (Nichols, 2016), Sean was unable to return home. Sean’s family was not provided with mediation services or other support and as such Sean was subject to further harm and criminalization. As Sean mentioned, his homelessness meant that his substance use was visible and as a result he was recriminalized for infractions that would have only resulted in a fine for a housed youth (Nichols, 2016). Sean felt that his situation made him a target for police. He stated that “it seemed like every officer in Peterborough knew me” and that “the police were constantly harassing me all the time right like I couldn’t walk down the street without an officer slowing down and seeing what you were doing.” This perception is consistent with that of youth in Mann et al.'s (2007) study, in that the police are viewed as a catalyst to further harm rather than a source of protection.

The criminal justice system also failed to provide Sean with appropriate diversion services (Nichols, 2016). Rather, he was placed on a strict probation order. He stated that:

I can remember the probation order that I got was very, very, very hard on me and I ended up getting 14 probation, uh, charges. Because of that one probation order because it was a two-year long probation order. And uh yeah I ended up getting 14 charges over that one probation order. Right cause you're not supposed to drink, you're not supposed to do this because I wasn't of age to be drinking, so they put all those stipulations on. And what 16-year-old is not going to drink you know or experiment with that stuff?

As a result of Sean's inability to meet his probation requirements he was incarcerated. He stated that he "ended up doing, I don't know how many months, 18 or 19 months and . . . when I left there, I was put right into an adult jail because I still had 13 months left to do adult. So I went right from a youth jail right to an adult." Sean identified this as "the beginning of [his] criminal life." He stated that "you don't learn good things in jail, you know, the people that are there, you know, the people that are there that's all you have is to talk about more crime. Right. A place, a jail ain't a place for youth right." Sean's experience highlights the gap between the criminal justice system and the homelessness sector (Nichols, 2016). Sean's homelessness could have been prevented with adequate family mediation and support. Alternatively, Sean could have been supported to obtain his own housing via his probation requirements, thus reducing the likelihood of re-criminalization. However, Sean's homelessness made him subject to increased visibility and police surveillance and a punitive probation order incited Sean's 'criminal life.'

Throughout the interview, Sean identified aggression and defiance as central to his pathway into homelessness. Sean also mentions that despite his friends displaying the same traits, they did not experience the same consequences. In talking about his peers, he stated, "we were all aggressive. You know we were all 'guy guys' we were all fighters, you know, rough around the edges a little bit. We all had something to prove, you know." When asked what could have prevented his homelessness, Sean stated that if he was less aggressive towards his teacher, maybe that event would not have been so condemning. While Sean individualizes his pathway into homelessness in this statement, he also identifies that "I guess we all growing up, we all had something to prove just a lot of us didn't get in trouble proving it." This demonstrates that Sean's homelessness occurred as a result of a complex intersection of factors and not a single event or individual characteristic.

Experiences of Home, Homelessness, and Housing

In contrast to the other participants, Sean's definition of home has not changed despite spending long periods of time without a physical home. Sean stated that he, "was raised in a family where, you know, your home was your, basically your place to feel safe, right? So, it doesn't mean any different to me than it did before." When asked to define home, Sean stated, "home means a place where you can feel comfortable, a place to relax, a place to eat, a place to you know have

your hygiene, that's about it I guess.” This is reflected in Sean’s artwork as a physical house rather than symbolic representations that the other participants created.

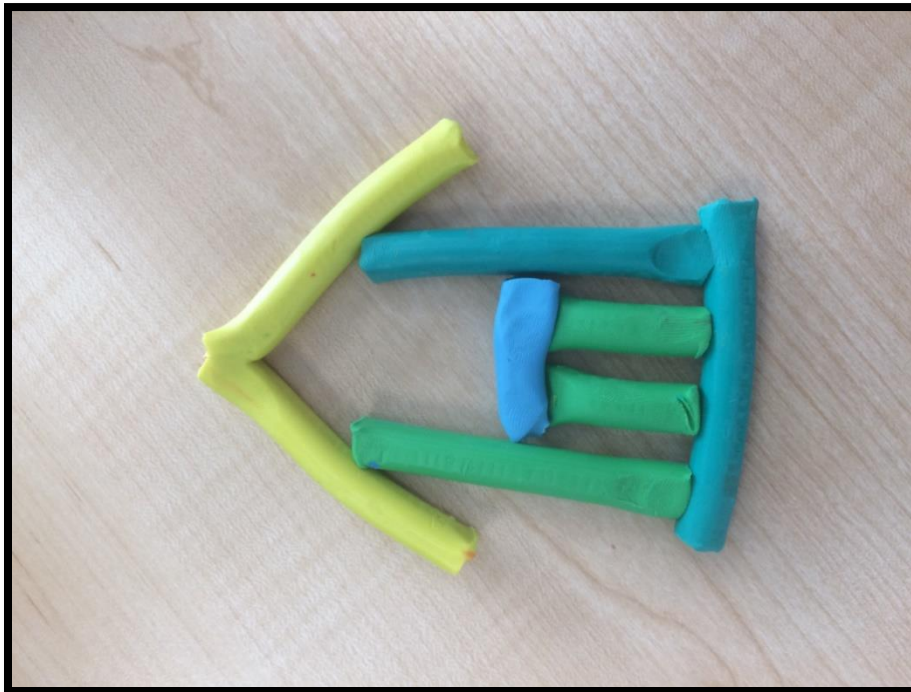


Photo 5: “It’s just a house”

While Sean’s definition of home has remained static, his experience of homelessness has changed. In referring to the safety of his childhood home, Sean stated, “I think being young I just didn’t care. You know there was more places at the time to drop you know.” As a young person, the possibility of couch surfing prevented Sean from experiencing absolute homelessness. Sean stated:

So being homeless was never ever a big issue. Being an adult it’s different. You know it doesn’t feel good to be homeless. You know, you seem to have more of a conscious about it. Where as a youth, you’re kind of living by the seat of your pants. As long as you had your clean clothes on for the day and uh you woke up still alive you’re good to go. The days went by quicker, where when you’re an adult, the days drag by. It seems like every hour is like 2 hours if you’re not staying busy.

Sean provided an insightful account of the housing market in Peterborough. He mentioned the challenge of finding affordable, appropriate housing both for himself as a father and for young people. He stated that “there’s rooms to rent but a lot of those youth if they go to those rooms they’re in Peterborough, they’re going to be into some bad stuff. They’re going to be right in the

middle of the worst of the worst... There's gotta be some sort of way these youth don't have to rent, um drug houses." He reinforced the importance of having a safe and private space. He stated that young people, "might want to have a drink and they might want to smoke a joint or whatever the case may be but they don't want to be in the midst of a crack house or needles all over the place or all that stuff. Right they really don't." This suggests that the ability to obtain his own housing as a young person potentially could have granted Sean the independence he was seeking and safety from criminalization. Sean also suggested that the Rent Geared to Income Housing be expanded to include youth specific units. Sean shared his current difficulty in obtaining housing that is appropriate for his son. He stated that even with the help of a housing worker, "there's just no place that is suitable for you to take your son there. Isn't that sad? You know there's not a single rooming house in Peterborough that has people that are in it that would be suitable for me to bring my son on Saturdays. Not one." Sean provides a firsthand account of the necessity of investing in affordable and appropriate housing.

Sean's pathway into homelessness highlights key themes in the literature of substance use, family conflict, and inter-sectoral gaps. His narrative demonstrates the ways in which a complex intersection of individual, relational, and institutional factors compound to result in homelessness. Sean is also an example of the consequences of failing to prevent youth homelessness in that he has been subject to episodes of homelessness throughout his adult life (Gaetz et al., 2016).

Recommendations and Conclusions

The following section will highlight key findings and corresponding recommendations. The recommendations are grouped into the categories of: (1) develop the capacity for identification and intervention; (2) develop the resources necessary for family mediation and support programs; (3) increase availability of affordable, appropriate housing for families and youth; and (4) develop inter-sectoral partnerships and an integrated system.

1. DEVELOP THE CAPACITY FOR IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION

Opportunities for intervention in the lives of the participants were not taken up. Each youth came into contact with an institution that identified that they and their family were in need of support. These institutions included the education system, the criminal justice system, and the child welfare system. These opportunities were not used to connect youth to appropriate resources.

Recommendations

- 1) All youth serving organizations should take responsibility for recognizing the risk of youth homelessness and connecting youth to appropriate resources. Front line staff such as police officers, teachers, and child welfare workers should be trained to ask youth about their housing situation and provided with the knowledge to refer youth and their families to available resources. The City of Peterborough should engage A Way Home Peterborough to develop the resources necessary to train other sectors to identify youth at risk of homelessness. Specifically, the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board and the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board should look to the [Upstream Project](#) as an example of an early intervention model delivered through the school system. This model has been used with success in Australia as well as the Niagara Region.

2. DEVELOP THE RESOURCES NECESSARY FOR FAMILY MEDIATION AND SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Participants lacked the support of a caring adult prior to and after entering homelessness. For James, poverty, parental substance use, and a difficult family situation led to feelings of isolation and loneliness. As a result, strained family relationships and family conflict led to James' first entrance into homelessness. Poor family relationship quality has been established in the literature as a pathway into youth homelessness (Mallet et al., 2005; van den Bree et al., 2009). For Salena, home was a place of rejection and violence. Sean felt disconnected from his parents who did not understand or accept the choices he was making. After entering homelessness, each participant struggled to transition successfully to adulthood without connection to family or a caring adult.

- 2) Local youth-serving recreational organizations and programs, such as the YMCA, Peterborough Baseball Association, and Peterborough Youth Soccer Club should explore ways to get at-risk youth involved. This may include reducing rates, offering subsidies, and/or doing outreach.
- 3) The City of Peterborough should invest in the promotion of the recreation subsidy program. Providing youth in poverty access to recreational activities of their choice facilitates connections to caring adults and a sense of inclusion. Information about the subsidy program should be disseminated through school guidance counsellors, through Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program case workers, and in public places such as grocery stores and laundry mats.

- 4) The City of Peterborough should increase its investment in youth spaces such as The Loft to extend operating hours and age mandate. These spaces provide youth with access to free recreational activities and connection to supportive and caring adults. These spaces should be supported in a mandate to connect youth at risk of homelessness to appropriate resources.
- 5) The organizations involved in the delivery of Strengthening Families for Parents and Youth and Family Reconnect programming should determine a delivery model that allows the programs to be offered consistently. These programs reduce the risk of youth homelessness by mitigating the potential for family breakdown. These programs also help to facilitate a successful transition out of homelessness and into adulthood by fostering connections to family members that can provide support. Families should have timely access to mediation supports through these programs.

Salena experienced difficulty parenting with limited resources. In the context of parenting in the public space of a shelter, Salena lacked supportive teaching relationships and financial resources. Salena struggled to demonstrate her ability to parent effectively.

- 6) The YES Shelter for Youth and Families, YWCA Crossroads, The Brock Mission and Cameron House should ensure that information about parenting resources and programs are made available at shelters. Each shelter should provide a list of available parenting resources and programs including skill development programs. Shelter workers should have extensive knowledge of these programs and be trained to offer this information.

3. INCREASE AVAILABILITY OF AFFORDABLE, APPROPRIATE HOUSING FOR FAMILIES AND YOUTH

Low income contributed to family instability and conflict. James identified that his family lacked the resources to provide adequate food and school supplies. He also identified that his family's housing situation was unstable. This contributed to family conflict and first entrance into homelessness.

- 7) The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board and the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board should ensure that they provide sufficient school supplies and nutrition programs for students. Each school board should offer a 'back-pack' program. At the beginning of each school year, backpacks stocked with school supplies should be provided for low-income students to access. Schools should work towards the provision of healthy meals for students to access while at school and the

information necessary to access food during evenings and weekends. These programs should be developed through consultation with young people to ensure the least stigmatizing delivery. For instance, back-packs should be offered in a variety of colours and styles, such that no specific type becomes a visible marker of participation in the program.

After entering homelessness participants struggled to regain housing stability. Each participant experienced multiple episodes of homelessness. Reports of episodes of homelessness ranged from lacking a place to sleep for as many as 12 times in one month to experiences of homelessness into late adulthood. One participant attributed his homelessness to the lack of safe, affordable housing in Peterborough.

- 8) The City of Peterborough should increase investment in affordable housing for families and youth. This should include the creation of a youth-specific Rent-Geared-to-Income housing stock. Housing for youth should include adequate support to stay housed and successfully transition to adulthood.
- 9) The City of Peterborough should continue to work with the A Way Home Peterborough collective to develop innovative housing options for youth. This includes initiatives like HomeShare that provides youth with safe appropriate housing and the opportunity to build a meaningful relationship with a caring adult.

4. DEVELOP INTER-SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS AND AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM

Sean experienced family conflict as a result of substance use and delinquency. Sean's housing precarity began at age 13 as a result of this family conflict. The relationship between youth substance use, family conflict and youth homelessness has been established in the literature (Cheng et al., 2013; Collins, 2013; Mallet et al., 2005).

- 10) The City of Peterborough should partner with the Central East LHIN to allocate funding for mental health and addiction programming specific to youth and families. Programming should incorporate education as well as options for treatment and counselling. Parents and youth should be educated about substance use and ways to reduce harms associated with using substances.

Sean experienced family breakdown after being charged through the criminal justice system. Once Sean had been charged, he was no longer welcome at home. This put Sean at further risk of harm and criminalization. Family breakdown as a result of involvement in the criminal justice system

has been documented in the literature as a pathway into youth homelessness (Baskin, 2007; Cheng et al., 2013; Mann et al., 2007; Nichols, 2016).

- 11) The John Howard Society should ensure timely access to counselling and mediation for youth involved in the criminal justice system and their families. Youth that are charged under the Youth Criminal Justice Act should be provided with the resources necessary to stay housed. This service should prioritize youth choice. This could involve mediation between youth and their families as well as support to gain independent housing. As per the first recommendation, police officers should be trained to identify at-risk youth and refer them to the programming.

Sean and James were discharged from the criminal justice system into homelessness. After being released from jail, both participants entered homelessness putting them at risk of further criminalization.

- 12) The John Howard Society and the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services should collaborate to ensure youth are provided with adequate discharge planning from corrections. This could include the aforementioned counselling and mediation to re-establish family connections or support to obtain independent housing.

Salena experienced confusion about the expectations of the Children's Aid Society. Salena expressed frustration and confusion about not meeting the expectations of the Children's Aid Society.

- 13) The Kawartha Haliburton Children's Aid Society should work with non-profit agencies to provide plain language fact sheets for families who are in contact with the Child Welfare System. While their work is complex and unique to each family, a fact sheet could help to distill the Child and Family Services Act and other relevant Children's Aid Society policies into accessible language. These fact sheets should be made available in shelters, social services offices, and housing and family resource centres.

Conclusion

The findings from this research demonstrate the complexity of the pathways into youth homelessness that has been identified in the literature. Each participant experienced a unique pathway comprised of multiple, intersecting factors that resulted in their homelessness. James' narrative demonstrates the ways in which poverty intensifies difficult family situations by impeding a parents' ability to provide emotional and material resources and care. An environment

of conflict and instability led to James' first experience of homelessness. Salena depicts a childhood characterized by emotional and physical abuse. Feeling unsafe and unwanted in her family home led to Salena to seek security and acceptance elsewhere. Since entering homelessness, Salena's experiences have been shaped by trying to meet the expectations of the child welfare system to receive custody of her daughter. Sean demonstrates the way in which the factors of substance use, family conflict, and criminal justice system involvement lead to youth homelessness. Following involvement with the criminal justice system, Sean's already fractured relationship with his family was severed as he was not offered mediation or reconciliation support.

The participants' experiences illuminate key areas for recommendation around prevention, support, and system integration. Each participant encountered a system prior to entering homelessness that identified that they and their families were in need of support. This demonstrates the necessity of providing education to professionals so they can identify youth at risk of homelessness and provide adequate support and appropriate referrals. Each participant has experienced multiple episodes of homelessness and struggled to transition to adulthood and obtain and maintain housing without the support of a caring adult. This experience lends itself to the recommendation that the City of Peterborough continues to invest in programs that support family connections and adult mentorship. This finding also demonstrates the necessity of affordable housing that includes appropriate support to stay housed for families and youth. Finally, two participants were subject to the consequences of a gap between the criminal justice and housing and homelessness sectors. To prevent homelessness as a result of criminal justice system involvement, partnerships need to be developed that support youth to maintain connections with family and obtain independent housing. The literature has identified the key to ending youth homelessness as an investment in prevention. This research contributes to the understanding of pathways into youth homelessness in Peterborough and corresponding recommendations for prevention.

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