

YOUTH TRANSITIONAL *Housing Toolkit*



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PURPOSE *of the Toolkit*

This toolkit is designed for shelters, housing providers, youth-serving agencies and other organizations concerned about homeless and at-risk youth in Canada. It outlines some ideas for transitional housing incorporating the Foyer model but is meant to provide a model that is flexible and adaptable. The case studies and resource materials are based on the Rights of Passage and transitional housing programs at Covenant House Toronto (CHT) and Covenant House Vancouver (CHV). Groups are encouraged to consider this model as a promising practice but to modify it where necessary to create a program that meets the unique needs of their community. Whether groups are interested in adapting one part or the entire model, the toolkit provides support and resources to help develop the program, establish staffing roles, understand funding expectations and create the policies, procedures and rules needed to get it up and running as quickly and smoothly as possible.

Please note: the information contained in the toolkit is accurate as of March 2015, but the programs are continually evolving to better meet the needs of the youth they serve.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the staff, volunteers and service users (past and present) of Covenant House Toronto and Covenant House Vancouver who assisted in the development of the toolkit by taking part in interviews, providing data and resources or reviewing information.

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- **Vanessa**, age 28 - Past Participant
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ROP VANCOUVER YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

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ROP TORONTO MENTORS

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A special thanks to Hollyburn Properties staff for assisting with our understanding of the unique program they offer: Katrina May (PR and Communications), Christina Digan, Paul Sander (Principal and Owner) and Petrit Asimetay, Building Manager.

CANADIAN OBSERVATORY ON HOMELESSNESS/HOMELESS HUB

Thanks to the staff, students and volunteers at the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness/ Homeless Hub for their efforts in collecting and analyzing the material, transcription, review of materials and creation of the toolkit.

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The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness acknowledges with thanks the financial support of The Home Depot Canada Foundation.



CREATION *of the Toolkit*

As with most projects of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness/Homeless Hub the toolkit was developed through a very collaborative process.

- » A review of literature related to Foyers and Transitional Housing was conducted (this toolkit is not a literature review and this research was conducted primarily for background material). Research into key theories and concepts was also conducted.
- » Phone and in-person interviews (the latter were filmed) were completed with a variety of staff and users of the transitional housing programs at Covenant House Toronto and Vancouver, as well as with Hollyburn Properties staff.
- » Transcriptions were made of each interview.
- » Both agencies provided copies of their materials, including policies, forms, guides etc.
- » Monthly meetings were held with Covenant House Toronto to discuss progress and direction.
- » All of the materials were analyzed to determine what information needed to be included in the toolkit.
- » The video interviews were edited to create over 20 short videos to supplement the written content.
- » Each video subject had the ability to review their contribution and confirm their acceptance of the content included in the videos.
- » Both organizations had an opportunity to review content of the written toolkit. Special thanks to Julie Neubauer, Transitional Housing Manager at Covenant House Toronto and Chelsea Minhas, Manager of the Rights of Passage Program at Covenant House Vancouver for their continual feedback.

YOUTH HOMELESSNES

Overview

Many different terms are used to describe young people who are homeless, including street youth, street kids, runaways, homeless youth, etc. Youth homelessness refers to young people who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, and importantly, lack many of the social supports deemed necessary for the transition from childhood to adulthood. In such circumstances, they do not have a stable or consistent residence or source of income, nor do they necessarily have adequate access to the support networks needed to foster a safe and nurturing transition into the responsibilities of adulthood. Few young people choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.

There is no formally agreed upon age definition of a homeless youth (or in many cases, even a youth) in Canada. However, there is a [Canadian Definition of Homelessness](#) that has received wide support from community groups, government and researchers. A youth definition of homelessness is in the process of being created. While it will follow the Canadian Definition in terms of types of homelessness, it will distinguish the unique pathways that youth follow into homelessness.

Even within the proposed definition there is recognition that it is being created to help provide some definitional coherence despite not necessarily reflecting specific program, policy and jurisdictional definitions that already exist.

Depending on the jurisdiction, the state will define the ages for which child protection services are responsible for care, what kinds of mental health supports are accessible and the age when one can live independently, obtain welfare and other government benefits, or leave school, etc. (Gaetz, 2014a: p. 13).

The category of youth therefore can range from 12 to 29. According to the census youth means those aged 12-19, while *young adults* includes individuals between 20 and 29 (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011). A young person under the Youth Criminal Justice Act is someone over the age of 12 and younger than 18. Federally, the age of majority is considered to be 18 (when youth are allowed to vote) but in many provinces youth cannot buy alcohol until 19 years of age (Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta, 2013; Raising the Roof, 2009).

The child welfare mandate is determined by the provinces and territories and the age of protection ranges from under 16 to under 19. This means, for example, that youth leaving

home or being removed from their home under these ages fall under the responsibility of the child welfare system. However, above these ages children can be “aged out”¹ of foster care and restrictions may be placed on new entries. This is particularly true in Ontario where new access to the child welfare system is extremely limited for 16 and 17 year olds. A bill before the Ontario Legislature to address this issue died on the order papers before it could be approved into law (Justice for Children and Youth, 2013; Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal, 2011).

Most youth homeless services in Canada provide supports beginning at 16 or 18 and continuing up to the youth’s 25th birthday (Raising the Roof, 2009). Age is an important consideration because the developmental needs of youth vary from those of adults, but also vary within the youth category itself. The “needs, circumstances, and physical and emotional development of a 14 year old compared to an 18 year old or a 23 year old [are different] (though it must also be acknowledged that the factors that produce and sustain youth homelessness – including violence, trauma and abuse, may also contribute to developmental impairment for older youth)” (Gaetz, 2014a, p. 13).

Over the course of the year the number of young people who become homeless in Canada is at least 40,000 and there may be as many as 7,000 homeless youth on any given night (Gaetz, Gulliver, & Richter, 2014).

The Government of Canada estimates 1 in 5 shelter users in this country are youth between the ages of 16 and 24. Males outnumber females by a ratio of 2:1 in most shelters (very little specific data is collected about trans*² youth). Segart reports that 63% of youth in shelters are male, and 37% are female. Because of violence encountered by young women on the streets they may be more likely than young males to access alternatives to shelters (Segart, 2012; Gaetz, 2014a; 2014b).

There is significant overrepresentation amongst homeless youth who identify as [lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer or 2-spirited \(LGBTQ2S\)](#). They are estimated to make up 25-40% of the youth homeless population, compared to only 5-10% of the general population (Abramovich, 2013; Gaetz, 2014a; 2014b).

Additionally, as with the homeless adult population, there is significant overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth. Furthermore, depending upon location there may be an increase in the number of homeless youth of colour (i.e. black youth in Toronto) (Springer, Lum, & Roswell, 2013; Baskin, 2013; Gaetz, 2014a; 2014b).

Pathways into and out of homelessness vary. We know that over 40% of homeless youth have been involved with the child welfare system and over half of homeless youth have previous involvement with the criminal justice system. Additionally, homeless youth experience greater mental health issues (40-70% compared to only 10-20% for housed youth) (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Gaetz, 2014a).

- 1 Refers to the process of a child becoming independent and leaving the child welfare system. Many homeless youth have become too old to remain under the jurisdiction of the child welfare system and yet lack the necessary skills to live independently.
- 2 Trans* is an umbrella term that signifies the broad diversity of gender variance found within the transgender community including, but not limited to, transgender, transsexual, agender, bigender, genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary etc.

The key causes of youth homelessness include a) individual / relational factors, b) structural factors and c) institutional and systems failures:

1. **Individual and Relational factors** - A main cause of youth homelessness is a breakdown or conflict in key relationships within the home. The vast majority have chosen or been forced to leave an unsafe, abusive, neglectful or otherwise untenable situation. Many young people leave home because of mental health problems or addictions issues that either they or someone else in their household is experiencing.
2. **Structural factors** - This includes ongoing problems that a young person cannot control, and which largely originate outside of the family and exist at a broader societal level. This includes social and economic conditions like poverty, inadequate education, underemployment and lack of housing stability, which may also frame the experience of young people and can underlie stressors within the family that can lead to conflict; meaning “home” is no longer a viable option. Discrimination in the form of homophobia, transphobia, racism and bullying can also be contributing factors.
3. **Institutional system failures** - Sometimes young people become homeless after slipping through the cracks of our “social safety nets” (such as child protection, health and mental health care, juvenile justice). Many young people in government care (child protection) become homeless when their placement breaks down leaving them without a place to live, or choose to leave their placements; and/or have been discharged from a situation of care (e.g., for non-compliance) without a place of residence to which they can or will return. That we discharge young people from systems of care without adequate discharge planning and ongoing supports increases the risk of homelessness.

Homeless youth may be physically on the streets, staying in emergency shelters or youth hostels, “couch-surfing” with friends or family, renting cheap rooms in boarding houses or hotels, or staying in squats. All of these are risky housing situations, which may lead to imminent loss of shelter. Homeless youth, also tend to move between various housing situations over time as outlined in the typology below, which has been expanded from the National Alliance to End Homelessness. Gaetz argues that “it is the instability of their housing situation that characterizes their status as homeless youth” (www.homelesshub.ca).

Youth homelessness is defined by inherent instability, profound limitations and poverty. At a time when these young people are experiencing loss and potentially trauma, they are simultaneously charged with managing a diverse and complex set of tasks, including obtaining shelter, income and food, making good decisions and developing healthy relationships (Gaetz, 2014a: p. 9).

Youth homelessness then must be considered separately from adult homelessness. Just as the pathways into homelessness are different, so are the possible interventions and solutions. Homeless youth generally are leaving a situation – whether it is family, child welfare or correctional services – where they were dependent upon adult caregivers for their overall support.

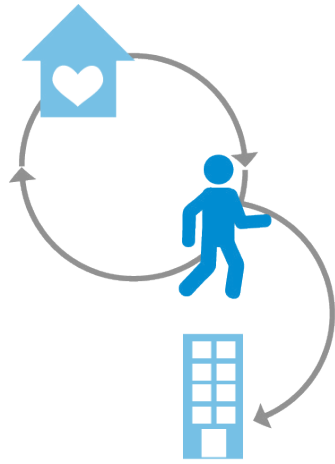
Becoming homeless then does not just mean a loss of stable housing, but rather leaving a home in which they are embedded in relations of dependence, thus experiencing an interruption and potential rupture in social relations with parents and caregivers, family members, friends, neighbours and community (Gaetz, 2014a: p. 7).

The diversity of homeless youth notwithstanding, the lack of experience with independent living is an important factor. This toolkit presents models of supported transitional housing that can help homeless youth make the adjustment and develop the skills necessary to live and thrive on their own.



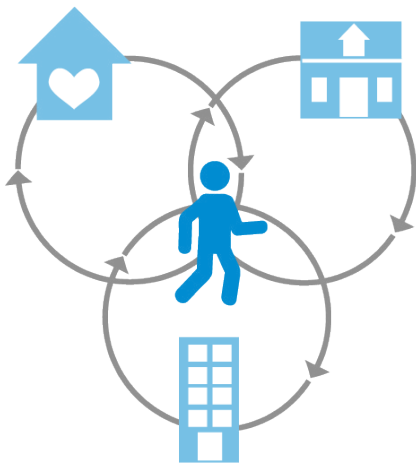
Errica, a current ROP participant at Covenant House Toronto.

FIG.1 THE NAEH TYPOLOGY OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS



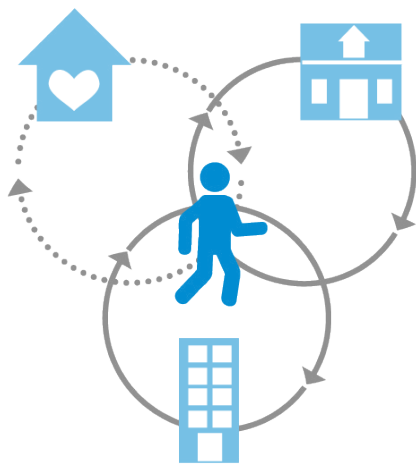
Temporarily Disconnected

As Kuhn and Culhane (1998) point out, the vast majority of people who become homeless do so for a very short time, typically find their way out of homelessness with little assistance and rarely return to homelessness. This is as true for adults as it is for youth. The NAEH suggests that between 81 and 86 percent of homeless youth fit into this category (NAEH, 2012). This group is characterized as generally being younger, as having more stable or redeemable relations with family members, a less extensive history of homelessness and are more likely to remain in school. There is a strong need for prevention and early intervention to divert this population from the homelessness system.



Unstably Connected

This population of homeless youth has a more complicated housing history and is likely to have longer and repeated episodes of homelessness (Toro et al., 2011). They are more likely to be disengaged from school and will have challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment. Most will have retained some level of connection with family members and are less likely to experience serious mental health or addictions issues than chronically homeless youth. This is a group for which family reconnection interventions, as well as transitional housing programs are recommended, particularly for youth under 18.



Chronically Disconnected

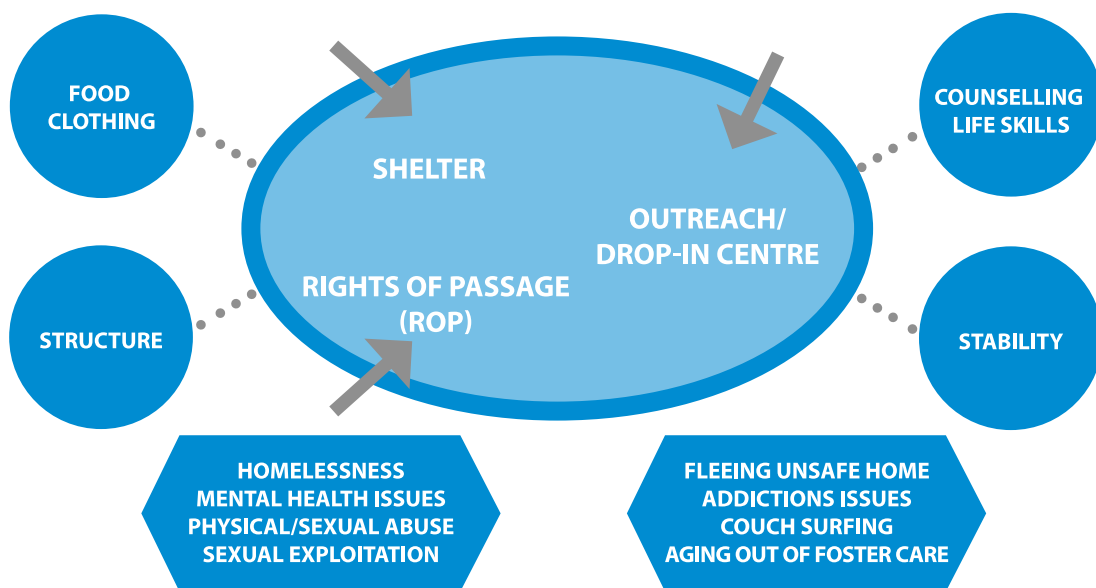
In terms of numbers, this will be the smallest group of homeless youth, but at the same time the group with the most complex needs with the heaviest reliance on the resources in the youth homelessness sector. This group is defined by longer term homelessness and a greater likelihood of repeated episodes. They will also be more likely to have mental health problems, addictions issues and/or a diagnosed disability. They will have the most unstable relations with families and in some cases there will be no connections at all. Young adults in this category may require more comprehensive interventions, as well as more supportive and longer-term housing programs. (from Gaetz, 2014a).

About COVENANT HOUSE

Covenant House International

Covenant House is one of the best-known international charities helping homeless youth. It is also the largest privately funded charity in the Americas for homeless and exploited youth. Founded in 1972, by Franciscan priests, Covenant House serves more than 50,000 youth a year in 21 cities in Canada, the United States, Mexico and Central America (Anchorage, Atlanta, Atlantic City, Detroit, Fort Lauderdale, Houston, Los Angeles, Managua, Mexico City, Milpas Altas, Newark, New Orleans, New York, Oakland, Orlando, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Tegucigalpa, Toronto, Vancouver, and Washington, D.C.).

FIG.2 CONTINUUM OF CARE



Covenant House has three core services that make up their Continuum of Care, including Street Outreach (including community support services, outreach and drop-in services), Crisis Program (including emergency, short-term shelter beds) and Rights of Passage (longer-term transitional housing).

These core services are made of a large array of programs, depending upon the city and needs, including emergency shelters, housing, healthcare, educational support, employment readiness and skills training, drug abuse treatment and prevention, legal services, mental health services, life skills training and aftercare supports.

There are also two toll-free crisis lines for youth in the US, Canada and Mexico that answer tens of thousands of calls a year.

Five Basic Principles

The work of all Covenant Houses is governed by five core principles, which are built into the philosophy, program delivery and staff training. The principles are so integral to the work that they are also embedded into policies and procedures.

In outlining the five principles below, the citations come from [Covenant House International website](#) (**CHI**) and Covenant House Vancouver's (**CHV**) ROP Participant Guide and speak to how each of these principles plays out in the work of ROP.

These principles are important for an agency to consider as it develops its program. As an international organization there are key philosophies that apply to all Covenant House agencies. The same may be true with a large agency with multiple programs. The contrast with the way in which Covenant House Vancouver has interpreted the principles is presented here to show you how a program within an agency may create their own understanding and implementation of the broader principles.

IMMEDIACY

CHI: Homeless kids come to Covenant House in crisis. Immediately and without question, we meet their basic human needs – a nourishing meal, a shower, clean clothes, medical attention, and a safe place away from the dangers of the street.

CHV: Immediacy means that needs are addressed as quickly as possible. ROP is staffed 24 hours, so that you always have someone available to talk to or to ask for support.

Immediacy also means that communication about needs and other important issues should be timely. You will have regular meetings with your Key Youth Worker, but you should keep the staff on duty informed whenever you are dealing with something that staff might be able to help with. When staff recognize the need to address something with you (e.g. about your behaviour or your plan) you can expect that they will do so promptly.

SANCTUARY

CHI: Homeless kids arriving at our door are often frightened and mistrustful. Young men and women can grow only when they feel safe and secure – Covenant House protects them from the perils of the street and offers that important sense of security.

CHV: Sanctuary means that ROP is meant to be a safe place for all. Our staff are committed to maintaining an environment where all the residents can feel secure, build trust, and be free of abuse and negative pressure. Everyone has to contribute to creating this environment. You should inform staff at once if you are feeling physically or emotionally unsafe. You will be expected to refrain from behaviours that threaten the sanctuary of others.

VALUE COMMUNICATION

CHI: Lying, cheating, and stealing are common survival tools on the street. Covenant House teaches by example that caring relationships are based on trust, respect, and honesty.

CHV: Moving away from street values and developing a healthy set of personal values is part of the work of ROP participants. Honesty, caring, accountability and mutual respect are values that we all strive to live and model.

STRUCTURE

CHI: Homeless kids never know how they will get their next meal or where they will sleep. Covenant House provides the stability and structure necessary to build a positive future.

CHV: If you have been staying at the CHV Crisis Program, you have experienced structure in the form of strict schedules and rules that are needed for establishing stability in that environment. At ROP, there are also some schedules and rules that must be followed by everyone, but structure is also meant to be individualized and internalized.

You will be involved in the process of setting expectations for yourself as you identify goals and as you take responsibility for working toward those goals. The aim is that by the time you leave, you will have practice in deciding and setting up the routines and self-discipline that are important to you so you can continue to do so independently.

For example, once on your own you will be able to live by a budget, get enough sleep, get to work on time, avoid triggers to destructive behaviours, decide when you will do your dishes, when you will study etc. The gradual move to setting structure independently is facilitated by the six steps of the ROP program. As you move through the steps, more and more of the responsibility lies with you.

CHOICE

CHI: Young people often feel powerless to control their lives and fall into a self-defeating cycle of failure. Covenant House fosters confidence, encouraging young people to believe in themselves and make smart choices for their lives.

CHV: At CHV, we support your right and responsibility to make choices for your own life. You make choices every day, by doing certain things and by not doing other things. We will support you in exploring the options that are open to you, and recognizing all of the little choices that you have to make every day. We will also support you in forming a plan that fits you, based on your own preferences and dreams. Part of the work of staff is to help you evaluate the possible results of each choice that you make. Our goal is to empower you with information and skills for positive decision-making.

Covenanting with the Youth

Every Covenant House creates a ‘covenant’ with each young person. The word covenant means ‘a coming together’. CHV says, “Covenants involve a mutual agreement, a relationship in which each party lays out what they are committed to doing.”

When a youth comes to our doors, we make a covenant, or a promise, to support them every step of the way to independence. We share our guiding principles with them, which include providing immediate care and sanctuary, modeling and communicating positive values, as well as offering structure and helpful choices ([Covenant House Toronto website](#)).

In return, youth are required to follow rules and to create a plan with their Youth Worker. Each plan is individualized to the youth and could include education, work or an alternative plan focused on addictions, mental health or other health concerns. The goal is overall independence to enable the youth to live a healthy and productive life in the community.

“The whole Covenant approach is that we would basically sit down, contract with the young person, understanding that it’s their choice to be here and that they’re the ones that have to focus and drive the plan. But basically, we piece that plan together in a way that will work for that young person. We customize it along the way.”

—Bruce Rivers, Executive Director, Covenant House Toronto

These plans are particularly important for the Rights of Passage program and will be explored in greater detail later on.

"We would basically sit down, contract with the young person, understanding that it's their choice to be here and that they're the ones that have to focus and drive the plan."

—Bruce Rivers, Covenant House Toronto

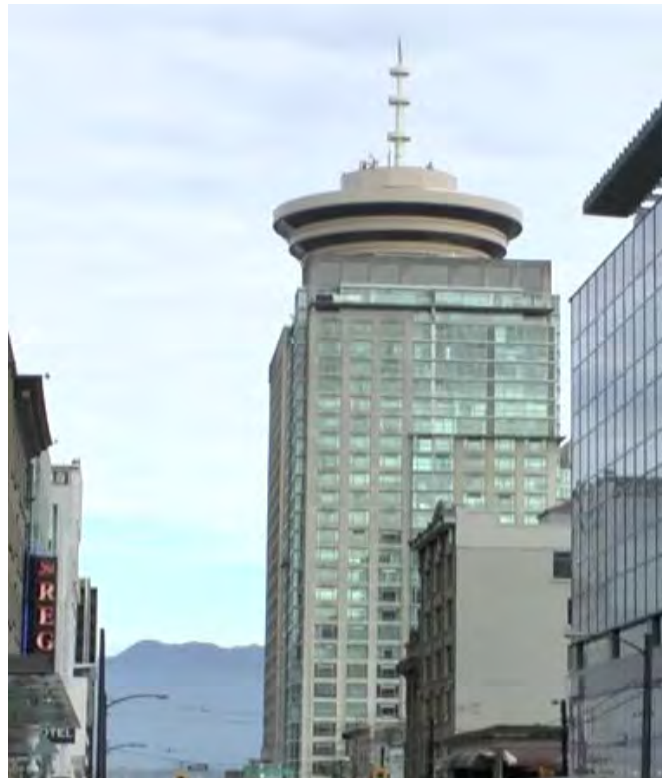
Covenant House Toronto and Vancouver Overview

The youth that are served by Covenant House vary in the needs and events that brought them to seek shelter. For both Toronto and Vancouver, a majority of youth (as much as 70%) have fled physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse or had been kicked out of their home. In more recent years there has been an increase “in the number of youth presenting with serious mental health and addictions issues”, including as many as half of the youth seen in Vancouver ([Covenant House Vancouver website](#)). There are also a high number of youth who have “aged out” of the foster care system and have no place to go. The agencies report that an estimated 30% of the young people they work with have been involved in some form of the sex trade and/or subjected to sexual exploitation.

Following the continuum of care model both Covenant House Toronto and Covenant House Vancouver provide a variety of different supports. These vary by location, but between the two sites include 24/7 crisis care, counselling, health care, education, employment training and assistance, transitional housing and support youth as they move from homelessness to independence. They work to build confidence and life-skills to increase each young person’s ability to achieve greater success.



Toronto, ON.



Vancouver, BC.

COVENANT HOUSE TORONTO (CHT)

Covenant House Toronto was the second international Covenant House site and opened in 1982, stemming from an idea of the late Cardinal Carter. The largest homeless youth agency in Canada, CHT is the second largest Covenant House in the world (after New York City) and serves an average of 3,000 young people annually. CHT has served about 90,000 youth since it opened its doors.

Covenant House Toronto currently has:

- » 94 shelter beds (58 for males and 36 for females)
- » 28 beds in the Rights of Passage Transitional Housing program (18 for males and 10 for females)

There are about 250 youth coming and going every day.

COVENANT HOUSE VANCOUVER (CHV)

Covenant House Vancouver opened in September 1997 with 12 beds and was full immediately. CHV has remained full ever since. Supported initially by Covenant House Toronto, CHV was formed to address a crisis of high numbers of youth living on the streets of Vancouver and a lack of shelter and transitional housing supports for youth.

During the fiscal year 2013-2014, a total of 1,375 youth accessed the services of Covenant House Vancouver and the agency provides ongoing support (food, counselling, shelter and clothing) to the approximately 700 homeless youth living in Vancouver.

Covenant House Vancouver currently has:

- » 54 beds in the Crisis Program (30 for males and 24 for females)
- » 25 beds in the Rights of Passage Transitional Housing program (13 for males and 12 for females)

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Overview

Transitional Housing refers to temporary housing that acts as a stopgap measure between homelessness and permanent housing. As it applies to youth in particular, it is usually housing with the necessary supports that enable young people to live independently.

Histories of abusive treatment, residential instability, addictions, and mental health issues add to the trauma of homelessness itself. Transitional housing is intended to offer a supportive living environment, opportunities, and tools for skill development, and promote the development of community among residents. These can be critical in enabling people to participate in employment or training programs, enrol in educational facilities, address addiction or mental health issues, and ultimately move to independent living in the larger community (Novac, Brown & Bourbonnais, 2009, p. 1).

Length of transitional housing programs can vary –especially depending on the population— but generally range from three months to three years (Barrow & Zimmer, 1999). Most transitional housing programs are housed within a building, but increasingly the use of scattered-sites with program supports is used. This type of housing offers less private space than is usually found in permanent housing. Space is often smaller and may include shared or single rooms and usually there is common space shared by all residents.

The primary difference between supportive housing and transitional housing is that residents in transitional housing are expected to “graduate” and to move on to a different type of housing or program (Barrow & Zimmer, 1999). In Canada, under the former SCPI program (Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative) funded by the federal government, funding was available to build transitional housing, but not permanent housing. The lack however, of affordable housing in this country, has meant that except where an age mandate or a specific program was attached to the housing, many of the units have become *de facto* permanent housing for the residents.



An apartment building Toronto, ON. (photo by Shane Fester)

Transitional housing for youth is always limited because of age restrictions. In most programs, youth exceed the program mandate on their 25th birthday. While in some cases an agency may provide minimal follow-up support, there is no funding to do this and therefore is usually very limited.

Creating a sense of permanency then is very difficult for youth. Using a scattered site approach to transitional housing, which allows for “convertible leases”³ can help increase opportunities for permanency. Program supports can continue until the age of 25, at which point the youth may be ready for completely independent living or another agency, which serves adults, may take over the support component.

Covenant House Toronto and Vancouver are gradually increasing their scattered site transitional housing usage. In many cases, youth leaving their shelter/crisis care or their on-site transitional housing program are supported to transition to independent living with minimal supports still provided by Covenant House. Staff in both locations provide an in-depth aftercare program and youth in both sites are encouraged to reach out to Covenant House for support as needed (especially up to age 25). In a few cases, this off-site housing is obtained and supported through a partnership with a property management company (Hollyburn Properties in Vancouver and Toronto) or a builder/developer (The Daniels Corporation in Toronto).

This combination of on- and off-site transitional housing is a component of the Foyer’s Hub and Spoke model, which will be discussed in the next section.

3 Convertible leases allow an agency to initially hold a lease in their name but to transition that lease to a young person at an appropriate time. This can be used when a young person is 16 or 17 and too young to sign the legal agreement, or to facilitate a young person’s transition into housing. It may also ease concerns of landlords who are hesitant about providing housing to a youth.

Foyer – Hub and Spoke Model

The Foyer⁴ is a great example of a unique way of providing support to youth through transitional housing. Popular in the UK and Australia in particular, it is gaining support and popularity in Canada, including Haven’s Way at the Calgary Boys and Girls Club, New Horizon at Wood’s Homes, also in Calgary and The Foyer project operated by Homeward Trust in Edmonton. Both Covenant House Toronto and Vancouver have integrated their transitional housing programs with the Foyer model.

The Foyer model can be considered a best practice⁵ and there is an extensive body of [evaluative research](#) on the model. There are a broad range of [examples](#) of how it has been [applied](#) in various [forms](#) in the [United Kingdom](#) and [Australia](#).

The Foyer model houses youth for longer than is normally the case in transitional housing, provides life skills and the residents are generally employed, attending school/training or both. This is particularly helpful in the case of younger teens and those leaving juvenile detention/corrections centers or child welfare.

The Foyer is very flexible and models of accommodation have included congregate living facilities, scattered site models and approaches that combine the two (Hub and Spoke models). The Rights of Passage program at Covenant House –which is discussed elsewhere in the toolkit—has generally followed a congregate living model. Both Toronto and Vancouver have limited (but expanding) scattered site housing and therefore consider themselves to be developing a Hub and Spoke model.

- » The research on transitional housing models for youth – including the Foyer – has identified some important characteristics of effective transitional housing models. These include:
- » A focus on helping disadvantaged young people who are homeless or in housing need – including young people leaving care - to achieve the transition to adulthood and from dependence to independence.
- » A developmentally-appropriate environment to build competence and a feeling of achievement.

-
4. For a full discussion on The Foyer model please see: [The Foyer Toolkit](#) and [Live, Learn and Grow: Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Homeless Youth – A Framework for the Foyer in Canada](#).
 5. An intervention is considered to be a Promising Practice when there is sufficient evidence to claim that the practice is proven effective at achieving a specific aim or outcome, consistent with the goals and objectives of the activity or program. Ideally, Promising Practices demonstrate their effectiveness through the most rigorous scientific research, however there is not enough generalizable evidence to label them ‘best practices’. They do however hold promise for other organizations and entities that wish to adapt the approaches based on the soundness of the evidence. For a more complete discussion of the differences between best, promising and emerging practices see: [What Works and For Whom? A Framework for Promising Practices](#) published by the Homeless Hub.

- » A holistic approach to meeting the young person's needs based on an understanding of adolescent development.
- » A formal plan and agreement between the Foyer and young person as to how the Foyer's facilities and local community resources will be used in making the transition to adulthood.
- » A supported transition that is not time limited, in which young people can practice independent living.
- » An investment in education, training, life skills and meaningful engagement in order to improve long-term life chances.
- » The provision of a community of peers and caring adults with emphasis on peer mentoring.
- » The provision of necessary and appropriate aftercare to ensure successful transitions to adulthood and independent living.

(Gaetz and Scott, 2012, p. 29).

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING AT *Covenant House*

Covenant House Toronto and Vancouver are in the process of aligning their services with the Foyer ‘Hub and Spoke’ model. While they are yet to be “best practice” examples, they are definitely promising practices, based on the extensive number of youth they have supported, the successes they have reported and their evaluations to date.

As mentioned previously, both agencies follow Covenant House International’s Continuum of Care model. The Hub component of the Foyer includes the emergency shelter/crisis program, drop-in, meal programs and other onsite services, as well as the transitional housing Rights of Passage program, which offers on-site, congregate living with supports.

The Spokes component refers to off-site community, scattered-site apartments. Youth in these locations live much more independently but in some cases are still supported by Covenant House. There are transitional housing units available in Toronto and Vancouver, as well as support to facilitate independent living.

This toolkit will explore the Rights of Passage program and will also touch on the off-site transitional and independent housing that is offered at each location. The off-site housing is a newer component for each Covenant House and is fairly small at each location. Yet, the model that they are implementing and the support that is provided post-transition, especially at Covenant House Toronto, are key to helping develop solutions to housing for youth experiencing homelessness.

THE RIGHTS OF PASSAGE *Program*

Created in 1986, Rights of Passage (ROP) is designed to focus on the longer-term needs of homeless youth that are harder to address in a crisis shelter setting. Youth can enter into ROP from the crisis program, outreach services or be referred by other agencies.

While it provides more independence than a shelter, it is **not** independent living; rather it is semi-independent, life skills-based, transitional housing. Youth are subject to rules and guidelines within the housing, must develop a personal plan, attend life skills classes, meet with workers etc.

The duration of stay and the living conditions vary in each Covenant House but the overall focus is the same: helping youth develop the skills needed to live independently or to live on their own with minimal supports. Most youth who come to Covenant House have never learned the skills necessary to live independently, including grocery shopping and cooking, maintaining a budget and paying bills, finding and keeping a job, completing their education and just generally taking care of themselves. Rights of Passage teaches these skills and helps youth move on to independent living (or another form of housing, including permanent supportive housing or further transitional housing).

ROP Overview in Toronto and Vancouver

The Rights of Passage programs in Toronto and Vancouver have similarities and differences, which is true for all Covenant House programs across the Americas.

“We have a similarity in terms of the principles that guide our work, but the look and feel of each of the Covenant House programs would customize and respond to the needs of the cities within which its set.” —Bruce Rivers,
Executive Director, Covenant House Toronto

This is to be expected, as it is ideal for a community to customize its program to suit the local climate and population that it serves. In some cases, program differences are the result of logistics, including space, funding and legislative climate. In other cases, youth may present with specific needs that a community must focus on. Agencies should be prepared to adapt to address changing needs of youth and ensure that their programs are culturally sensitive and flexible.

Steps to Progress in Vancouver

One of the biggest differences between the two programs is that Vancouver uses a six-step framework that guides youth's progress in the program. Each step brings new rights and responsibilities, as well as privileges. These steps are geared towards helping a youth enter and acclimatize to ROP and then move through the program in a supported way.

In order to better understand program elements and rules, and the way in which the two programs are different, it's important to understand the Steps program.

With the recent change to the length of stay, the steps were expanded from five to six.⁶ The first step is designed to take a minimum of four weeks, while each of the other steps takes at least eight weeks. If it appears that a youth is going to take more than three extra weeks on any step (besides Step 6), the support team will meet with the youth to discuss the issues. It takes a minimum of 36 weeks to complete the six steps, which are designed to be completed in a 12-month period. Youth may spend longer than the minimum on any one step as long as they are working toward the basic requirements of the program and their own life goals. Given the recent change, the new Step 6 has no completion deadline (except for the age mandate) as long as a youth is working on their program.

“The steps sort of help you showcase your commitment to a certain goal. It sort of teaches you ‘Hey, if you want to achieve something, you need commitment; you need to show initiative, you need to show responsibility to be able to progress.’”
—“Kevin”, 26, former ROP participant, Covenant House Vancouver

STEP 1: GETTING CONNECTED

Summary: Step 1 is a time to adjust to living at ROP. The focus is on making a successful transition into the program: getting used to your new environment, getting acquainted with co-residents, planning and starting to build relationships with staff.

Requirements:

1. Pay program fee of \$300 on the first of each month, unless otherwise arranged. A prorated amount is due by the day you move in, unless other arrangements have been made.
2. Make contact with staff at least twice a day.
3. Attend a weekly case planning meeting with your Case Manager.
4. Adhere to your case plan, including your plan for school or work.
5. Take medications as prescribed.
6. Sign in and out every time you enter or leave the building.

⁶ In the STEPS video that accompanies the toolkit you may hear references to five steps as we filmed during the transition period.

7. Meet daily curfew requirements (10:00pm on work or school days/12:00am on 2 days off per week).
8. No overnights or extended curfews.
9. Complete Life Skills assessment.
10. Attend Life Skills sessions as assigned.
11. Keep apartment clean, clean after yourself in the common area, and complete common area chores daily.
12. Attend Community Dinner every Wednesday and House Meeting once per month.
13. Adhere to behavioural guidelines.
14. Complete weekly program requirements.

Staff will:

1. Wake you up and remind you to take your meds as needed.
2. Help you to make appointments and remind you of them.
3. Do chores and room cleaning with you as needed, and make sure you know what is expected and how to do it. *(To pass this step, you must demonstrate that you know how to do all the basic household tasks, such as cleaning dishes, and cleaning your bathroom, so please ask for help if you need it).*

Step 1 is a minimum of 4 weeks. Once you have four successful weeks (*meeting all of the requirements*), you will move on to Step 2.

STEP 2: ESTABLISHING ROUTINE

Summary: During Step 2, you are moving forward with your plan. The focus is on getting established with work, school and/or healthy routines, maintaining stability, and practicing life skills.

Requirements:

1. Pay program fee of \$300 on the first of each month, unless other arrangements have been made.
2. Make contact with staff at least once each day.
3. Attend a weekly case planning meeting with Case Manager.
4. Adhere to your case plan, including your plan for school or work.
5. Wake up and get yourself to appointments/work/school as needed and without reminders. (Staff will remind you if needed, but to pass the step, you need to do this independently).

6. Take medications as prescribed.
7. Sign in and out every time you enter or leave the building.
8. Meet daily curfew requirements (11:00pm on work or school days/1:00am on 2 days off per week).
9. Overnights (up to 2 per month) or extended curfews only with pre-approval.
10. Attend Life Skills sessions as assigned.
11. Open a bank account and get all necessary identification.
12. Keep apartment clean, clean up after yourself in the common area and complete common area chores daily.
13. Attend Community Dinner every Wednesday and House Meeting once per month.
14. Adhere to behavioural guidelines.
15. Complete weekly program requirements.

STEP 3: SKILL BUILDING

Summary: By Step 3, you are expected to have achieved a stable routine and are ready to add to your skills for independence.

Requirements:

1. Pay program fee of \$300 on the first of each month, unless otherwise arranged.
2. Attend a weekly case planning meeting with Case Manager.
3. Adhere to your case plan, including your plan for school or work.
4. Wake up and get yourself to appointments/work/school as needed and without reminders.
5. Take medications as prescribed. Be responsible for remembering to do this.
6. Sign in and out every time you enter or leave the building.
7. Meet daily curfew requirements (12:00am on work or school days/2:00am on 2 days off per week).
8. Overnights (up to 3 per month) or extended curfews only with pre-approval.
9. Attend Life Skills sessions as assigned.
10. Keep apartment clean, clean up after yourself in the common area and complete common area chores daily.

11. Attend Community Dinner every Wednesday and House Meeting once per month.
12. Adhere to behavioural guidelines.
13. Complete weekly program requirements.
14. Ensure that you are up-to-date in filing your taxes.

STEP 4: CONTRIBUTING TO THE COMMUNITY

Summary: By the time you reach Step 4, you should be actively practicing in all of the independent living skills you have achieved so far and ready to contribute leadership to your ROP community.

Requirements:

1. Pay program fee of \$300 on the first of each month, unless otherwise arranged.
2. Start developing your own case plan for review with your Case Manager weekly.
3. Adhere to your case plan, including your plan for school or work.
4. Wake up and get yourself to appointments/work/school as needed and without reminders.
5. Take medications as prescribed. Be responsible for remembering to do this.
6. Sign in and out every time you enter or leave the building.
7. Meet daily curfew requirements (12:00am on work or school days/2:00am on 2 days off per week).
8. Overnights (up to 4 per month); must notify staff.
9. Attend Life Skills sessions as assigned.
10. Keep apartment clean, clean up after yourself in the common area and complete common area chores daily.
11. Attend Community Dinner every Wednesday and House Meeting once per month.
12. Adhere to behavioural guidelines.
13. Complete weekly program requirements.
14. Supply and prepare your own breakfast and lunch.
15. Begin a move-out plan or create an extension plan with Key Worker and Case Manager.
16. Offer leadership within your community.

STEP 5: TAKING RESPONSIBILITY/PREPARATION

Summary: During Step 5, you should be generally independent. You are almost ready for your transition from the program or to tackle additional long-term goals. Step 5 gives you some time to get all your plans in place.

Requirements:

1. Pay program fee of \$300 on the first of each month, unless otherwise arranged.
2. Case plan reviewed weekly with Case Manager.
3. Adhere to your case plan, including your plan for school or work.
4. Wake up and get yourself to appointments/work/school as needed and without reminders.
5. Take medications as prescribed. Be responsible for remembering to do this.
6. Sign in and out every time you enter or leave the building.
7. No curfew, but must check in daily by phone when staying out late or when taking overnights. (Spending more than 5 nights per month away from ROP will prompt a discussion about whether it is time to move on from the program).
8. Attend Life Skills sessions as assigned.
9. Keep apartment clean, clean up after yourself in the common area and complete common area chores daily.
10. Attend Community Dinner every Wednesday and House Meeting once per month.
11. When you miss dinner, supply and prepare your own meal. (*No saved dinners will be provided*).
12. Adhere to behavioural guidelines.
13. Complete weekly program requirements.
14. Follow your move-out plan or create an extension plan with Key Worker and Case Manager. Adapt your plan as necessary with your Key Worker and Case Manager.

STEP 6: MOVING FORWARD

Summary: During Step 6, you should be generally independent. You are almost ready for your transition from the program. Step 6 gives you some time to get all your plans in place.

Requirements:

1. Pay program fee of \$300 on the first of each month, unless otherwise arranged.
2. Case plan reviewed bi-weekly with Case Manager.
3. Adhere to your case plan, including your plan for school or work.
4. Wake up and get yourself to appointments/work/school as needed and without reminders.
5. Take medications as prescribed. Be responsible for remembering to do this.
6. Sign in and out every time you enter or leave the building.
7. No curfew, but must check in daily by phone when staying out late or when taking overnights. (Spending more than 5 nights per month away from ROP will prompt a discussion about whether it is time to move on from the program).
8. Attend Life Skills sessions as assigned.
9. Keep apartment clean, clean up after yourself in the common area and complete common area chores daily.
10. Attend Community Dinner every Wednesday and House Meeting once per month.
11. When you miss dinner, supply and prepare your own meal. (*No saved dinners will be provided*).
12. Adhere to behavioural guidelines.
13. Complete weekly program requirements.
14. Be a leader within the ROP Community (e.g. *Mentorship, Youth Advisory Committee, planning and implementing activities, and others*).
15. Create your move-out plan and adapt it as necessary with your Key Worker and Case Manager.

"With each step comes more *responsibility*. At the same time with more **responsibility** comes *freedom...*"

—"Kevin", Past Participant, ROP Vancouver

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

We particularly like this model. It was originally designed to be completed in a year as the Step program only recently extended its length of stay option. This means organizations who are limited in their time frame can still adopt this model for themselves.

Often, programs create a set of expectations and work to push participants through to graduation. Markers of success are completion rates and number of graduates. At Covenant House Vancouver, rather than a forced set of graduation requirements, the Steps foster a sense of independence and responsibility while still providing supports. The incentive of an increased graduation bursary means that youth are encouraged to stay at least through Step 5 (36 weeks), which is a good length of time in which to provide some core lessons and life skills.

The inclusion of Step 6 and the expansion of the program to allow youth to stay until their 25th birthdays really put the focus of the Steps on the youth and their development rather than on graduation.

The way in which youth are challenged to take on not just personal responsibility but also to get involved in and show leadership in their community is a really nice way to build self-esteem and independence in youth. It also allows for community members to develop another—and more positive—understanding of homeless youth.

Program Elements

In this section, we included a number of program elements that are of primary consideration for the creation of a transitional housing program for youth. These refer, primarily, to onsite housing such as the ROP program, but could be adapted for a program that uses a pure scattered site model.

Elements included here are:

- » [Case Plans and Case Management](#)
- » [Life Skills](#)
- » [Space](#)
- » [Length of Stay](#)
- » [Money – Trust Fund vs Program Fee](#)
- » [Meals](#)
- » [Monthly House Meeting](#)
- » [LGBTQ2S](#)

CASE PLANS AND CASE MANAGEMENT

The case plan is used to structure activities during the participants' stay at ROP. Youth must have a primary focus on employment and/or education, or if dealing with mental health or addictions issues may follow an alternative track that looks at dealing with those issues. Additional activities in a case plan could include life skills, health, legal issues, identification, discussion of curfews or chores, personal goals, budgeting and financial issues, volunteering, future housing plans and any other issues that arise that are important to help the youth successfully transition to independent living.

“Case management is a collaborative process at ROP. We are client-driven and client-focused while at the same time balancing that it is a residential program that does ask its participants to identify these goals and to commit to themselves and the program how they want to spend their time and what’s important to them. Case management process is about trying to find meaning in how they want to spend their time while they’re at ROP.”

—Dillon Dodson, Team Leader, Covenant House Toronto

Youth entering the Rights of Passage program have a referring worker (internal in another Covenant House department or external in the community). They also enter the program with a plan in place that has short and long term goals. This plan is initially discussed and agreed upon by the young person and their referring worker.

The application procedure is quite in-depth and includes a written application with support from the referring worker, an interview and a tour of the facility. During the application process ROP staff are able to delve deeper into a young person's ideas and intent to help develop the case plan (as well as make sure the program is a good fit).

Both sites have an extensive orientation period to help youth adjust to living at ROP. In Vancouver the intake is conducted by the Youth Support Worker and the orientation period (Step 1) lasts a month. In Toronto a variety of workers take part in the orientation with the intention that the youth will be required to get to know and interact with the majority of staff. This orientation period usually lasts about two weeks.

Vancouver's Case Plan Reviews Policy says “Youth have aspirations for themselves that do not include living on the streets. Youth made decisions for a variety of reasons that brought them to the streets, but this does not speak to their long-term intentions. They need support and assistance to develop the skills and knowledge to reach their full potential, and to mature and learn from their mistakes in a safe environment.

When a youth seeks help and support voluntarily, it signals that they are ready to begin making positive changes. At this stage, achieving their goals will be much easier. It will be more difficult when a youth is forced or feels forced by external pressures to comply with program goals and objectives that do not match what the youth believes to be their goals and objectives.”

Both Toronto and Vancouver have a significant focus on education, which differs from most American ROP programs where the focus is employment.

In Vancouver, the majority of the 22 youth (19 out of 22 as of November 2014) are engaged in educational plans. This is supported by the extended stay possibility (a young person could finish high school and complete college/university while residing at ROP) and extensive financial support through scholarships that are made available. In Toronto, more youth are engaged in employment, however a significant number are also in school.

In developing case plans both locations use the SMART goal concept. This means ensuring that plans are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely. This makes it easier to break the plans down into manageable chunks so that the youth can quickly develop a sense of possibility and success.

CHT: The case plans in Toronto are developed by the Consistent Worker in partnership with the young person. A summary (Case Review Summary form) is prepared by the Consistent Worker and taken to one of the weekly Case Management Team (CMT) meetings; each youth's file is reviewed every two weeks. The CMT meetings are attended by the Consistent Workers and Team Leaders, as well as the Life Skills Coordinator, Mentor Coordinator and other staff from Covenant House or community partners. At each CMT meeting, the Team Leader completes a Case Management Notes report based upon the input of the Consistent Worker and the other CMT attendees.

At the 9 month mark planning begins for discharge and involves the youth's Consistent Worker, Youth in Transition Workers and Housing Workers. This planning includes a very comprehensive assessment that looks at the skills a youth will need to live on their own and where they are in obtaining these skills. This helps determine future housing plans, including whether the youth needs another transitional housing program or is ready for independent living. In some cases, the gaps can be addressed through focused life skills development in the last few months. In others, the Youth in Transition (aftercare) workers may need to address some of these issues with the youth.

CHV: During Steps 1-3 the case plan form is filled out by the Case Manager and is discussed during the youth's weekly case planning session, which is attended by the youth, Case Manager, and Key Worker. The Life Skills worker attends as needed.

It is a very collaborative document. In Step 4, the youth begin developing their case plan for review with the Case Manager. By Step 5, youth are writing plans themselves and presenting them during their Case Plan session. In Step 6, the weekly case planning meetings move to bi-weekly and the youth continue to write their plans.

The Case Plan document has multiple components (see example – CHV ROP - Case Plan Sample). It includes basic demographic information, updates in a variety of key areas, notes on new areas/goals/dates and a section for the youth to make their own request of staff.

There is also a Case Management Residential Log, which is a narrative written by the Case Manager each time they meet with a youth or when they need to relay an update to the team (strategies, consultation with the mental health team etc.).

A Program Tracking Sheet forms part of the residential log. This contains steps and progress with program requirements, including curfew, key worker meetings, case plan, community dinners, life skills etc.). This information is formally tracked in Efforts to Outcomes (the evaluation database software) on a weekly basis and becomes one of the metrics used to evaluate the program. Information from this section may be mentioned in the Case Plan, but is not a requirement as it is monitored by the Key Worker.

Covenant House Vancouver recently transitioned to a new Case Management Model. Under the previous model there was one Case Manager responsible for the 22 youth in the ROP program, as well as the youth in independent living with Hollyburn. Other Case Managers followed youth in the shelter program and through the outreach services. When a youth transitioned between programs they were given a new Case Manager.

Now, youth are assigned a Case Manager when they enter any Covenant House Vancouver program regardless of entry point. That individual will stay with and support the youth through their entire journey with the agency. If/when youth move between stages on the Continuum of Care, the Case Manager continues to work with them and support them in their new area of focus.

“Our goal is to have one youth, one file, and one Case Manager that will work with them up until they’re twenty-five years old. This way they don’t have to repeat their stories over and over again, and it will help them—one of the things we were seeing is we were starting over, every time the youth was coming back into the building. So this way even though that they may leave, they can still come back and we can continue moving forward with them.”
—Lisa Ronaldson, Case Manager, Covenant House Vancouver

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Case plans are excellent for tracking goals and activities. The plans are always youth-driven, which allows a young person to develop planning skills and autonomy even within a transitional housing/congregate living situation.

LIFE SKILLS

Both programs are life skills-based meaning the development of a youth's life skills comprises a large component of the work that is done during the stay.

Life skills are extremely important for this population and are skills that a youth might normally obtain when growing up in a stable family environment.

“I think the difference for our young people when they come to us, around their life skills, is that they haven't been in stable family situations. They haven't been part of families where they would come together around cooking; where each kid in the family would have a piece to contribute to the meal. Or [where] they would be part of going out to buy groceries and understanding where you should get groceries and how to get groceries cheaply. I think those are normal conversations that you have in a family where people talk about budgets and constraints, and ‘we can do this, or we can take this kind of holiday or we can't take that kind of holiday. We can have hamburgers for dinner but we can't have steak every night, it's a special occasion kind of meal.’ And these kids haven't been exposed to that. So, when they come to us, they haven't got that normal sort of family experiences that help them or give them a bit of a leg up when they go on their own.”

—Carol Howes, Director of Program Services, Covenant House Toronto



A youth at ROP Vancouver cooking their own meal.

The Covenant House Vancouver Participant Guide defines life skills as “the skills and abilities that help you deal with challenges you face in life. They are skills needed to carry out the day-to-day operations of independent living and that help us live the lives we want to lead.”

Life skills may include, but are not limited to –

- » Money management
- » Job training
- » Employment
- » Housing after ROP
- » Education and training
- » Health and well-being
- » Daily living skills
- » Personal and social development
- » Legal rights and responsibilities

“Well, we have life skills workers who do weekly sessions with us on skills for life. Some kids might need to learn how to do laundry; some kids might need to learn how to cook. For me, it’s been a lot of budgeting and goal planning.”
—“Patrick”, 21, Covenant House Vancouver current ROP participant

Life skills are designed to meet an individual youth’s needs and “help facilitate healthy, positive and productive growth.”

Early on in their stay each youth at ROP conducts an assessment to determine what life skills they already have and where they may need support. This can lead to the development of a life skills plan, which can be revised throughout a youth’s stay. Assessments are also done at departure to show the youth how many skills they have gained during their residency.

“I think it’s just more of setting a routine of doing these things so that way when you leave it’s not such a big shock that, ‘oh, I’m on my own and I have to do laundry today.’”
—Vanessa, 28, past ROP participant, Covenant House Toronto

**"I think it's just more of
setting a routine of doing
these things so that way
when you leave it's not
such a big shock that,
*'oh, I'm on my own and I have
to do laundry today.'*"**

—*Vanessa, Past Participant, ROP Toronto*

At times, life skills are offered as part of a class, while at others youth work one-on-one or in a small group with a worker to help develop their skills. For example, at Covenant House Toronto, the overnight staff offer a Wednesday morning breakfast life skills session – youth learn a skill and get a bonus meal.

Life skills are also broken down into practical, manageable chunks. Learning to manage money is an important skill. Youth need to open bank accounts, create a monthly budget, set up debt repayment plans etc. Jennifer Morrison, the Life Skills Worker at Covenant House Vancouver, says,

“Within the budgeting spectrum, we might have youth track their spending for a week and keep all of their receipts so that we can look at their spending habits. And then we would sit down with that youth and we would go over what their expenses are and what some of their spending habits are, and what some of their needs are versus their wants, and really start to make it make sense for them.”

CHT: Toronto uses its life skills program to provide rewards, such as overnight privileges and extended curfews. A minimum of two life skills are required each month.

A Life Skills assessment is completed at intake and reviews are undertaken at the six month point and upon departure. The life skills assessments lead to a life skills plan which is shared at the Case Management Team (CMT) meeting. The CMT follows the progress of the youth in their life skills plan. The reviews are similar to the assessment and look to map growth in specific life skills areas.

CHV: Vancouver uses a six-step program as a framework that guides youth’s progress in the program during the stay. Life skills are a key component of the step program.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Life skills are the foundation of the Rights of Passage program and are essential to providing support to young people leaving homelessness. Best practices in Housing First suggest that it is necessary to provide supports that are individualized and meet the needs of the person who has been experiencing homelessness (Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver, 2013; Gaetz, 2014b). The life skills training programs offered by ROP form a core means of providing individualized supports.

Agencies looking to develop their own transitional housing program are advised to consider some of the key points about life skills from ROP at Covenant House:

- » Life skills programs are offered in both class/workshop format and as one-on-one lessons to meet needs expressed by the youth.

- » All staff at ROP are trained in, and provide, life skills. While there are life skills coordinators at both locations, all staff can do life skills sessions with the youth. This allows for the creation of mini-learning opportunities to respond to issues as they arise and for youth to bond and work with a variety of helping adults.
- » Life skills are also considered quite broadly – for some youth it is specific skills such as cooking, financial management or job search – but for other youth, inter-personal skills and addressing social anxiety are considered to be just as important.
- » Life skills are mandatory and are connected to rewards and privileges. At CHT this reward system is clear and immediate: completing life skills earns credits, which are equated with extended curfews. At CHV life skills are necessary to progress through the steps. Completion of the steps affects the percentage of the program fee returned to the youth at the end of their stay.

SPACE

Covenant House Vancouver houses their ROP program in space originally designed and operated by St. James Community Services. Opened in 1998 by the Vancity Place for Youth Society, the board’s goal was to “create safe, affordable housing for street-involved youth, supported by programming and training to assist them to live independently.” In 2000, the board decided that it needed to get community agencies involved in supporting the program and issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for an agency to “take on responsibility for the operation, funding and governance of the residence.” Covenant House Vancouver was the selected proponent and took over operations on April 1st, 2001 (from: <https://www.vancity.com/AboutVancity/News/MediaReleases/Archives/MediaArchive2001/Feb5CovenantHousetoOperateVancityPlace/>).

Covenant House Toronto houses their ROP program in the old 21 McGill Club building, an upscale women’s health club. Built in 1924, the five-storey brick building originally housed the Central YWCA. Covenant House began their program in 2002 with extensive support from the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC); in recognition of their status as the main funder, Toronto’s program is officially called the CIBC Rights of Passage.

In both locations, youth have their own private room. This is not the same for all ROP programs; in New Orleans for example, youth share rooms with 2 to 4 other youth.

Rooms range in size from about 100 to 300 sq. ft. in Toronto and the average footage is 245 sq. ft. in Vancouver. Rooms at CHV also have a full private bathroom and a small kitchen area (microwave, sink and mini-fridge) whereas in Toronto, the rooms have no additional amenities.

In both locations rooms are furnished with a bed, dresser, desk and nightstand. Both Toronto and Vancouver ensure that each room has a window allowing youth to have access to natural light. Upon intake, residents are given a small start-up kit. In Toronto this includes primarily hygiene items, while in Vancouver it also includes cleaning supplies, a clock radio, linens and a lamp.

Both locations have common areas including kitchens, living spaces (including TVs, computers) and in Toronto, common washrooms with showers. Laundry rooms are also provided on-site for a small fee that is similar to the cost of laundry in the local community.

Both locations share some amenities with the crisis/shelter program, while also maintaining privacy and unique space for ROP. Primarily, this means that ROP youth are able to use certain spaces within the shelter; however, shelter residents are not allowed to come into ROP, except in specific cases.⁷ Covenant House Toronto also has a full-sized gymnasium refurbished by the Toronto Raptors.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

The differences between the two locations in terms of how the space is designed is an aspect that agencies developing transitional housing need to consider. Much of this may depend on budget and whether the building is a renovation or new build.

Both locations provide kitchen access even though CHT allows youth to access the shelter meal program the entire length of their stay. They found that providing a communal kitchen allows for youth to develop the necessary skills of meal planning, shopping and cooking. For CHV, a kitchen is a necessary component since later steps require youth to prepare their own meals.

For programs that are considering lengthier stays in their transitional housing (longer than one year) an ensuite private bathroom and mini-kitchen create spaces that are more conducive to stays of multiple years. While the ability to provide such amenities is limited by space and financial considerations, their inclusion develops a deeper sense of independent living. In fact, this model of small rooms with micro-kitchens and bathrooms is one used for permanent housing by many homeless-serving programs including [St. Clare's Multifaith Housing](#) in Toronto and [Common Ground](#) in New York City.

Since Toronto focuses on a shorter term stay, the single rooms with shared common spaces provide youth with the independence they need to start preparing for independent living, but do not encourage them to get too attached to the space; after a year, most youth are ready to move on.

It is important to get youth input into the space. Certain fixtures, images, colours and smells may be triggers to a youth. An agency also needs to decide what they will do when there are concerns; for example, can they afford to fix an issue right away to ensure it is not a trigger for other youth in the future?

Recently, CHT added full-length mirrors to the rooms allowing youth the privacy to really look at themselves.

⁷ The Covenant House Vancouver policy on visitors does allow for shelter residents to be signed into ROP by a youth with permission of staff. They would be able to use common spaces while in the presence of their ROP host. CHT does not allow any visitors in ROP, however, shelter youth may be in the space for a meeting, life skills class etc. if accompanied by a staff member.

“For the first time they can probably stand, without clothes, in front of a full-length mirror, and really look at themselves. Learn to love themselves. Deal with issues that they have. And for a lot of them, they have never had that opportunity that so many of us take for granted.”

—Julie Neubauer, Transitional Housing Manager, Covenant House Toronto

As will be discussed in the LGBTQ2S and Gender section in Program Elements, it is important that agencies with shared washrooms ensure that there are also gender-neutral washrooms – especially showers – available.

LENGTH OF STAY

In order to stay in the program, a youth must work their program, follow the rules of their respective ROP and engage in their day plan.

CHT: Youth in Toronto are able to stay for one year. Occasionally, short extensions are made – particularly for youth who are addressing mental health or addictions issues – increasing the duration up to 18 months. While CHT would like to extend their length of stay options, they are limited by provincial legislation that puts limits on the length of time a program like this can house youth.

CHV: The length of stay at Covenant House Vancouver was recently increased from “one year with the possibility of extension to two years” to “up to the youth’s 25th birthday”. This means a youth could technically stay in the ROP program from the time they are 16 years of age up to 25 years of age. John Harvey, Director of Program Services, states that the previous average length of stay was 13 months. He thinks that a realistic estimate (based in part on the experiences of the Infinity Project in Calgary) that takes into account the extension is between two to three years.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Agencies setting up a similar program need to take a few factors into consideration when establishing duration of stay.

- » What are the legislative guidelines that affect duration?
- » How many spaces are available and does a longer stay reduce access for other youth? In other words – is it better to allow more youth shorter stays or fewer youth longer stays?
- » What needs are the youth presenting with and are these issues going to require longer or shorter interventions?

- » What other transitional housing programs exist in the community for the same population (if any)?
- » What kinds of partnerships can be established to provide support to youth in the program that cannot be met in-house? For example, a mental health agency may be able to provide counselling and support services to a youth allowing him/her to remain in the program longer.

MONEY – TRUST FUND VS PROGRAM FEE

ROP residents in Toronto pay into a Trust Fund. In Vancouver they pay a monthly program fee. While these plans require different contributions (which will be explained below) they have three big commonalities:

1. It is made clear that this is not a rent payment. It is critical to avoid fees/payments being construed as rent as this then leads to rights and obligations for both parties under relevant landlord/tenant legislation.
2. Money is refunded in full or in part to the residents upon departure.
3. By simulating a rent payment it creates a practice of regularly budgeting and setting aside money for housing costs on the part of the young person.

CHT: Residents of ROP in Toronto pay into a Trust Fund. The amount of the payment is determined in conjunction with staff and is individualized based upon a youth's income, as well as their anticipated rent after they move out of ROP. For a youth who is receiving social assistance the amount might be \$180, whereas a youth who is receiving funds from child welfare might be asked to pay \$600. Changes in income sources or amounts require a re-working of the budget to determine what the payment should be.

“When I first came here they set up a budget of how much I was making monthly and we broke it down to ‘Okay, what do I need to spend on hygiene products? What’s my clothing budget for the month? Entertainment? Food?’ and then just kind of allotting ‘Okay, so I’m going to put away \$500 every month because that’s what rent would be.’ The idea is that you try to put as much away as you can budget so that way when you leave here you get that money back. It was a really good opportunity for me because I was able to leave here with some savings. I don’t think if I hadn’t come here I would have been able to do that on my own.”

—Vanessa, age 28, past ROP resident, Covenant House Toronto

Within the first two weeks of arrival the youth will develop a budget and savings agreement with their Consistent Worker. If necessary, youth will be supported to establish chequing/savings accounts at a financial institution.

Frequency of Trust Fund payments will depend on the schedule by which a youth is paid/ receives income; most youth pay bi-weekly. Youth have a 48 hour period after they get paid in which to make their Trust Fund payment. Failure to do so can result in an overnight suspension from the program and a referral to a homeless youth shelter.

When the Trust Fund account reaches \$5,000 the youth meets with their bank and makes plans to move this money into their own secured savings; for example, a tax free savings account. All of the savings are returned to the young person, whether the Trust Fund contributions were made through earnings, scholarships or a form of government assistance (i.e. social assistance, disability payments).

As youth get closer to discharge (usually around the nine month mark), the youth begins to save money in their own account rather than making Trust Fund payments. The amount they save will increase to be a more realistic match with a future rent payment. This may require a reworking of their budget in consultation with their Consistent Worker.

CHV: Residents of ROP in Vancouver pay a monthly program fee amounting to 60% of income up to an absolute maximum of \$300 per month. This is due on the 1st of each month. While most youth pay the \$300 flat rate, the Steps guidelines indicate this as the standard payment. A pro-rated payment is made for the month in which they move in to ROP.

Program fees are set aside and potentially available for reimbursement. The policy notes “this does not include program fees that are paid while you are on a youth agreement, income assistance, or employment insurance (EI). It also does not include program fees that are paid late” or any program fees paid beyond the first year⁸. This rule ensures that only the monies the youth themselves pay (as opposed to a government agency) is returned to the youth.

If a youth moves out during Step 1 or Step 2 they are not eligible for reimbursement. If they move out during Steps 3-6, a portion of their program fee is returned in the “form of a cheque, start-up items, or damage deposit for your new place and/or educational scholarship.”

Known as a “graduation bursary” the assistance is designed to help youth transition and succeed in their independent living. The assistance may be paid directly to a vendor such as a landlord or educational institution.

The value of the bursary is as follows:

- » 25% of the fees paid if departing while on Step 3
- » 50% of the fees paid if departing while on Step 4
- » 75% of the fees paid if departing while on Step 5
- » 100% of the fees paid if departing according to plan after successfully completing Step 5 or 6.

For example: A youth who pays the maximum \$300/month and who leaves after one year with a successful completion of Step 5 or 6, would therefore be reimbursed \$3,600. If they left after a year but were still on Step 3 their graduation bursary would be \$900.

⁸ This is in the process of being reviewed with the change in limits of stay. These changes only took effect in October 2014 so CHV is working to figure out possible options for the graduation bursary in this new context.



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

The ability to reimburse youth is definitely an ideal goal. However, it may not always be feasible from an operational point of view. In some cases, the contribution from the youth may need to form part of the operating budget of the transitional housing program. However, the youth may not always make their payments so it would be risky for agencies to count on the payments as a guaranteed form of support.

We support a zero discharge into homelessness policy and do not feel that missing a payment (i.e. Trust Fund payment in Toronto) should be grounds for a suspension. While we understand the intent of showing that actions have consequences, transitional housing needs to be a secure place that allows for youth to make mistakes without resulting in even a night of homelessness.

From a legislative perspective, the act of reimbursing all or a portion of funds to the youth should be an argument against the program and the agency being seen as a landlord under provincial/territorial landlord-tenant legislation.

Whether or not money is reimbursed, getting youth in the practice of paying rent is a great concept. The creation of that habit, along with support provided to the youth around budgeting, makes it much more likely that the young person will be able to maintain rental payments when they move into independent living.

We understand that the change to length of stay is new in Vancouver, and we support their review of the graduation bursary cap. Any agency looking to develop a longer term stay program should consider how a youth who stays for several years will be able to recoup more of their funding even if it is just a percentage of what is paid.

We also feel that Toronto's Trust Fund payments provides youth with a more realistic sense of budgeting and better models the actual payment of rent. We particularly like the gradual increase of the amount paid so that youth first get comfortable with the idea of budgeting and making regular "rent" payments and then begin to contribute more based on their post-discharge plans. We encourage organizations to work to have the youth contribute realistic payments. Even in small communities, it is unlikely that a post-graduation/discharge rent payment will be \$300 (the amount of the program fee in Vancouver) so it is better to get youth accustomed to paying a higher amount (unless they are addressing and paying off debt instead).

The question of returning funds to a youth when the income source was government funding is a tricky one. Certainly, if a government agreement states that the payments they make to an organization are only for that organization itself (and particularly if the payments are made directly to an organization) then the money cannot be returned to the youth. However, if youth are receiving funds directly (i.e. social assistance, disability payments) and are then making their expected practice rent contribution themselves, we believe the money should be returned to the youth as if it came from any other source. This is the practice at Covenant House Toronto and we think it is a good one. The start-up funds provided by the graduation bursary/Trust Fund system is critical to helping youth establish themselves independently.

MEALS

Both organizations have rules and guidelines around meals and kitchen use. These include orientations to the kitchen and safety assessments. Some of the youth at ROP have never made their own meals. Life skills are a key means of teaching the youth how to create their own meals before they graduate.

“Cooking would be another example that’s really critical. Before we really beefed up our kitchen program we would have kids that had graduated from the program... it was sad to hear that they were living in the community pretty successfully but they went to a fast food place to get their dinner every night. So that really concerned me; we were graduating kids from the program and clearly they didn’t really know how to cook and do that piece, so we’ve really beefed up that side of the program so that kids leave and know they shouldn’t spend all their money on fast food.”

—Carol Howes, Director of Program Services, Covenant House Toronto

CHT: Limited quantities of basic food staples are always available in the ROP kitchen, provided through their Food Services Department. This includes cereal, milk, bread, juice, soup, rice, pasta, onions and carrots. Youth are provided with a bin in the refrigerator to store their fresh food and a small locker area for dry goods.

Youth are also able to go to the Crisis shelter for lunch and/or dinner. The ROP residents go over as a group at a set time. For youth who are offsite (i.e. school, work or approved appointment) a lunch can be made to take with them. Those who are offsite for program reasons during dinner may sign up for a saved dinner. This meal is stored in the lounge fridge and must be accessed via staff. If the meal is not eaten by 5pm the next day it’s transferred to the kitchen fridge for general consumption.

CHT has fairly strict rules in place about kitchen access. In particular, a staff member must be present before a youth is allowed to use a stovetop. At times, this means youth may need to wait for a staff person to be free before preparing their meal.

CHV: A limited supply of groceries is available for youth on Steps 1-3, which is intended to supplement a youth’s grocery budget, not replace it. Youth may store their own food items in the kitchen fridge or freezer providing they are not too big and are clearly marked.

Youth are responsible for preparing their own food for breakfast and lunch, either individually or cooperatively with other residents. Youth on Steps 4-6 are fully responsible for providing their own breakfast, lunch and snacks (exceptions include communal meals they participate in, Sunday brunch, cooking class meals or special events).

A dinner is served nightly from 5:20pm to 6pm in the main floor dining room. One of the goals of the meal is to build a sense of community by providing an opportunity for social interaction. Saved dinners are available (must be requested in advance) for youth in Steps 1-4 who are at work or school during dinner time. They will be kept on a tray which can be reheated in the kitchen on the youth’s floor. For youth on Steps 5 and 6 saved dinners are not available and the youth must supply and prepare their own meal if they miss the dinner.

A weekly Community Dinner is hosted by ROP and unless excused by their Key Worker (for a reason connected to their case plan i.e. work or school), all youth residing in ROP are required

to attend. Former ROP residents who are 25 and under are allowed to attend as long as they are not under the influence during the meal or carded (i.e. suspended/banned) by CHV. Youth may invite family or friends to attend under the guidelines of the ROP Visitor's Policy.

At CHV, youth have open access to their common kitchens with two exceptions:

- » no deep frying
- » knives are locked so they have to sign them in and out as needed

Youth are free to use the stove without a staff member present and have access to the common kitchens unsupervised.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

It is critical to develop the skills associated with meal preparation, including budgeting, planning, shopping, cooking and clean-up. At the same time, especially in the early stages, youth may not have the funds or ability to prepare their own meals. The mix of options that both locations offer – provision of basic staples, introduction to shopping, meal planning and cooking through life skills, ability to have meals with the crisis/shelter program – is a good way to address the barriers.

Vancouver's Step program is useful in that it gradually increases independence by ensuring that youth take charge of more and more of their own meal preparation. Access to the dining room meal program exists for dinners even in the later steps (although not saved meals), which ensures that youth are able to eat if they are running low on funds or otherwise unable to prepare a meal for themselves on a particular day.

We found Covenant House Toronto's kitchen access to be too strict:

- » The kitchen passport is overly complicated and does not model what is done in a home kitchen (and perhaps not even a professional one). While recognizing that safety is important we also want to assist youth to begin to develop their kitchen skills as quickly as possible. While CHT recently modified some of its passport requirements they feel that tasks/learnings are necessary to ascertain a baseline of skills.
- » Access to the stove is an area of concern brought up in the interviews and also noted in the review of policies. Again, while recognizing that safety is key, it is also important to give youth a sense of independence. The youngest participant in ROP is 16 years old and by that age should be able to use a stove unsupervised (or at least can with some training). CHT notes that despite the training that exists, two grease fires were contained quickly because of the presence of staff.
- » We suggest that agencies developing their own program consider easing the guidelines so that after a youth has completed a certain number of cooking life skills or has successfully used the stove in front of staff a few times that the youth may move to independent use.

"Clearly they *didn't* really know how to cook and do that piece, so we've really beefed up that side of the program so that kids leave and know they shouldn't spend all their money on fast food."

—Carol Howes, Covenant House Toronto

MONTHLY HOUSE MEETING

House Meetings at both ROP programs are mandatory. They provide an opportunity for communication to the group as a whole to ensure information is shared promptly and efficiently. Youth can only be excused from a House Meeting if it conflicts with their work or school schedule, or another program requirement, and must communicate this to their worker.

CHT: A monthly house meeting is held with staff and residents. This is primarily an opportunity for staff and residents to discuss issues and concerns around the house, upcoming policy or procedural changes, and to share events.

Residents also hold their own meeting as desired, organized by a youth, to discuss issues of concern. Interest in holding these meetings seems to depend on whether there are issues of concern in the program and whether there is a youth who is inclined to organize. Minutes are taken and then given to senior staff.

CHV: A monthly house meeting is held to allow two-way communication between staff and residents. Anyone who has an issue to discuss can have it placed on the agenda.

Youth are encouraged and supported –including funding—to organize their own resident-only meetings and events, however there is very little take-up in this regard.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Allowing youth and staff an opportunity to discuss issues is key to building a harmonious living environment. Making the meetings mandatory is also important as it helps ensure everyone receives the same information at the same time.

We particularly like the residents-only option available in both cities, as it does provide a safe space for youth to air grievances they may have with the program or staff. We encourage all agencies to make space and funding available to the youth to organize their own meetings or events.



LGBTQ2S AND GENDER

Both locations have a floor for male residents and a floor for female residents. Youth identify their gender during the application process and this determines which floor they are put on.

This is a recent switch for Covenant House Vancouver, which had co-ed floors until October 2014. There were fears that a male-only floor would result in increased aggression and as a result staff received training on de-escalation and dealing with physical confrontations. This fear did not materialize.

At CHT, the youth share bathrooms. Bathrooms and shower facilities are gendered – that is, the female-only floor has female-only bathrooms. Within the shared bathroom, the shower stalls are individual. If requested, youth can access private showers in other parts of the program/agency.

Since CHV youth have their own private bathroom in their individual room the overall issue of bathroom privacy is addressed. However, the agency has shared gender-neutral restroom facilities on all floors with appropriate signage.

Both agencies have made a concentrated effort to develop programs and policies that support LGBTQ2S youth. Given that 25-40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ2S this is an important consideration for all youth-serving agencies. CHT has a standing LGBTQ2S cross-agency committee that reviews policy, practice, gaps in service and supports. There is also an LGBTQ2S youth group that meets every two weeks. All staff are trained by Rainbow Health Ontario to ensure awareness and sensitivity to the LGBTQ2S community of youth. CHV has mandatory LGBTQ2S training provided by a local agency (PRISM) on a regular basis for all program staff, they have members of the LGBTQ2S community working in all departments and have established community relationships for referrals.

Both agencies have policies around discrimination and harassment. The CHT Rights of Passage manual states “ROP is a welcoming community for people of all sexual orientations, gender identity, and racial diversity. Any homophobic, racist, or derogatory comments and/or actions intended to hurt another program participant will not be tolerated.”

They are both part of a Covenant House International initiative that has joined with the [True Colors Fund](#), an organization founded by Cyndi Lauper. While it is still rolling out, they are working on cultural/inclusion assessments with a goal to strengthen their organizational culture around openness and inclusion.



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

The issue of co-ed or sole gender floors is going to be one for an agency to consider based on space, layout, numbers of youth applying etc. There are definitely arguments that can be made for each viewpoint (segregated female floors may make young women who have experienced sexual assault or violence feel safer; co-ed floors allow for youth to develop inter-personal skills with a wider variety of people).

Allowing youth to self-determine/select their gender (and therefore their floor) is a good start towards trans-inclusivity. To a certain extent, it allows youth who are transgender or genderqueer (or otherwise “gender non-conforming”) to be housed with a reduced fear of discrimination. However, the limit of “male-only” or “female-only” floors means youth who do not identify with a binary gender are limited and must choose the one they feel “closest to”. Co-ed space, in that sense, is more trans-inclusive as youth are not required to select one over the other.

For an agency to truly make itself an LGBTQ2S positive space there are other factors that come into play. This includes:

- » Providing ongoing and mandatory information and training for all staff (no matter what their role).
- » Providing information and holding awareness workshops for youth.
- » Developing and enforcing a strong policy against harassment and discrimination.
- » Providing gender-neutral washrooms, including shower facilities (especially if youth do not have their own private bathroom).
- » Building networks and partnerships with LGBTQ2S agencies in order to refer youth, find counsellors/mentors etc.
- » Ensuring that non-LGBTQ2S agencies to which youth are referred have training, policies and programs in place to support LGBTQ2S youth or providing them with support needed to create a positive space.
- » Allowing youth to attend LGBTQ2S events and support groups (i.e. through curfew extensions) under the same criteria that would apply to any other external support.
- » Developing inclusive forms (i.e. additional options to male/female for gender).
- » Hiring people from the LGBTQ2S community to work in the organization in a variety of roles and positions.
- » Soliciting volunteers and mentors from the LGBTQ2S community.
- » Ensuring that all policies are reviewed through an LGBTQ2S lens.

**"For the first time they can...
...really look at themselves.
Learn to love themselves.
Deal with issues that they
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that opportunity that
so many of us take for granted."**

—Julie Neubauer, Covenant House Toronto

Mentorship Program - Covenant House Toronto

The Mentorship Program exists only at Covenant House Toronto, while Vancouver is in the exploratory phase of creating such an initiative.

Similar to the more familiar "Big Brothers" or "Big Sisters" programs, the Mentorship program matches up youth – primarily from Rights of Passage, the scattered site transitional housing and the Youth In Transition Program –with a mentor. The goal is to give the youth an adult, who **is not** a staff member, with whom they can build a relationship.

“The mentorship program has been a very blessed experience for me. My mentor is someone I actually do lookup to because my mentor contains the same qualities and traits that I always wish I had. I like that things are going at a pace that I can control because I have too many variables in my life that I have little if any control over and sometimes I feel as if I’m being buried alive. I still have much to work on concerning my character and my aspirations and I know things wont change overnight and I don’t expect them to. I also know that its not my mentor’s job to change my situation; it is my mentor’s job to help me acquire the tools and/or resources I need to move myself forward which my mentor has been doing. There are many like me in the mentorship program; lost souls who know what they want and have the willingness needed to get there but they lack the means not because we aren’t bright or lack capabilities but we have come from broken situations like homelessness or abuse or disasters that have impaired our judgement and at times crippled our abilities to possess the skills we need to move forward.”

– "Aisha", 25, ROP Participant and Mentee

Mentors apply to the program and are interviewed, screened and reference checked. Volunteers go through intensive and ongoing training as well as participate in Mentor Support Groups. They are expected to commit to a one-year timeframe with the program. Once matched, the volunteer mentor agrees to weekly contact (including texts, phone calls and/or emails) with twice monthly meet-ups with their youth.

“The best part of being a mentor is to see how much she’s grown since we met. It’s like, oh my gosh, the first time we met I did not think the person she is now was under there, or I just didn’t know her. But I mean, you meet your mentees faced with difficult situations in life and it’s amazing to watch how they face them and overcome the challenges and how they grow.”

—Danna Brown former ROP mentor

The matches are made through a meet and greet process where mentees and mentors get an opportunity to get to know each other. After some introductory games, they sit down one-on-one to answer questions that are pulled from a jar. At the end of the evening the youth and mentors are able to submit their choices to the Mentorship Coordinator. If there is a match, then the Coordinator will connect the two together.

There are very strict rules that are in place for the mentors/mentees to follow during the program including:

- » Each person must pay for themselves. This encourages independence on the part of the youth and helps them with their budgeting. It also reduces the likelihood of a dependence upon the mentor for financial offerings.
- » The mentor is allowed to share certain personal information but must be aware of what they share. They are not allowed to introduce the youth to their friends/family, take them to their home etc.
- » Youth and the mentor must meet in the community, not at Covenant House except in certain circumstances (i.e. the use of the Girl's Lounge at Covenant House, group activities with other mentors/mentees).

Once the program is completed and the youth graduates than these rules are removed as the relationship, if it continues, is solely between the youth and the mentor as independent adults. This often happens –and is indeed, part of the hope of Covenant House—and the relationship is able to evolve.

"When we graduated I knew that it was a fear for her that she'd be on her own and that would be the end of our friendship. And for me, I spent more time with her than so many other people in my life during the course of the year that it was unimaginable that all of a sudden the program would be over and I wouldn't be that support. So, we've continued. It's been about eight months and we still see each other just as much and we're more in touch. And without the boundaries of the program it's more natural and it's shaped into almost a different kind of friendship because there are less boundaries. But I see ourselves, I see us being in each other's lives for as long as she needs me and I need her."
 —Danna Brown, past ROP Mentor



Danna Brown, (past ROP mentor) speaks about having a close relationship with her mentee.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

This kind of initiative is extremely beneficial to the youth. It may be seen as an "add-on" to a transitional housing program, and in many ways it is, but at the same time, it is extremely important for the long-term success of a young person. Particularly, in cases of time-limited accommodation, the ability of a young person to develop and maintain a relationship with a community mentor can help their overall success on the path to independence.

"I spent more time with her than so many other people in my life during the course of the year that it was unimaginable that all of a sudden the program would be over and I wouldn't be that support."

—Danna Brown, Past ROP Mentor

Rules

There are a number of rules to help ensure the smooth running of the Rights of Passage Program. In many cases, these also support the Covenant House International principles of Sanctuary and Structure.

Rules are created to match youth where they are at based on their age and stage of life. In Vancouver the rules are also influenced by the Steps and the stage the youth is at in the program. For example, at Step 1 a youth can get support from staff with waking up, remembering appointments, taking medication, but in later stages these need to be done without staff assistance.

Per the case plan all youth must be in school, working or following an alternative track to address mental health or addictions issues. There is zero tolerance for discrimination, violence etc.

There are also general rules that would apply to most transitional housing programs around cleaning up after oneself, chores and bedroom cleanliness. Both locations, understanding that not all youth have the knowledge, teach youth to complete certain chores, how to maintain their room etc. Room inspections take place (daily in Toronto, weekly in Vancouver) to check for fire safety, presence of unauthorized visitors and cleanliness, including no dirty dishes, no spoiled food, empty garbage bins, no excessive dirty laundry etc.

These chores are also used to help incentivize youth. In Toronto, for example, completion of chores and a clean room is one of the criteria for overnights and extended curfews (conversely, failure to do chores could result in decreased curfews). In Toronto youth do two chores per week, four chores in a two-week period and no more than one per day. In Vancouver they do five chores per week.

Other general rules apply to the use of space and safety. Both agencies have rules about computer use, for example. Rules are in place to address issues such as noise, smoking, keys/fobs, pets, damages, cable/internet, laundry, sexual activity, weapons, pornography, attire, belongings etc.

Below we outline some of key rules that should be considered in the development of a transitional housing program, understanding that other rules may need to be developed depending on a specific agency's needs or program offerings.

Rules included in the toolkit cover the following topics:

- » Curfew
- » Overnights
- » Visitors
- » Medication
- » Drug and Alcohol Use

CURFEW

Both locations have curfews for their youth. In the policy manual for Covenant House Toronto the purpose is explained as: “Curfew is a concrete expression of our Principle of Structure. It serves to assist the residents in developing the skills to discharge their daily living responsibilities (school, work, chores, etc.) during their stay in, and upon graduation from the Right of Passage program.”

CHT: The curfew changes as the youth moves through the program and is primarily dependent upon the completion of life skills workshops.

- » Orientation period: Curfew is 10pm.
- » After orientation it is 11pm Sunday through Thursday and 1am Friday and Saturday.
- » It can be increased to 3am/3am depending upon life skills completion. Each month youth are required to attend at least two life skills workshops, which earn them life skills credits. For every two credits they earn their weekday curfew is extended by a 30-minute interval. When the weekday time catches up to the weekend time (i.e. 1am/1am), they both go up together by 30-minute intervals to a maximum of 3am.
- » It is possible for curfews to be decreased if a youth fails to attend life skills sessions or is having other challenges meeting the expectations of the case plan or the overall program. These would be discussed at the weekly case management meeting and the reduction of the curfew could be applied as a means of removing a privilege.
- » Youth who are enrolled in high school generally have a school night curfew of 11pm regardless of the number of life skills they have completed. Once they show regular attendance and prove that curfew is not an area of concern that will impact upon their schooling they may have their curfew extended.

Curfew time is strict and the policy manual states: “late is late.”

- » If a youth is late for curfew they must meet with a staff member the next business day to explain their lateness.
- » If they are continually late they will meet with their Consistent Worker to create a plan to overcome this challenge.
- » If a youth is more than **one hour past curfew** and they have not contacted ROP staff then they are considered AWOL. When youth do contact staff the reason for the lateness/absence is discussed. Depending upon the reason youth who are AWOL might not be allowed into their room at ROP and instead may be referred to a shelter for the night. The next day the youth must speak with the Team Leader to determine follow-up actions.

CHV: The curfew is determined according to the step the youth is currently working on. As they work through the steps their curfew is increased accordingly:

- » **Step 1** - 10:00pm on work or school days/12:00am on 2 days off per week.
- » **Step 2** - 11:00pm on work or school days/1:00am on 2 days off per week.
- » **Step 3 and 4** - 12:00am on work or school days/2:00am on 2 days off per week.
- » **Step 5 and 6** – No curfew but must check in by phone when staying out late or away.

Youth who want an extension to a curfew need to make a request in advance. Any time a youth returns after 3am (whether it was approved or unapproved) it will count as an overnight rather than a late curfew. Youth are allowed into their room at this point and they will not be referred to a shelter.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Many youth who come to Covenant House have never had the benefit of a curfew. This structure is something that most youth who live in their family's home experience and generally the curfew time increases with age and responsibility. Determining what the curfew will be and how it will be enforced will be dependent upon a variety of factors.

- » Some communities have established a curfew for youth. While in most cases it applies to those under 16, in some places it includes 16 and 17 year olds. Agencies establishing curfews should align with legislation.
- » In some ROP programs the majority of youth are employed, while in others the focus is on education. Curfews should be flexible (as they are at both CHT and CHV) for youth if they are employed in a night-time or evening job (or night school) to allow for youth to work/attend class as required and to allow for travel time home.
- » Agencies may wish to set a stricter curfew time for youth engaged in school (or just for those in high school).
- » Agencies may choose to develop a graduated curfew time based on life skills (like CHT) or steps (like CHV). If doing so it should be clearly communicated to a youth what they need to do to extend their curfew and the ways in which a curfew can be reduced.
- » It is recommended that agencies do not penalize youth for missing curfew by referring them to a shelter for the evening. Except in cases of breaking a critical rule (violence, possession of drugs or weapons in the building etc.) loss of housing should not be used as a penalty. Transitional housing programs should aim to have a “zero discharge into homelessness” policy and discharging even for a night to a shelter violates that principle.

OVERNIGHTS

Both CHT and CHV allow for a limited number of excused overnight absences each month. In both locations these must be approved ahead of time. Nights away are earned by completing life skills (Toronto) or steps (Vancouver).

CHT: Youth are not allowed overnight passes during orientation period (unless there are extenuating circumstances). An overnight pass is considered an earned privilege rather than a right and can be revoked if a youth is not meeting the requirements of their plan. Youth earn the right to overnights by completing life skills. Youth must request their pass ahead of time and the decision is made by the Case Management Team.

In order to leave for their overnight the youth must have completed their chores and have a clean room (these are confirmed before the pass is issued). Youth must check-in with staff to ensure that the request is approved before leaving. They may be asked to complete a task before leaving such as cleaning their room, completing a chore or submitting their Trust Fund payment. Failure to do these tasks is considered an “unauthorized overnight” and may lead to suspension on return.

Consecutive nights are rarely allowed except during the holiday periods. A maximum of four overnight passes are allowed each month except in special circumstances.

The youth must return by curfew the next day or they will be considered AWOL. Youth who are AWOL may be suspended upon return and must discuss re-entry with the Team Leader.

Youth complete an Emergency Contact Form when they arrive in ROP (mandatory under 18, optional over 18). If a youth is absent for two nights without contact with staff or prior approval the emergency contact will be notified. If the youth is still deemed missing, the Toronto Police Services will be asked to issue a Missing Person report. After seven nights the individual could be automatically discharged.

CHV: No overnights are allowed during Step 1 (the first four weeks at least) because youth are settling in and it is deemed important for them to develop the routine of returning to the same location every night (and the resultant stability and security that comes with that). Two overnights are allowed during Step 2, three are allowed during Step 3 and four are allowed during Step 4. Five overnights are allowed during Step 5 and 6. The number of overnights is limited because a youth’s ability to participate in the program is dependent upon being present consistently. Youth who are frequently away from the program may not need the ROP anymore. More than five overnights during either of the last two Steps will prompt a discussion about whether or not it is time to move on.

It should be noted that during Steps 2 and 3 overnights must be pre-approved, while from Step 4 on, staff need only be notified. Permission is generally only granted for one night at a time and extended absences are discouraged. Absences beyond one night must be pre-approved, regardless of Step level.

If a youth is absent without approval for more than 72 hours it may be considered grounds for discharge and a missing person’s report will be filed if there is no contact.



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Having a strict overnight policy (while allowing for some flexibility) is a good way of developing structure and routine. It ensures that youth are present and accounted for and limits the likelihood that they return to old habits and behaviours.

Providing clear information about absences, discharge, missing persons' reports is beneficial to the youth and staff and is geared at eliminating misunderstandings and confusion. Both CHT and CHV provide this information to the youth in their manual and during orientation.

Referring a youth to a shelter for going AWOL could backfire by creating an opportunity for a youth to spend the night outside of their housing again. As with the curfew policy, we do not recommend that any punishments include a discharge (even for a night) into homelessness. Youth must have security in their housing.

Both CHT and CHV allow for exceptions to the overnight limits in certain cases – i.e. attempted family reconciliation through a holiday or vacation with family members. This is a key component; as a youth gets stabilized they may wish to begin to explore connections with their family. Gradually spending more time with them, including overnights, is a good way of exploring whether moving home is a safe and viable option.

The fact that police will be contacted and a missing person's report filed after an unexplained absence should create a sense of security for youth. It holds them accountable for their actions and shows that they have responsibilities along with privileges. It also emphasizes that their personal welfare is of concern.

VISITORS

Visitors can help youth maintain or develop positive social networks. At the same time, rules are in place to maintain safety and security of the youth, visitor, staff, other residents and the building itself.

CHT: Visitors are not allowed in the ROP program or other areas of the building with the exception of the McGill reception desk.

- » Visitors can ask for an ROP resident between 10am and 10pm.
- » They are allowed to wait in the lobby for five minutes maximum and then will be asked to leave the building.
- » Youth need to organize their visitors and be available for their arrival as it may not be possible for staff to look for a resident.
- » Confidentiality restricts staff from letting a visitor know whether a resident is in or out of the building.
- » ROP residents may not let another ROP youth in their room at any time.

CHV: Visitors are allowed at ROP in Vancouver with certain conditions:

- » Youth must sign their visitor in and out at the front desk.
- » The visitor may be asked to show identification.
- » Only two visitors per youth may be signed in at one time.
- » Youth are not allowed to sign in a visitor if they are scheduled to be at school, work, on job search or otherwise engaged in their program.
- » Prior approval must be obtained from the Program Manager to sign in a youth under 16.
- » Visitors are allowed in the common spaces between 10am to 11pm Sunday to Thursday and 10am to 1am Friday and Saturday.
- » Visitors are not allowed in any room occupied by youth.
- » No physical contact is permitted between youth and their visitors.
- » A visitor may not use an ROP computer or eat ROP food (with the exception of the community dinner).
- » Visitors from the other floor may be signed in by an ROP member.
- » Visitors from the Crisis shelter or other programs require advance permission from staff.
- » ROP residents may not let another ROP youth in their room at any time.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Creating opportunities for youth to maintain or create positive social relationships are important for growth and healing. At the same time, an organization has to maintain security and safety of all of its residents and staff. The layout of space may also restrict the ability of an organization to allow youth to have visitors.

Where possible, we recommend that youth be able to have visitors in common areas. This is particularly important in the case of family, close friendships or mentors. Having clear rules and guidelines for visitors (per CHV) is beneficial and important. Not allowing people within the youth's room is a good security measure and can help prevent complaints of theft or damage.

MEDICATION

CHT: Youth are responsible for taking, storing and refilling their prescription medication. They must inform staff of all medications that they take and this information can be passed on to medical personnel in case of an emergency. In certain situations, ROP staff may assist a youth by storing their medication in a secured cabinet.

CHV: Youth must inform staff of all medications they are taking. All medications (with the exception of vitamins, birth control and fast-acting medication), such as inhalers, will be kept locked in the office. In all Steps youth are responsible for taking medication as prescribed and will be asked to initial each time they take a dose. In Steps 1 and 2 youth may be reminded by staff that it is time for them to take or use a certain medication. In Steps 3-6 this is solely the responsibility of the youth. At this point, the youth may discuss with their Key Worker and Case Manager the possibility of storing their medication in their room.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Allowing a youth control of their own medication – perhaps with supports to remind them to take it – is beneficial but needs to be weighed against the risks of the medication being stolen or abused/misused by the youth. It is critical that a youth maintain control of emergency medication (i.e. epipens, rescue inhalers) and that staff are trained in their use and how to administer them.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

Both locations follow similar guidelines in terms of rules around drugs and alcohol.

- » Consuming or possessing drugs or alcohol on Covenant House property or during Covenant House activities is prohibited. This includes prescription medication not prescribed to the youth. Selling substances is also prohibited. Breaking these rules is cause for immediate suspension and possible discharge.
- » Youth who come into the ROP under the influence will be asked to go to their rooms and are not allowed in the common areas.
- » Disruptive behaviour will not be tolerated.
- » If necessary (due to moderate or severe intoxication) safety checks may be conducted (two staff entering room to check on the youth).

- » A young person may be asked to receive medical clearance to stay in the program if there are significant concerns for health.
- » If it is recognized that substance use is creating or contributing to problems in a youth's life, their case plan will be adjusted to address this.

In Toronto, a Substance Use Counsellor works with all youth who are identified as having drug and/or alcohol problems. If they are committed to working on their issues –with a goal of sobriety—they are entitled to engage in the Abstinence Support Program. Youth need to meet with the Substance Use Counsellor within 24 hours of returning to the building under the influence. An Abstinence Support Plan will be developed and the youth must work with the Case Management Team members, including their Consistent Worker and the Substance Use Counsellor, to maintain sobriety.

Toronto's safety planning procedures, which supports the ability of a youth to remain in program while under the influence, is geared at ensuring there is no risk to the safety of themselves, the building or others. These are outlined in the ROP Residents Using Drugs or Alcohol Policy found in the resource section.



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

The issue of substance use is always challenging in a congregate living situation. Covenant House supports abstinence-based housing and this is evident in their program design. While a harm reduction model is our preference – and indeed forms one of the core components of Housing First –there may be some youth who prefer and need abstinence-only housing to maintain their own sobriety (Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver, 2013; Gaetz, 2014b). When an agency has multiple housing options this can be addressed more easily, but when there is only one shared space, rules such as those developed above become more critical.

Age is definitely one consideration, as the ability to purchase, and the legal right to consume, alcohol varies by jurisdiction. Legality of substances is also something that needs to be examined (including the right of some people with certain health issues to hold a legal entitlement to use medical marijuana).

An approach that encourages sobriety but does not punish for lapses is more positive than a punitive approach. In fact, CHT only changed its policy in early 2015. Prior to that date returning to ROP under the influence could result in a suspension and a referral to a shelter program.

SCATTERED SITE TRANSITIONAL HOUSING *Program at Covenant House*

In following the Foyer’s Hub and Spoke model, both Covenant House Toronto (CHT) and Covenant House Vancouver (CHV) have developed different forms of transitional housing (besides their onsite Rights of Passage Program). Both agencies have a partnership with Hollyburn Properties, a large property management company that provides three apartments in Vancouver and two apartments in Toronto. CHT also has two condominium units through a partnership with the Daniels Corporation, a residential developer.

Toronto anticipates having 20 supported scattered-site apartments in total within the next three years, including [a specialized program for women](#) who are victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Vancouver also hopes to increase the size of its off-site transitional housing offerings.

Additionally, both organizations have housing workers who strive to develop connections with landlords – whether they are landlords who rent a room in their own home or those with multiple or large-scale rental opportunities.

While Covenant House Toronto has a more organized after-care component, both organizations try to stay connected with youth who leave to help address issues and prevent them from becoming homeless again.



“One of the things that we’ve found over the last several years is that young people are staying longer and longer in our shelter and part of the reason for that is... there are no affordable housing options for kids to move to in community. So we came up with the idea that we needed to create some of those options ourselves. We were turning to government but, quite frankly, government was not able to come forward with solutions that could meet or stem the tide of demand. We felt that we needed to come up with a customized approach that would work for the young people that we’re seeing. So that has helped to yield results with our new transitional housing program...our scattered apartment program.”

—Bruce Rivers, Executive Director, Covenant House Toronto



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

One of the successes of Covenant House's transitional housing program is the variety of options available to youth and this is a key consideration for any agency. Often, transitional housing is considered only within a bricks and mortar model; all residents housed in the same location. If proper support is provided it is possible to have a pure scattered site model as evidenced by the success of the [Calgary Boys and Girls Club's Infinity Project](#). ROP and Covenant House demonstrate that a melding of these two options, with both scattered site and residential transitional housing units provided, is also possible.

Housing Workers

Given the lack of affordable housing across the country, it is very beneficial to have workers whose primary focus is helping youth find, secure and maintain housing. Youth often lack key components necessary for accessing housing, including identification, references, income or the knowledge around how to even start their housing search.

Both locations employ [Housing Workers](#) whose job it is to help youth find housing after they leave ROP (or the crisis/shelter program). This support includes conducting an assessment of their housing readiness, needs and budgets. The Housing Workers will discuss the type and cost of housing available. This includes exploring housing options, such as independent living, shared accommodation, supportive housing or other transitional housing facilities.

When possible/requested, Housing Workers also support the youth in accessing and applying for that housing, including filling in applications, meeting with landlords and negotiating leases. Depending upon availability, a Housing Worker (or other ROP staff) may also drive a youth through their new neighbourhood to help them figure out where to access groceries, recreation, transit and other necessities in their new environment.

In the scattered site housing units, ongoing support is still provided by the Housing Workers and Case Managers in Vancouver. While this was also the case in Toronto, a recent switch has moved all aftercare into the realm of the Youth in Transition Workers (this will be discussed later in this chapter).

“The best part of the work for me is when I house a youth and you see them grow. You see them gain that confidence to be on their own. You can see that they're actually cooking their meals. You see that they're not depending on other people for their own money, they're actually looking for work [or] they're going to school. [They're] doing what they want to do and succeeding.”

—Danny Aguilar, Housing Worker, Covenant House Toronto



A Rights of Passage youth's empty room at Covenant House Toronto.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Avoiding the revolving door of homelessness, as discussed in the Youth Homelessness Overview chapter, is a difficult challenge to overcome. Housing Workers play a critical role in helping youth obtain and maintain housing. There are a few ways that a Housing Worker can help support a youth:

- » Create a sense of connection to their new community. A youth who is more engaged will hopefully not seek out old neighbourhoods which may draw them back in to a previous way of life.
- » Under promise and over deliver. Housing workers need to be clear about what they are and are not able to do. It is better to be able to provide better service than to not meet the minimum expectations of the service.
- » Strive to reduce unrealistic ideas about what they can obtain by way of housing. Being able to work with youth to develop a budget is helpful to increase a youth's understanding of their financial status in relationship to the market.
- » Housing workers should give youth in-depth information about landlord-tenant legislation, and in particular, the youth's rights and responsibilities. Helping a youth avoid eviction because of activities or behaviour that could have been prevented with a bit of knowledge, is a key way of reducing a youth's return to homelessness.

**"The *best part* for me is
when I house a youth
and you see them *grow...*
...They're doing what
they want to do
and succeeding."**

—Danny Aguilar, Covenant House Toronto

WORKING WITH LANDLORDS

Another advantage of employing Housing Workers is that they are able to dedicate time and energy to building extensive connections and networks with landlords to help house youth quickly. Building these partnerships is a key to helping increase the availability of housing for youth.

Part of this work is educating a landlord about the misconceptions they may hold about homeless youth and social assistance. Landlords may not understand the benefits of accepting a youth on a rent supplement, housing allowance or who is receiving social assistance – primarily that in most cases it is a form of guaranteed income that is not lost unless the youth gains employment or other positive things occur in their lives.

CHT and CHV work to create partnerships with landlords wherein everyone wins – agency, landlord and youth. One component is ensuring that a landlord knows that the agency understands that the landlord is trying to make money; that housing is a business for them. Letting landlords know that the agency is going to be involved with the youth helping them transition into housing and can be called upon to help address problems reassure landlords that there is a reduced risk at play for them.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Housing Workers need to be clear in their agreements with landlords. They cannot promise perfect behaviour by a young person or guarantee that there will never be a problem with rent. They can explain the ways in which the agency will support the youth, and in turn, the landlord.

Housing workers should educate landlords about homeless youth to help reduce misconceptions. This may also involve education about social assistance programs.

Creating a network of landlords who are willing to house homeless youth is important. Provide resources and information opportunities for landlords. Landlords should also be informed that youth have been educated about landlord-tenant legislation and know responsibilities and also their rights.



Community Apartments

The Housing Workers, and other staff, work with youth to get them housed and established in off-site community apartments. The lack of affordable housing and the high costs of rent in both Toronto and Vancouver make this particularly challenging, but the agencies have reduced barriers through partnerships and relationships with builders, property management companies and landlords.

Having a youth transition to independent living after being in the Rights of Passage program provides some distinct advantages for the youth compared to moving directly from the street or even a shelter. Each youth will have some amount of money saved, either through personal savings or from their graduation bursary in Vancouver or their Trust Fund payment in Toronto. This helps reduce a big barrier to obtaining housing – the ability to pay both first and last month’s rent, as well as any deposits (keys, utilities etc.). Youth are also able to provide Covenant House staff as a reference to the landlord, which also gives them a leg up.

Additionally, youth who stay at Covenant House (in either the crisis shelter program or ROP) have worked to develop a budget so they have an understanding of what the needs and costs are for independent living. Those coming out of ROP have a further advantage in that they have “practiced” paying a rent-like amount through their program fee/Trust Fund payment so they better understand prioritizing rent, food and transportation.

HOLLYBURN PROPERTIES PARTNERSHIP WITH COVENANT HOUSE TORONTO AND VANCOUVER

Both Covenant House Toronto and Vancouver have partnered with [Hollyburn Properties](#) to create a dynamic and innovative youth transitional housing model. Hollyburn is a Canadian, family-owned company based in Vancouver with apartments across Metro Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto and Ottawa. One of their core principles – commitment – includes “becoming an active, contributing partner in every neighbourhood we are privileged to be a part of.”

In 2000, when one of the owners, Paul Sander, and his then 10-year old daughter were visiting Toronto, she was struck by the sight of a young woman in her early teens panhandling near the restaurant they were eating at. Upon returning home, Paul and his wife discussed the issue with her in more detail, and they decided to get involved.

“I’ve dealt with [homelessness] around the property management industry as far as asking people to move along...and I’d never thought of it as something we could do something about.”

—Paul Sander, Director, Hollyburn Properties

Initially, the partnership included collecting goods for youth at Covenant House Vancouver, including food and clothing. This eventually expanded to collecting furniture and household necessities for youth moving into independent living. Both of these ventures presented challenges in terms of collection, quality of donations, repairs/cleaning and storage. However, they created a fierce sense of community among the staff and also the tenants. Additionally, the moving company that they contracted with to move the belongings began to employ youth from CHV creating increased employment opportunities for youth.

The issue of homelessness was nothing new. As an urban property management company, Sander says, “Building Managers have to address people sleeping in parkades, under building eaves, inside apartment buildings.” One of the aspects of the partnership included providing education to Building Managers and staff to help them both better understand the issue and how to improve their response.

Gradually, there was a decision that the company wanted to be more pro-active in their response. They decided to develop a housing program that would give a fully furnished unit to Covenant House for a youth to live in for a year. With the success of the program, it was gradually expanded with additional units in Vancouver (now a total of three) as well as the expansion of the program to include two units in Toronto.

“Hollyburn is the crème de la crème of transitional units.

Hollyburn will give you everything.”

—Danny Aguilar, Housing Worker, Covenant House Toronto

Hollyburn solicits interest from Building Managers and considers the most accessible locations to determine the best fit and see where they might be able to house a youth. A bachelor or small one-bedroom unit is made available through a head lease[9] with Covenant House. Youth pay a reduced rental amount, about \$300-\$375 to Hollyburn, who subsidizes the remainder of the market rent. Cable and internet are provided free of charge, and the youth is responsible to pay for Hydro and home insurance. Covenant House provides a tax-receipt to Hollyburn for the full market rent for the year as well as a tax receipt for all suite furnishings



A Hollyburn Properties building, Toronto, ON.

Hollyburn buys all of the necessary items for the unit including furniture, linens, small appliances etc. They estimate that this costs about \$3,000/unit. When a youth leaves the unit they are able to take all of the items with them to help them get established in their next home.

Covenant House screens a youth – sometimes, but not always, a graduate of the Rights of Passage Program – and provides ongoing case management support to the youth. Part of the support includes providing orientation to the youth about their housing: introducing them to key people, explaining expectations of independent living, discussing who is responsible for what aspect (i.e. internet, utilities). Generally the agreement is in place for a one-year period and then the youth can either move to a new location elsewhere with the help of their housing workers or in another Hollyburn unit at market rent. (Hollyburn hopes to create “happy Hollyburn tenants” according to Paul Sander) and if necessary, to extend the agreement for another year. The program is flexible so as to ensure each youth has the greatest opportunity of success. As of 2014, 10 youth had successfully graduated from this partnership and five were currently living in subsidized units in Vancouver and Toronto.

This housing is considered transitional and programmatic supports are still in place, but there is a greater sense of independence compared to ROP, and particularly compared to the shelter. Youth who have benefitted from Hollyburn’s support have made mention that one of the biggest barriers they face, when striving for independence, is a fair opportunity to live outside of the demographic associated with their homeless past. The Covenant House-Hollyburn Properties Youth Housing Program provides these youth with an opportunity to begin a new life and to break free from the cycle of chronic homelessness in a safe and secure building that they can take pride in and call their own. This component is often the key to leaving street life behind, once and for all. Youth in Hollyburn units are still required to have a case plan in place and to be in contact with their worker. They pay a fee instead of rent to Hollyburn Properties (or Covenant House directly in Toronto); in Vancouver, this money is returned in full or part and is used to help establish the youth in future housing.

In Vancouver, the Hollyburn apartments fall under the Community Support Services department and support (usually weekly) is provided by the Housing Workers/Case Managers. In Toronto, Hollyburn apartments are part of the Transitional Housing portfolio. The Housing Worker and the Manager of Transitional Housing oversee the selection and move-in process, while the Youth in Transition Workers provide the ongoing support.

Hollyburn and Covenant House also hold regular meetings attended by staff from the two organizations, including Building Managers of the Hollyburn buildings and Covenant House Case Managers in Vancouver/Youth in Transition Workers/Housing Workers in Toronto. This provides an opportunity to discuss ongoing issues, although immediate or crisis issues can be addressed through a phone call or emergency meeting.

Hollyburn has identified some key learnings and suggestions from their experience:

- » It is more efficient to buy the furniture and household goods than to receive and manage donations. They estimate it costs about \$3,000.
- » The Building Manager/Superintendents must be onboard. While education helps provide information, the most successful situations have come because the Building Manager has taken ownership of the program. Hollyburn Building Managers play a pivotal role in providing guidance, structure and support to the youth, ensuring their suites are kept in order and that building rules are followed.

- » Youth often have more “traffic” and may be noisier than older adults in the same building. Hollyburn recommends housing the youth on the ground floor or in another area that will reduce the impact on other tenants. (This is less of an issue in buildings that have a higher number of college or university students as the behaviour is similar).
- » Education may be required with tenants to help them understand why it is important to provide this kind of support and to assure them that any issues will be addressed.
- » Communication is key. The ability for the youth or Hollyburn staff to reach out to Covenant House when there is a problem is important, but the regular meetings ensures that the connection is always in place, not just when there is a problem.

“Homelessness impacts rental buildings on a regular basis. Most managers can tell you about issues they’ve had with homelessness around their buildings, and so, it’s kind of a natural partnership, if you think about it. We want to have good tenants in our buildings. This is a way to take kids that are on the street, that are otherwise sleeping in our doorways and our parkades, and turn them around and give them a foot up, and a helping hand and turn them into future renters, that are reliable. And that little bit of help makes a huge difference to kids at that vulnerable stage in life and so, I think operationally, it’s a natural. It’s something that landlords have; they have the suites, it’s team building and it creates a culture of charity within your company.”

—Paul Sander, Director, Hollyburn Properties

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

- » This is an amazing and innovative partnership. It addresses a core need – lack of housing – while allowing a business to give back.
- » This initiative is easier to do in a big city where there are larger amounts of rental housing stock (and bigger companies). But it is still possible to do in small communities. Even an individual landlord who has a few units may decide to sacrifice the income of a unit in exchange for helping to improve the life chances of a homeless youth. Full tax receipts for market rent and suite furnishings make participation more accessible for landlords of all sizes.
- » One of the keys to this initiative is the ongoing support provided by Covenant House and the open communication. Clear agreements and understanding must be in place for all parties – the landlord/property management company and their staff, the youth and the support organization.
- » Donation management can be extremely challenging. Buying new furnishings and essentials also ensures youth are – perhaps for the first time in many years if ever – given belongings that are new and not just “new to them.”

**"I've dealt with
[homelessness] around the
property management
industry as far as asking
people to move along...
*and I'd never thought of
it as something we could
do something about."***

—Paul Sander, Hollyburn Properties

THE DANIELS CORPORATION PARTNERSHIP WITH COVENANT HOUSE TORONTO

[The Daniels Corporation](#) is a Toronto-based builder/developer with a long history of addressing issues of homelessness and affordable housing. Daniels recently partnered with the Toronto Community Housing Corporation in the redevelopment of Regent Park in the heart of downtown Toronto. As part of this work, Daniels also created a unique partnership with Covenant House Toronto (CHT) by making two (unfurnished) condominiums units available at a very minimal cost.

“Daniels - they give you a brand-new unit, a brand new condominium unit! Everything is brand new!!”
—Danny Aguilar, Housing Worker, Covenant House Toronto

Similar to the Hollyburn partnerships, CHT is responsible for selecting, orienting and providing ongoing support to the young person. The youth pays \$480/month, including insurance and hydro; this amount is well below market rent. The Daniels Corporation then donates the youth's rent payment back to CHT in exchange for a tax receipt.

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING FOR SEX-TRAFFICKED VICTIMS AT COVENANT HOUSE TORONTO

Still in development, the recently announced project will house up to seven female residents, ages 16-24, who are victims of sex trafficking. Covenant House estimates that dozens of their young people, mostly women, have been exploited through trafficking. They also estimate that about 1,000 of the youth they work with annually are involved in the sex trade, mostly engaging in survival sex.

The program is a partnership between Covenant House Toronto, The Rotary Club of Toronto's Women's Initiatives Committee, Toronto Community Housing (TCHC) and the City of Toronto. A TCHC property will be leased to Covenant House for a 15-year period at a minimal cost. The City of Toronto will provide capital funding for repairs and renovations, while CHT will fund ongoing maintenance, as well as operating costs.

Residents will be allowed to stay for up to two years and will receive a range of supports, including educational and vocational, life skills training, trauma and addiction counselling and free legal assistance.

Aftercare

The provision of aftercare –a key component of the Foyer program—is different at each location and is somewhat dependent upon age of the youth. In both locations, youth fall under Covenant House’s mandate until the age of 25. That means that youth are able to access certain services at Covenant House, such as crisis shelter, drop-in and outreach, thus keeping them connected to supports even after they are housed independently or elsewhere. In Vancouver, for example, youth under 25 can come back to the weekly community dinner, thus guaranteeing one good meal and social support/connection each week.

Youth over 25 face different issues because Covenant House is no longer mandated or funded to provide care. Covenant House staff are always available for a youth to reach out to and the 24-hour staffing in the ROP guarantees that someone is always there. Certainly in cases of emergency, staff would not turn a former resident away, but they are challenged in terms of providing ongoing supports. Covenant House will do their best to transition youth to new community supports, both for them to access as a youth, but importantly when a youth is aging out of Covenant House’s care.

Danny Aguilar, Covenant House Toronto’s Housing Worker says that the aftercare component is one of the most critical considerations for any agency developing transitional housing. He says, “It’s not just getting them graduated. It’s keeping them outside the shelter system and maintaining their own place. The after-care has to be there. Because sometimes when a youth just leaves a program, they feel alone.”

CHT: Toronto has several Youth in Transition (YIT) Workers who work with youth leaving the shelter or ROP program. These workers support youth in any type of transition (leaving a shelter or ROP, new to Toronto or Canada, life changes etc.) with a significant focus on youth who are leaving the child welfare system. An outreach-based program, YIT is specifically designed to help youth who may resist coming in to an agency setting to access services. Meetings are held regularly in a location that works for the youth, including their home, another agency or a neighbourhood location, such as a coffee shop. YIT Workers can help youth face challenges and feel less alone. They can provide support or guidance on issues identified by the youth or accompany youth to appointments.

YIT Workers also build local support networks for the youth, helping them with life skills or learn about the resources available in their community such as stores, laundromat or food bank. They also help youth access social and recreational supports to get them better connected to their community.

CHV: For youth living in scattered site, market, or other forms of housing, the Housing Workers and the assigned Case Manager provide the transition supports to the youth up to their 25th birthday. CHV believes that keeping with the same worker can be valuable based for attachment. For ROP youth specifically, staff formally follow up with youth minimally at the three, six, nine and 12 month markers after they leave the program (regardless of age). These contacts are recorded in the Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) database ([for more on ETO see the Evaluation section](#)). Youth Workers are able to remain in contact and continue to support past residents up to their 25th birthday as well, and many of them remain in touch via phone or email or continue to visit long after that.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Discharge and aftercare must be carefully considered when developing a transitional housing program. Creating programs such as CHT's Youth in Transition or CHV's aftercare supports could certainly be considered the gold standard of community-based supports for youth. While not every organization can fund the wide range of aftercare supports that Covenant House does, it is important to ensure that youth are aware of their options after they leave:

- » What are the opportunities for them to come back to the original agency? Can they call, drop by or receive outreach visits? Are there activities that they are still able to participate in?
- » Where else are they able to access support? Is there an adult drop-in or meal program nearby? Is there a community recreational option?
- » Can they be matched up with a mentor during their stay who can continue to provide ongoing support after they graduate/leave?
- » Are all of the necessary physical or mental health or addictions supports lined up, including both medical and community supports?

STAFFING

The CHT ROP Participant Handbook states: “The role of the staff is to support the program goals of ROP by mentoring, coaching and counselling program participants as necessary. Our program philosophy demands that each staff member develop with the ROP participants a relationship built on mutual trust and respect; and within that relationship, assist and support the participants in making positive changes. At the same time, staff must maintain a professional distance.

Interaction between a staff member and a participant is an opportunity for positive learning. Staff will help in identifying alternative ways of thinking, responding to frustration and achieving your goals.

Staff will encourage each other in delivering the best quality service to you; celebrating your growth and progress; challenging you when you seem to be losing sight of your goals; and welcoming you as a member of the ROP Community”

Staff Roles

CHT: There are 12 direct staff members in the ROP Program –two Team Leaders and 8 Youth Workers (four on overnights and four day/evening), the Mentorship Coordinator and the Life Skills Coordinator. Support is also provided by the two Housing Workers and aftercare is addressed in part by the five Youth in Transition Workers. At the senior management level, the Director of Program Services is responsible for a variety of services, including outreach, shelter, health and transitional housing, while the Transitional Housing Manager is responsible for all transitional housing, including the Rights of Passage program and off-site transitional housing.

While all Youth Workers provide ongoing support to the youth, including teaching life skills, individual case management is provided by a Consistent Worker.

The Consistent Workers rotate between the day (8am to 4pm), midday (12noon to 8pm) and evening (3pm to 11pm) shifts to make themselves available to the youth at different times of day. These shifts change every two weeks and Youth Workers also work every other weekend. Overnight staff (who work 10:30pm to 8:30am) do not serve as Consistent Workers, but at times, their hours may mean they have primary contact with a youth.

Consistent Workers have a caseload of about 7 youth each, with a mix of genders. Their role is to provide very direct, individualized support to the youth in their caseload, including developing and managing their case plan, creating a budget and determining their Trust

Fund payment, keeping them on track with employment, education, housing, mental health issues etc. Consistent Workers also meet weekly with the youth to review and update their case plan and discuss a youth's progress with the Team Leaders.

The Team Leaders have multiple functions including supervising several youth workers and also providing oversight into the case management plans of a number of youth. Dillon Dodson, one of two Team Leaders at CHT says that she sees her role as having three different functions. “The first role is supervision and case management of the current residents within our program. The second being supervising staff – the child and youth workers that work front-line with the residents of the program. The third role is a bit of program coordination. Myself and my colleague coordinate the IT issues, food services, operations, the management of the facility.”

All of the youth and staff are additionally supported by several other positions including:

- » Mentorship Coordinator
- » Life Skills Coordinator
- » Housing Workers
- » Youth in Transition Workers

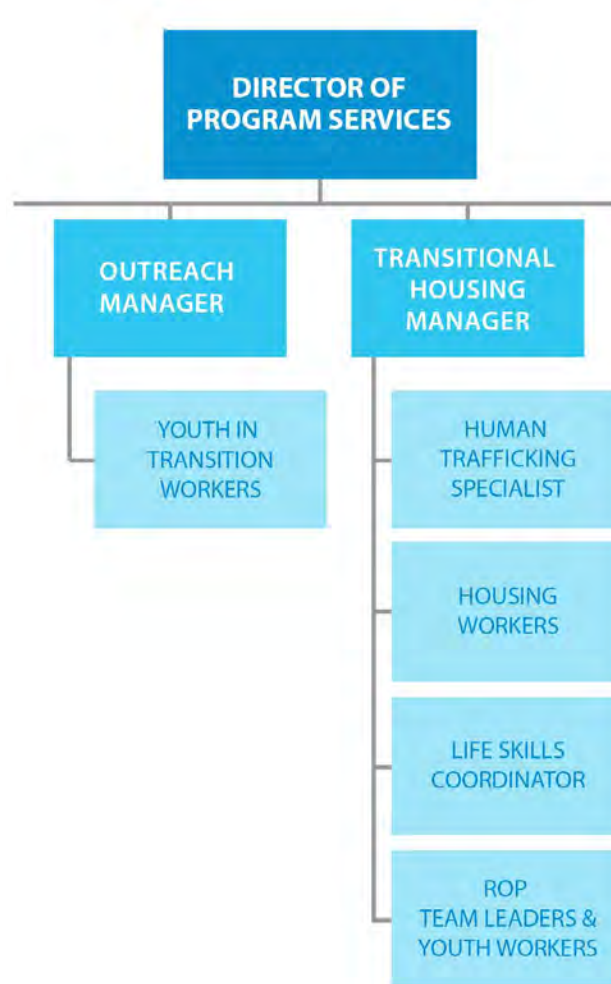
CHV: There are 13 direct staff in the ROP Program – the Manager of ROP, 5 Youth Workers, 5 Shift Supervisors, a Youth Support Worker and the Life Skills Worker – plus support from the Case Managers and Housing Workers who fall under Community Support Services.

The ROP Participant Guide says “ROP has staff on duty 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. At first, it may seem like a lot of different people, but you will find that the full-time staff work fairly consistent schedules, and it does not take long to get to know everybody. We also have staff who work on a casual basis, filling in when others are away.

Youth Workers are your main resource when you need practical help, information, or just to chat. They make sure that guidelines are being followed from day to day.

You will be assigned a **Key Youth Worker** as you enter ROP. This is the Youth Worker who will be watching out for you to make sure everything is on track. This Youth Worker will assist you to achieve all of your Case Plan and Life Skills goals. Keep in mind that all of the staff work with all of the residents, so for most things you do not have to wait for your Key Youth Worker.

FIG.3 COVENANT HOUSE TORONTO STAFFING CHART

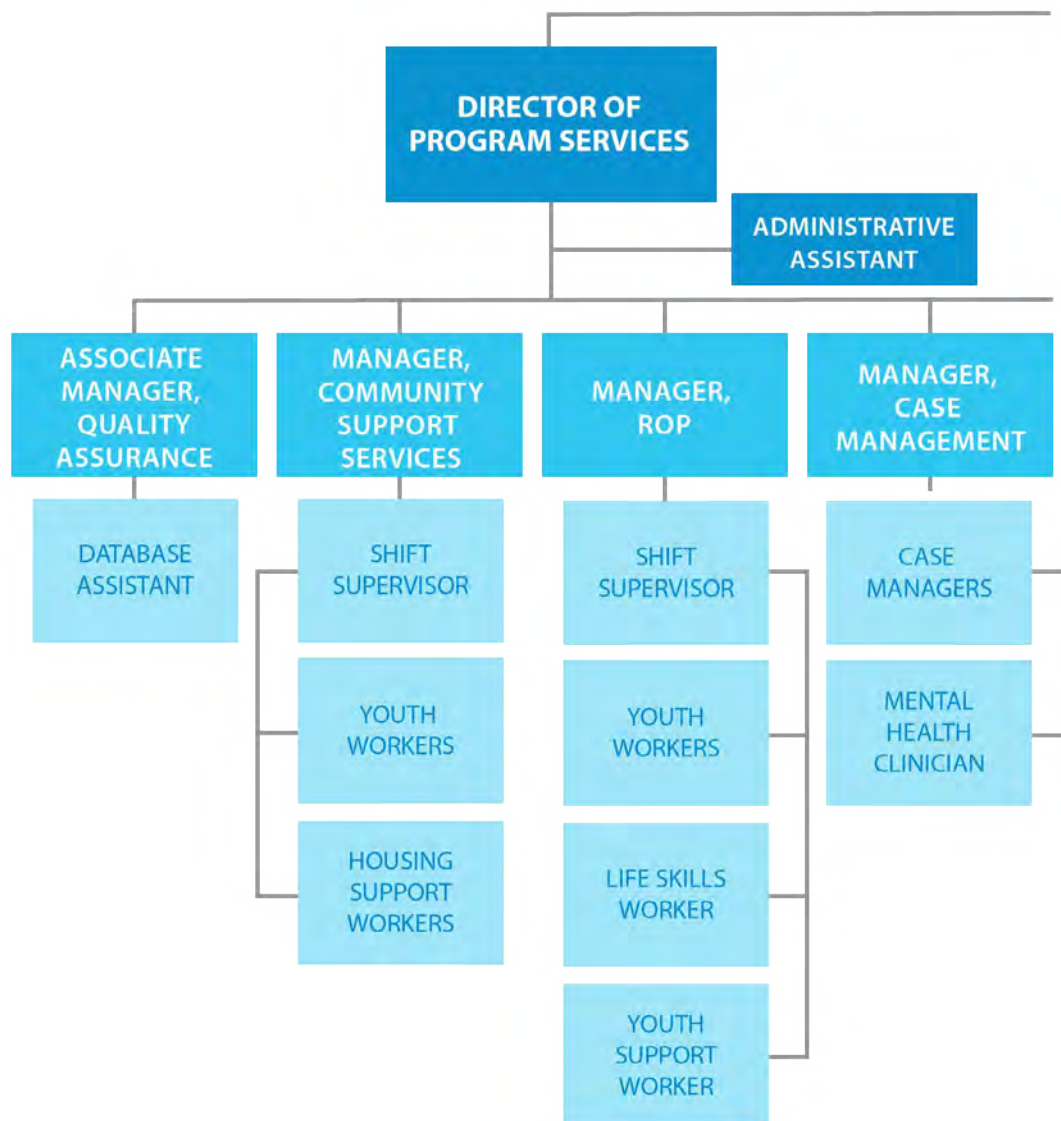


The **Youth Support Worker** does a lot of the same work as the youth workers, but is also the person who is responsible for making sure that the rooms are in order when you move in, everyone has the supplies that they need, keys and fobs, and so on. The Youth Support Worker is in charge of program fee administration, but you can pay your program fees to any youth worker as well. The Youth Support Worker provides such services as income taxes and arranging dentist appointments.

The **Case Manager** is responsible for developing all case plans and making sure that all of the case plans are done in a way that fits ROP's purpose and mission. Case Managers are here to support the youth in reaching all of their goals.

The **Life Skills Worker** is responsible for assessing your life skills needs with you and developing a plan to work on areas for development. They also coordinate and manage all life skills activities in ROP.

FIG.4 COVENANT HOUSE VANCOUVER STAFFING CHART



There are also several other positions related to ROP as well as maintenance, administrative and leadership functions that are connected to the operation of Covenant House as a whole.

The Director of Program Services (who reports to the Executive Director) oversees ROP and four other areas (Quality Assurance, Community Support Services, Case Management and Crisis Shelter). This position also has a full-time administrative assistant.

The Manager of the Rights of Passage program is responsible for the overall function of the ROP program. As of January 2015 this position had 12 reports – 5 Shift Supervisors, 5 Youth Workers, 1 Life Skills Worker and 1 Youth Support Worker.

Within the ROP program there are 5 Case Managers, 2 Housing Support Workers and 3 Mental Health Clinicians who may also be involved with the youth.

Once the youth leave ROP they may continue to have contact with services, especially if they are 25 and under. This could include outreach services, mental health clinicians and housing support workers. They may also continue to reach out to the staff of ROP.

Within the organization, the staff will work in varying capacities with people from all across the organization.



Jennifer Morrison, Life Skills Coordinator at Covenant House Vancouver

Staff Job Descriptions

The job descriptions provided are samples and are given as guides to help you identify the skills and job duties that may be required. The staffing models in Toronto and Vancouver differ, as do the reporting structures. What your program staffing looks like will depend on overall structure of the agency and your transitional housing program.

The following job descriptions and duties are available as examples:

- » CHT – ROP Team Leader Responsibilities
- » CHT – Shift Coordinator Responsibilities
- » CHT – Job Description – Overnight Youth Worker
- » CHT – Job Description – ROP Youth Worker
- » CHV - Job Description – Manager, Rights of Passage Program
- » CHV - Job Description – Youth Worker
- » CHV - Job Description - Case Manager
- » CHV - Job Description – Life Skills Worker

[See online resources.](#)

Managing Change

Change management is a time-consuming and very involved process on its own, let alone the time required to implement the actual changes. Both organizations talked about how much change they have gone through and how much work this is. Several recommendations for change management were brought forth:

- » Provide lots of notice. Do not announce a change one day and start it the next.
- » Provide your staff with training to support the changes being implemented.
- » Go slow. Give your staff, the youth and management time to adjust to the changes and to see how they work.
- » Review the changes and see how they are working. Be prepared to pull back or readjust as necessary.
- » Increase staff supervision if necessary to provide individual training and support to staff.
- » Understand that change is hard for everyone and that it may result in “negative” behaviours from youth as they adjust.
- » Be open and excited to doing something new and different.

Self-Care

Self-care is the process of maintaining and promoting one's health, well-being and development to meet everyday challenges and stressors with energy, vitality and self-confidence. Rather than a passive process, self-care calls for active engagement and intentional action. Self-care can be a combination of physical, emotional, spiritual, psychological or intellectual processes.

For people working in demanding positions, self-care is especially important to managing one's level of stress and preventing burn out. In fact, "[according to Health Canada \(2009\)](#), stress and stress-related symptoms account for 85% of all visits to doctors." Many studies point to the process of self-care as an acquired set of skills rather than a personal attribute.

Covenant House feels that part of teaching youth new and healthy coping behaviours is to model that in their staff team. They celebrate birthdays and special events (of both youth and staff), they provide training in new areas to facilitate learning and they create a supportive staff team. Supervisors always check with their direct reports on how they are managing and if there are any issues that are presenting that need to be addressed. Staff retreats and an annual renewing of the covenant (a day which features past youth returning to share their success stories) is part of re-motivating and energizing the team.

Staff also talk about self-care – with each other as a staff team and with the youth they work with. Strategies for self-care are as diverse and varied as people, but include activities that help you relax, feel better, deal with emotions or otherwise take care of your physical and emotional self.

Self-care activities can include such things as:

- » eating healthy meals/eating your favourite comfort food
- » exercising or doing a fun activity
- » relaxing with a good book/TV show/movie
- » talking with friends or family
- » spending time with pets
- » meditating/engaging in spiritual pursuits
- » going for a walk or drive to your favourite place

In this section, you will find tools to help assess your level of stress. You will also find toolkits and solutions that will help you learn some of the necessary skills for applying self-care to your everyday life.

"What we've tried to do is provide a *consistent language* for the staff to use when they're *talking about the youth, working with the youth, and framing their plans.*"

—John Harvey, Covenant House Vancouver

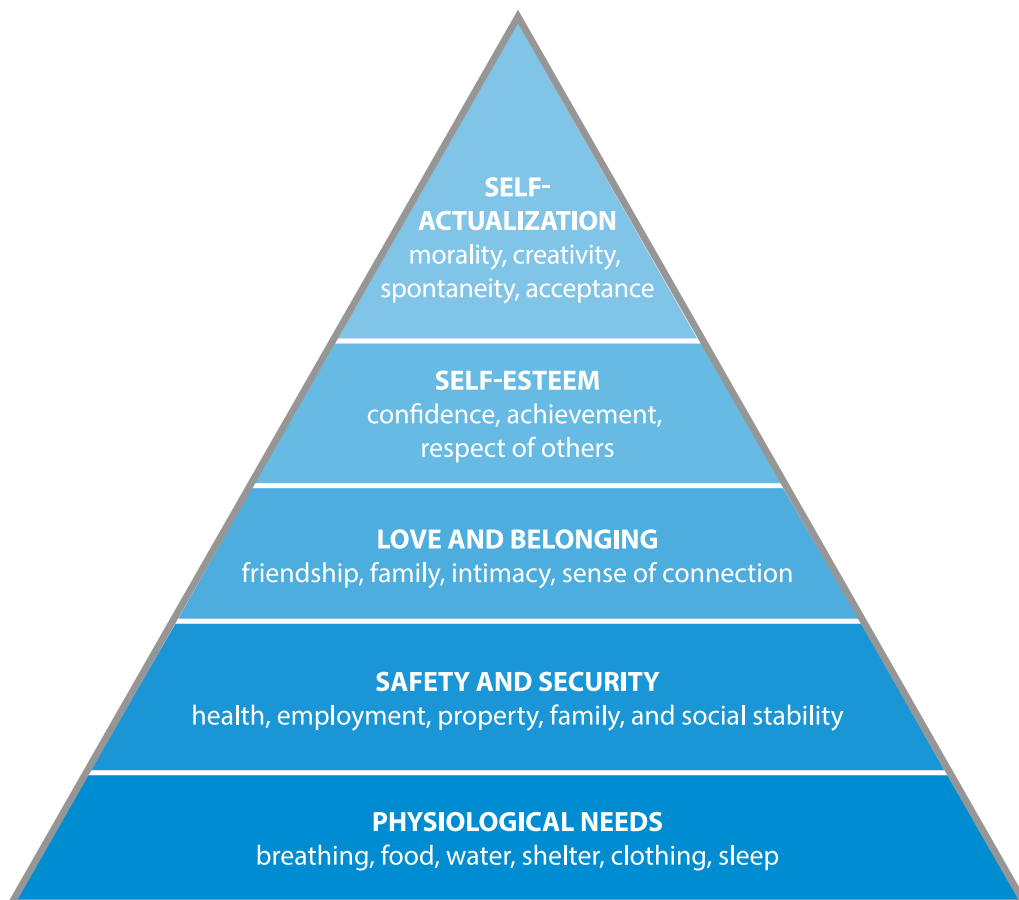
Theories

TO SUPPORT THE WORK

Both Covenant House Toronto and Vancouver invest in training their staff on specific theoretical perspectives and use those theories in their work with youth. They are considered to be very important case management tools to assist in providing support to the residents.

“What we’ve tried to do is provide a consistent language for the staff to use when they’re talking about the youth, working with the youth and framing their plans.”
—John Harvey, Director of Program Services, Covenant House Vancouver

FIG.5 **MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEED**



This begins the moment a youth walks through the doors of the crisis/shelter program for the first time.

Beyond a basic intake, the first response is to ensure that the youth has something to eat, clothes to wear and is able to get some rest. Discussions and planning about next steps occur a couple days later after the immediate basic needs have been met.

The youth can stay in the crisis/shelter program and begin to develop a day plan that includes employment, education or addressing mental health or addictions issues. Moving into the Rights of Passage programs moves them further up Maslow's hierarchy by giving them more than just safety and security but also a sense of belonging. The life skills training and support provided by staff help them move through other stages as well.

The theories and approaches summarized here are some of the key theories used by one or both Covenant House locations in Canada. They are really the tip of the iceberg and a great many skills and theoretical perspectives are integrated into the work. Links to further reading are provided for those agencies that wish to delve deeper into understanding how they work.

The theories included are:

- » Attachment Theory
- » Stages of Change
- » Resiliency Theory
- » Motivational Interviewing
- » Trauma-Informed Care

“All these theories are constantly interwoven with what we do. They are utilized and made applicable by the young person, by the situation that presents itself.”
—Julie Neubauer, Transitional Housing Manager, Covenant House Toronto



Julie Neubauer, Transitional Housing Manager at Covenant House Toronto

Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory is a means of understanding how early childhood development, especially in the first two years of life, determines how a child will interact with peers, adults and even future romantic partners, as they mature through adolescence and adulthood.

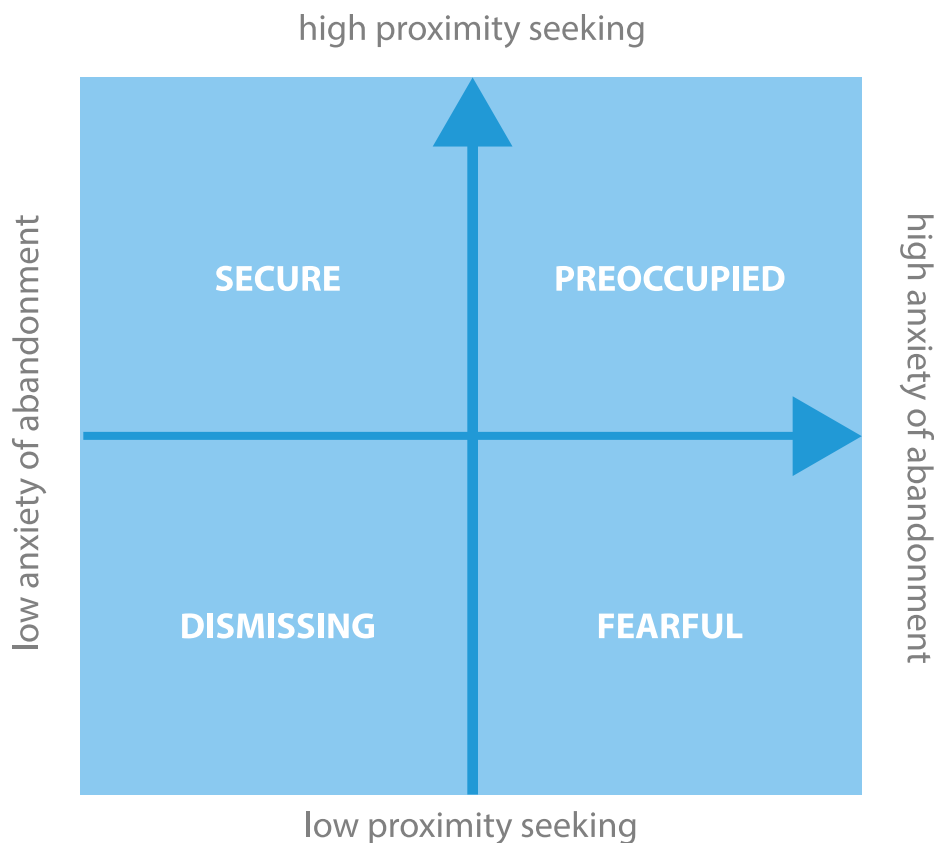
John Bowlby, the ‘father of attachment theory’ described attachment as a “lasting psychological connectedness between human beings” (Lees-Oakes, 2011).

“Attachment theory is basically fostering positive relationships and helping youth to model relationship skills and social skills that they might have been exposed to in their home life. That really forms the basis of that relationship to the youth and understanding them and practicing empathy; to understand where they’re coming from and allowing them to work out conflict in a healthy way and manage their relationships after they leave ROP.”

—Jennifer Morrison, Life Skills Worker, Covenant House Vancouver

There are several modes of attachment. Secure Attachment is considered positive while the other types of attachment (ambivalent, avoidance, disorganized) are all forms of insecure attachment and usually cause a variety of negative behaviours.

FIG.6 ATTACHMENT THEORY



- » **Secure Attachment** – a healthy attachment where the child knows a parent will respond appropriately, consistently and promptly to their needs. The child is able to separate from their parent but prefers their caregiver to a stranger and shows distress when left alone. As adults, those who have developed a secure attachment with their parents:
 - › have trusting, lasting relationships as adults.
 - › tend to have good self-esteem.
 - › are comfortable sharing feelings with partners and friends.
 - › seek out social support.

- » **Ambivalent Attachment** – wherein the child does not view their parent as a secure base because the caregiver gives little or no response to a distressed child and discourages crying while encouraging independence. Children in this kind of relationship often feel anxious because their parent’s behaviour and availability is inconsistent. As adults, those who have developed ambivalent attachment:
 - › are reluctant to become close to others.
 - › worry that their partner does not love them.
 - › become very distraught when a relationship ends.

- » **Avoidance attachment** is developed through inconsistency between appropriate and neglectful responses. The child does not seek comfort or contact from their parents and may in fact avoid them. The child does not respond well to affection, has low self-esteem and may act out negatively. As adults, those who developed avoidance attachment:
 - › may have problems with intimacy.
 - › invest little emotion in social and romantic relationships.
 - › are unable, or unwilling, to share thoughts and feelings with others.
 - › are self-critical, insecure and feel they are going to be rejected.
 - › may act clingy and overly dependent with partners, friends or in other relationships.

- » **Disorganized Attachment** – is often generated by abuse (of any kind) towards the child. The caregiver may be frightened themselves or exhibit frightening behaviour. They may be very withdrawn, negative; there are communication errors and maltreatment. There may be role confusion where the child takes on roles that are typically associated with the caregiver (they take care of an alcoholic parent for example). As adults, those who developed disorganized attachment:
 - › may exhibit chaotic or explosive behaviour.
 - › they may be seen as insensitive.
 - › they will have struggles with trust while also seeking security

- › may in turn be abusive themselves.
- › may find it difficult to maintain solid relationships.
- » **Reactive Attachment** – tends to indicate even more abuse or neglect. The parental-child relationship is extremely unattached and malfunctioning. As adults, those who developed reactive attachment:
 - › Cannot establish positive relationships
 - › May be misdiagnosed with mental health issues

Covenant House uses Attachment Theory as a basis for developing a working relationship with youth. They feel that understanding what type of attachment a youth has will allow them to improve their working relationship with that youth by better understanding the specific behaviours a youth exhibits.

At Covenant House Vancouver, a discussion of Attachment Theory forms part of the initial meetings between a youth and their Case Manager. The policy on Change of Case Managers states “CHV follows the principles of Attachment Theory. Where possible, youth are encouraged to resolve conflict when it occurs. This conflict resolution better equips youth to handle stressful situations by empowering them, ultimately increasing their independent living skills. Attachment Theory advocates that a strong alignment be established between youth and their supports.”

By teaching youth about Attachment Theory it lets youth know that conflict is normal and helps them understand how to resolve it. When a conflict arises between the Case Manager and the youth (or a conflict with any other staff) the young person will hopefully be better prepared to deal with it in a healthy way.

“A lot of these young people have an unsecure attachment style which can explain a lot of the things that we see in our day-to-day work and it really teaches our staff to be curious about behaviour. So [asking ourselves] what is the meaning behind this behaviour? Not, ‘this kid swore at me I need to discharge him’ but ‘what is this youth telling me through this behaviour’. [This] has been very helpful for staff in terms of crisis management and conflict resolution.”

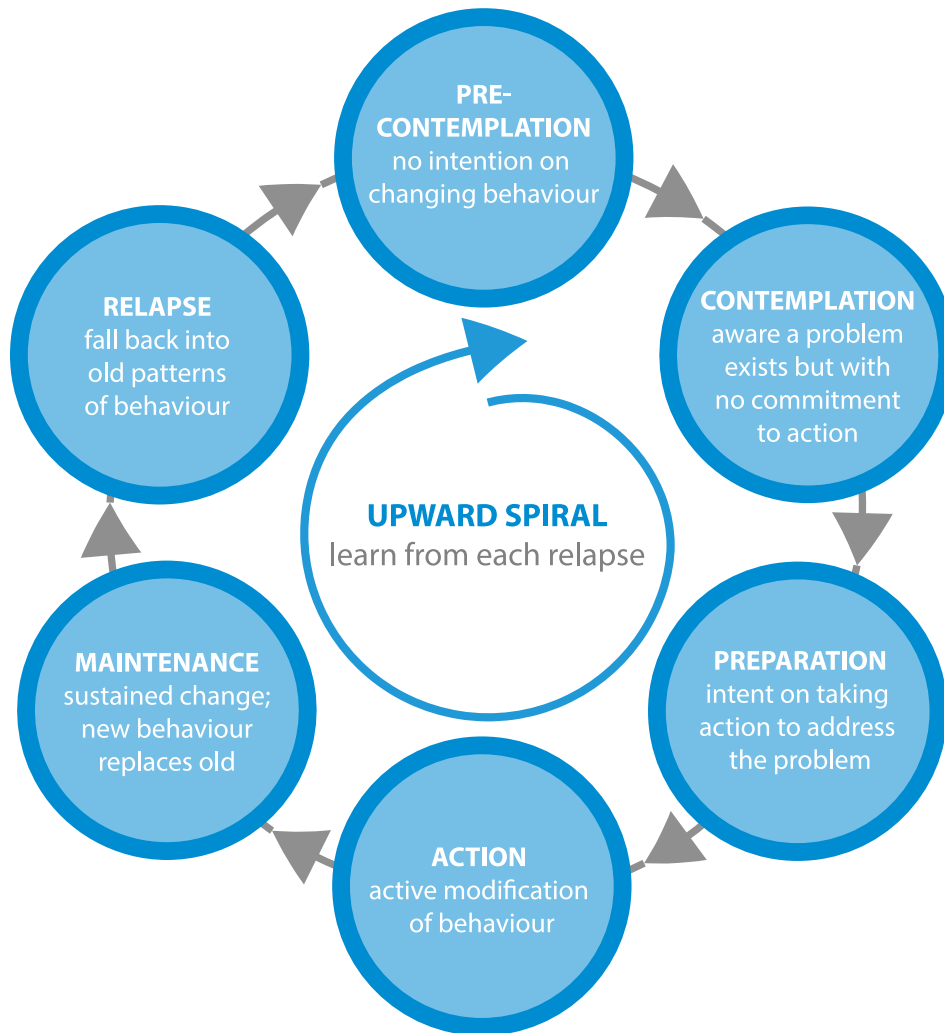
—Chelsea Minhas, Manager, Rights of Passage, Covenant House Vancouver

"So [asking ourselves] what is the *meaning* behind this *behaviour*? Not, 'this kid swore at me I need to discharge him' but 'what is this youth telling me through this *behaviour*'."

Stages of Change

Stages of Change, also known as the “transtheoretical model” is a means of examining the various stages that someone goes through while dealing with an addiction and working to change their addictive behaviour. The originators of the theory James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente also identify 10 processes of change, which are used throughout the stages.

FIG.7 STAGES OF CHANGE



Most people who are trying to end an addiction or change a specific behaviour go through the various steps in the Stages of Change model many times before they are able to successfully end their addictive behavior. Obviously, the young person may not know about or understand the model himself or herself, but the staff use it to help evaluate an individual’s readiness for change, so that appropriate interventions are used as effectively as possible. Prochaska and DiClemente (1992) state, “we have determined that efficient self-change depends on doing the right things (processes) at the right time (stages)”.

“So the pre-contemplative is when a youth is not quite ready to come forward and have insight about their addiction. So our goal there is to give them as much information as possible, around addiction services and discussion around—‘This is the behaviour we’re seeing is going on.’ Contemplative, we’re starting to see them [say], ‘Ok, maybe I do have an addiction issue’ and at that point we start saying ‘Are you ready to get connected to work on these issues?’ Move into Action, and then Maintenance and then we see the Termination. Any time within there we can see a relapse, so we’re always watching out for that. The youth here, when we work with them we can definitely see when there’s some struggles going on. Our goal is to get that relationship going in order for them to come to us saying, ‘I’m struggling right now.’ And then we work on, ‘Well what do you need?’ Most of the time some of the youth already have the connections, but they’ve disengaged, so it’s just getting those connections back.”

—Lisa Ronaldson, Case Manager, Covenant House Vancouver

Both locations embed their evaluation methods in this theoretical approach. The Outcomes Star and The Youth Engagement Scale ([discussed in the Evaluation chapter](#)) tie in this theory to the way in which a youth’s progress is measured. This means that program milestones, youth engagement markers and other indicators of success are not based only in the need for evaluation measures but in a concept that explains and elaborates upon a youth’s behaviour. It allows staff to more fully understand why a youth does something, what that behaviour would look like at each stage and to guide the youth in a more positive direction.

While the youth themselves may not always be aware of the theoretical models being used, they are impacted by them. In talking about relationships with staff Kevin says

“For me, I don’t really have too many people out here, and just having someone that I could look up to, someone who understands some of my life experiences, and yeah, obviously judgment is the biggest thing. Like, you know, staff that [says] ‘Hey, you know what, you made a mistake, that’s fine. We’re not here to judge you, we’re just here to help you.’”

—“Kevin”, 26, former ROP participant, Covenant House Vancouver

**“For me, I don’t really
have too many people
out here, and just having
someone that I could look
up to, someone who
understands some of my
life experiences...”**

—“Kevin”, former participant, ROP Vancouver

Resiliency Theory

Covenant House Toronto uses a model for building resiliency that was created by Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg, Director of Health Services at Covenant House Pennsylvania and an adolescent medicine specialist. His evidence-based model uses the principles of Covenant House to help staff manage relationships with youth.

“In terms of our philosophies around how we feel it’s best to work with youth I think one of the things that we’ve really focused on is resiliency. We’ve done a lot of training with our staff around a resiliency model that we’ve tried to infuse in every piece of our program. [It] starts at the point that the youth comes to ask for help, through to when they leave our programs. You know, these kids come with lots of deficits, based on the experiences that they’ve had and the lack of opportunity that they’ve had. So, for both the youth and my staff it’s really important that we try to shift our focus and focus on what the youth do well. And they do have strengths and they are very, very resilient when you look at the kinds of experiences they’ve had. It’s just up to us to really shine a light on that and both for the staff and for the young person so that they can see that they’ve got things to build on and a place to move to.”

—Carol Howes, Director of Program Services, Covenant House Toronto

CHT’s website explains that [Dr. Ginsburg’s model uses “Seven Cs” of resiliency](#):

Confidence - Kids need to recognize their strengths, so they can develop the confidence to find their place in the world, think creatively and recover from setbacks.

Competence - When we notice what young people are doing well and we give them opportunities to develop skills, they feel competent. When we don't allow them to recover from mistakes themselves, we undermine their sense of competence.

Connection - Feeling connected is the single most important factor in overcoming challenges. Other people, schools and community groups give youth the validation and confidence to pursue their goals.

Character - Kids need clear guidance on right and wrong. They must learn to live with integrity.

Contribution - When youth contribute to the well-being of others, they receive gratitude instead of condemnation. Kids discover that it feels good to contribute to others and they are more likely to ask for help without fear or shame.

Coping - Young people who have developed a range of healthy coping skills will not turn to higher risk “quick fixes” like drugs or self-harm.

Control - When youth understand that privileges and freedom gradually increase as they demonstrate responsibility, they learn to make better choices.



Stacey Rees, Life Skills Coordinator at Covenant House Toronto.

“The thing with resiliency...is that it has to be something real. So it’s not just being a cheerleader and saying ‘yeah, yeah, you’re doing great, rah rah rah. It’s about real stuff that they’re accomplishing and building their self-esteem and confidence by what they’re doing and having them reflect on it”

—Stacey Rees, Life Skills Coordinator, Covenant House Toronto

Motivational Interviewing

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a style of working with a client that focuses on allowing the client to direct the change rather than telling the client what they need to do. It is about having a conversation about change. MI is considered to be an evidence-based practice that has proven to be successful. It is usually considered to be “a person-centered, goal-oriented, guiding method to enhance motivation to change” ([t3 website](#)).

In a [video interview](#) by Mark Howarth from Invisible People, Ken Kraybill from t3 (think. teach. transform) says “we must try to have a conversation that draws out from the person what their own needs/desires are, what kind of life they really want to have, how that’s dissonant from the life they’re living. Not to guilt trip them but to just to help them shine a light on it”.

In MI the goal is to work with the client in a partnership rather than the case worker seeing themselves as the expert. It includes meeting the client “where they are at” (also a key component of harm reduction) and recognizing that a client brings many strengths to the table. Helping the client recognize their own abilities and therefore the opportunity to make choices for themselves is a key component of motivational interviewing.

At Covenant House, staff use motivational interviewing techniques when working with youth, particularly in the development of case plans. Creating the plan **with** rather than **for** a youth means more buy-in from the youth and therefore a greater likelihood of success.

Trauma-Informed Care

As mentioned in the Covenant House Toronto and Vancouver Overview section many of the youth involved in the two agencies have experienced extensive trauma, which in many cases led to their homelessness. Almost 3/4 have fled physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse or been kicked out of their home, about half have mental health or addictions issues and about 1/3 have been engaged in sex trade work. Homeless youth also experience a high level of violence – physical and sexual – during their homelessness. Additionally, a number of homeless youth have been through the child welfare and/or corrections systems. Even when someone has not directly had a traumatic background, research is emerging that shows the experience of homelessness itself can be considered traumatic (Goodman et al., 1991; Hopper et al., 2010; Bartella, 2011; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012; New City Initiative, 2014).

All of these experiences mean that staff and volunteers working with this population need to develop and implement trauma-informed services to provide the best support possible for their clients. According to SAMSHA “A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for healing; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in staff, clients, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and settings” (SAMHSA, 2014).

“At ROP, and at Covenant House in general, we realize that the young people that are coming to our door have often times histories and experienced journeys that they’ve experienced some trauma. The reality of having to experience homelessness or under-housing, in and of itself, is a traumatic experience. I think in really basic form we try to exercise being trauma-informed in realizing that the people we are blessed to interact with might have some experiences with trauma. That awareness, in and of itself, I think grants the opportunity for us to pause [and] to consider the person that we’re sharing space with is bringing a lot to the table. That this step that they’re taking to share a space with us is huge, and is significant, and we need to honour and work from that place. The behaviours that we might see are grounded in a really, really positive and effective coping from what they’ve experienced. So just appreciating that.”
—Dillon Dodson, Team Leader, Covenant House Toronto

Like Motivational Interviewing, a key component of trauma-informed services is to “meet people where they are at.” It also involves recognizing that often the very work aimed at helping people tends to re-traumatize them. Creating a case management system that avoids someone having to continually tell their story is helpful. Providing a space that is structured and secure yet flexible, allowing for input from the affected individual, providing opportunities for the development of safe and trusting relationships and recognizing that “one-size-does-not-fit-all” are keys to developing trauma-informed services.

Both CHT and CHV provide many opportunities for youth to have input into their individual case plan (including full development of the plan in later steps at CHV), as well as the workings of the house. CHT provides opportunities for residents to hold their own meetings, independent of staff, that provides an open forum for youth to share concerns without feeling restricted because of the presence of staff.

HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

While some of these theories may sound very academic and confusing, the reality is that most youth-serving agencies and non-profits tend to use many of them in day-to-day operations, even if they did not know what they were called. Considering the theoretical underpinnings in developing your program will help you justify certain activities and evaluation methods to funders.

If you have an existing program and do not know what theories are in place, consider partnering with a local university or researcher. Have them observe your case management practice and examine your program and evaluation methods. They will likely be able to point out several theories that you are already using.

The theories you need to develop will be informed by your clientele and their presenting needs. Your specific program may also influence this. We feel that trauma-informed care, resiliency theory and motivational interviewing are all key when developing a theoretical approach that honours the knowledge and experience of the youth that you serve.



EVALUATION *and* MEASURING PROGRESS

Increasingly, organizations are being asked by funders and stakeholders to “prove their successes” using formal evaluation methods and data. This information helps ensure that programs are effective and that the donor dollar is being used wisely and efficiently.

There are numerous ways of evaluating programs and Covenant House uses a variety. At the core of evaluation, however, you are looking for either quantitative data –things that can be counted—or qualitative data—using words to explain things in more detail. A successful evaluation process, especially in a transitional housing program such as this, will use a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data to gain a full understanding of successes and challenges.

Entire toolkits can, and have, been written about evaluation so we will take a minimalistic approach and describe a few of the key methods and resources used at the two Covenant Houses and then provide links to resources where you can gain more detailed information.

Two of the most common evaluation methods at Covenant House are surveys and focus groups. Used for both youth and staff, these two methods allow a large number of data points to be collected and evaluated (through a survey) and then for more in-depth discussion and analysis to occur through a focus group.

Bruce Rivers, Executive Director of Covenant House Toronto says that anonymously surveying youth has allowed the agency to “ask them very critical questions about how we’re doing, what we need to be doing differently.” He says that these surveys range from food taste to quality of programming. There are currently over 20 different research and evaluation programs going on at Covenant House Toronto to allow them to test and apply different areas of the work.

“If it weren’t for the youth working with us around each of those initiatives, we’d be nowhere. They’re the ones who can testify as to whether or not it’s effective and helpful.”

—Bruce Rivers, Executive Director, Covenant House Toronto

Covenant House also uses evaluation methods to monitor growth and progress of youth – the Youth Engagement Scale (YES in Toronto and the Outcomes Star in Vancouver). These tools allow for easily understandable and visual measurement of a youth’s progress within the system. Use of these tools is done both individually between staff and the specific youth, but also collectively as part of Case Management Team (CMT) meetings.

*“How do I know that when a youth comes in the front door and leaves out the back door that they’re in better shape than [when] we found them and how do we measure that?”
—John Harvey, Director of Program Services, Covenant House Vancouver*

All Covenant Houses also use the Efforts to Outcomes database developed by Social Solutions. It is an adaptable data management system that has a specific module for working with a transitional housing program for homeless youth. There are a variety of data management systems and we are not prioritizing or recommending this over any other, but it is a system that is mandated for all Covenant Houses and the transitional housing component was piloted in part by Covenant House Vancouver.

Of utmost importance however, is that consideration is given to evaluation even before you get up and running. Oftentimes, evaluation is considered to be an add-on, but conducting research about your programs is critical to their success and sustainability.

Key Performance Indicators and Outcomes

*“When I first joined...the key issue for the board and for the agency is that they really need to get outcomes. They had metric up the ying-yang and that is something that Covenant House does really well – it measures lots and lots and lots of things...what’s key is understanding how well we’re doing. So we needed to put together a key set of indicators, what we call key performance indicators, the outputs and the outcomes.”
—John Harvey, Director of Program Services, Covenant House Vancouver*

One of the ways an organization can measure whether it is achieving its mission and meeting its goals is through the development of ‘Key Performance Indicators’ (KPI). “Performance measurement is a process that systematically evaluates whether your efforts are making an impact on the clients you are serving or the problem you are targeting” (Albanese, n.d., slide 12).

While KPIs vary depending upon organization and program, a good Key Performance Indicator provides a measurement of success that is quantifiable. Being able to count allows for comparison between programs, between years or between organizations.

Performance Indicators generally measure ‘outputs’ – specific numerical measurements (clients served, number of youth rehoused, number of hygiene kits given out). Some will measure specific achievements – i.e. “80% of clients will successfully complete ROP within a year” whereas others measure progress towards overall organizational goals: “The average length of stay in shelters is reduced.”

KPIs allow an organization to determine what is and is not working and to adjust programming to improve outcomes. In selecting the correct KPI an organization has to have:

- » a clear mission
- » well-defined goals
- » a set of desired outcomes
- » prioritization of the most important factors.

An agency may have several goals and outcomes that it wishes to measure. By creating clear KPIs an organization can indicate which of these it views as most important. For example, a graduated transitional housing program may wish to see its clients move on to independent living within a certain time frame, say 12 or 18 months. However, it also wants its clients to complete all steps in the program before graduation ([see Steps section for an idea of a graduated plan to completion](#)). The agency needs to understand which of these is most important and therefore, which key performance indicator holds the most weight.

Therefore, if completion of all program steps is more important than moving on to independent living with a set number of months, success can be obtained when a high number of youth complete all steps even if it takes them longer to move into independent living. Since a step program would be aimed at providing youth with the necessary skills for independence, the likelihood of achieving long-term successful housing will be greater with this outcome than if youth are pushed through the program to meet the length of stay goal.

An effective evaluation program uses a logic model to join the key goals and outcomes together in a straightforward and organized fashion. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation defines a logic model as a “systematic and visual way to present and share your understanding of the relationships among the resources you have to operate your program, the activities you plan, and the changes or results you hope to achieve (2006, pg 1).”

TABLE 1 LOGIC MODEL TEMPLATE

RESOURCES	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	GOAL
<i>Resources dedicated to or consumed by the program</i>	<i>What the program does with the inputs to fulfill its mission</i>	<i>The direct products of program activities</i>	<i>Benefits for participants during and after program activities</i>	<i>Desired long-term result of the program</i>

(from <http://nnlm.gov/outreach/community/logicmodel.html>)

In 2006-2007 Covenant House Vancouver developed the use of Key Performance Indicators. After a pilot year, they committed to using the indicators for three years before doing an in-depth review of the data and making any programmatic adjustments. This began in 2008 officially.

“We just wanted to develop a pool of data so that we can say ‘ok, now what? What does this tell us after three year?’”

—John Harvey, Director of Program Services, Covenant House Vancouver

Case Manager Lisa Ronaldson (ROP Vancouver) explains how the statistics that are collected at ROP are based on the youth’s individual case plan. “We look at what are they working on—employment, education. Are they stuck in a certain area? Health—so that could be mental health, it could be medical health, it could be dental health. Legal—if there’s any legal stuff and where they are in that continuum. Housing—if I’ve started to work with them on different types of housing, filling out applications.” Overall, she says, “it’s a way for us to keep track of the work that the youth is doing.”

Efforts to Outcomes Database

The Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) database is a form of case management software, created by Social Solutions, a company based out of Baltimore, US. It is an electronic database system used to measure different program outcomes. With Covenant House, ETO has significantly improved the agency’s ability to “collect, monitor and analyze what we are doing, who we are doing it with, and how well we are doing it” ([Covenant House Washington website](#)).

ETO is a flexible system, as it can be tailored to suit an organization’s specific needs. An organization may want to track numerous elements of their services, such as program outcomes or demographics. The ETO can be built to track certain elements of service delivery, as indicated by the organization. Ultimately, ETO allows an agency to organize the different interactions that occur between employees and stakeholders. Once the specified interactions are documented and added to the database, the organization can evaluate the data, and interpret the results, which facilitates greater program success, as agencies are able to see the benefits or downfalls of certain programs. According to the Social Solutions website, ETO “brings a performance management approach to improving the lives of participants under your care”. It is a systematic, evidence-based method that fosters careful program evaluation and eventually leads to improvements in service provision, as organizations understand what elements of their programming are successful, or require development. In terms of funding, ETO is an effective measure to ensure accountability and demonstrate program success to possible donors.

ETO provides different kinds of database management, suited to certain kinds of organizations. Initially, ETO conducts a customization process, to determine which software is best suited to your organization’s needs. After implementation, ETO provides a training curriculum to address future changes, as an organization’s needs may be different over time.

For instance, Covenant House uses ETO to track a client's progress, thus different reports are generated when a client enters a shelter, leaves a shelter and completes classes and programs. These interactions are then organized in the electronic database, along with other interactions of different clients at the same location, which allows Covenant House to produce data representing the trends and priorities of the clients at a specific Covenant House. As other Covenant House programs are also using ETO, this facilitates data sharing, as locations can compare and contrast the unique aspects of their centre with challenges encountered at other locations. Consequently, Covenant House is able to produce a comprehensive history of program participants, which illustrates how people have been helped over time, and identifies ways to improve Covenant House programming to successfully assist future participants.

Because ETO also serves as the ROP's program database, ETO is able to do much more than just track data. The customizable nature of the program allows for basic forms to be created within ETO that facilitate electronic registration/intake and discharge, updating of case plans, tracking of referrals and key contacts etc.

The screenshot shows a web-based intake form. At the top, there is a header bar with the text "Take Assessment for Fake, Fake on" and three dropdown menus for "Feb", "4", and "2015". Below this is a section titled "ROP Intake Report" with a sub-header "ROP Intake Report" and a text box containing "ROP Intake Report". The form contains several sections:

- A-1. Intake Package and Initial Room Check Completed?** with radio buttons for "Yes" and "No".
- A-2. Program Staff Completing Assessment (First and Last Name)(Required)** with a text input field.
- A-3. Community Agency Currently Providing Support** with a large text area.
- A-4. Any immediate health concerns?** with radio buttons for "Yes" and "No".
- A-5. Immediate Health Concern(s)** with a large text area.
- A-6. On medication?** with radio buttons for "Yes" and "No".
- A-7. List of Medications Currently Taken (Prescription and/or Non-Prescription)** with a text input field.

A screenshot of an Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) intake form.

The Youth Engagement Scale (YES) – Covenant House Toronto

Covenant House Toronto uses the Youth Engagement Scale (YES) model to gather information about a youth's engagement with various factors of the program. YES examines 12 different "Points of Service" in a young person's life using a 10-step scale that captures how engaged they are (actively working to make changes) on that particular issue including school, work, involvement in their program etc. The 10-step scale is linked to the Stage of Change transtheoretical model, which will be discussed in the [Theories to Support the Work chapter](#).

The 12 different Points of Service are: Activities of Daily Living, Housing, Education, Employment, Motivation and Relationships, Support System/Community Connectivity, Strength Based Resiliency/Self-Efficacy, Legal, Medical, Mental Health, Substances and Financial.

According to CHT, in the area of employment for example, a youth being scored as Step 1 or Step 2 would fall into the Pre-Contemplation Stage of Change and their behaviour would include being "Unemployed and not interested in seeking employment, hostile or cold toward idea of employment and rejects offers of employment coaching/assistance". As the youth moves up the scale and becomes more engaged with this Point of Service their behaviour would transition to a more positive outlook until they are "employed in a sustainable job providing a living income".

CHT is in the process of rolling out visual tools to help staff and youth see how YES measures their progress. The graphs below are still in development, but provide a sample of how YES can show the growth and progress of each youth.

As these sample graphs show, a youth can progress in many ways. The system allows comparisons between several points (as shown in the chart on the left hand side) or between two specific points in time (as shown in the chart on the right hand side).

FIG.8 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT SCALE (YES) RADAR GRAPHS



“[It] has really helped around just tracking in a better way the impact that we have on young people. We work with young people from 16-24 and sometimes it takes a number of years before you can really see that we’re having an impact. So this tool really helps us to check our progress.”

—Carol Howes, Director, Program Services, Covenant House Toronto

The Case Management Team approach is very effective when combined with YES because while one worker might not see a youth’s engagement as very high, another may have had a detailed conversation about that specific factor and so a melding of scores can be obtained.

The YES model can also be used to demonstrate progress to a youth.

It is important to note that with the YES model, and with Outcomes Star described in the next section, progress is not always linear. Youth may make forward progress in Activities of Daily Living but backward progress in Employment. This is understood to be natural and both staff and youth are informed that this should not be seen as a failure in any way.

"Sometimes it takes a *number of years* before you can really see that we're having an *impact*. So this tool really helps us to check our *progress*."

—Carol Howes, Covenant House Toronto

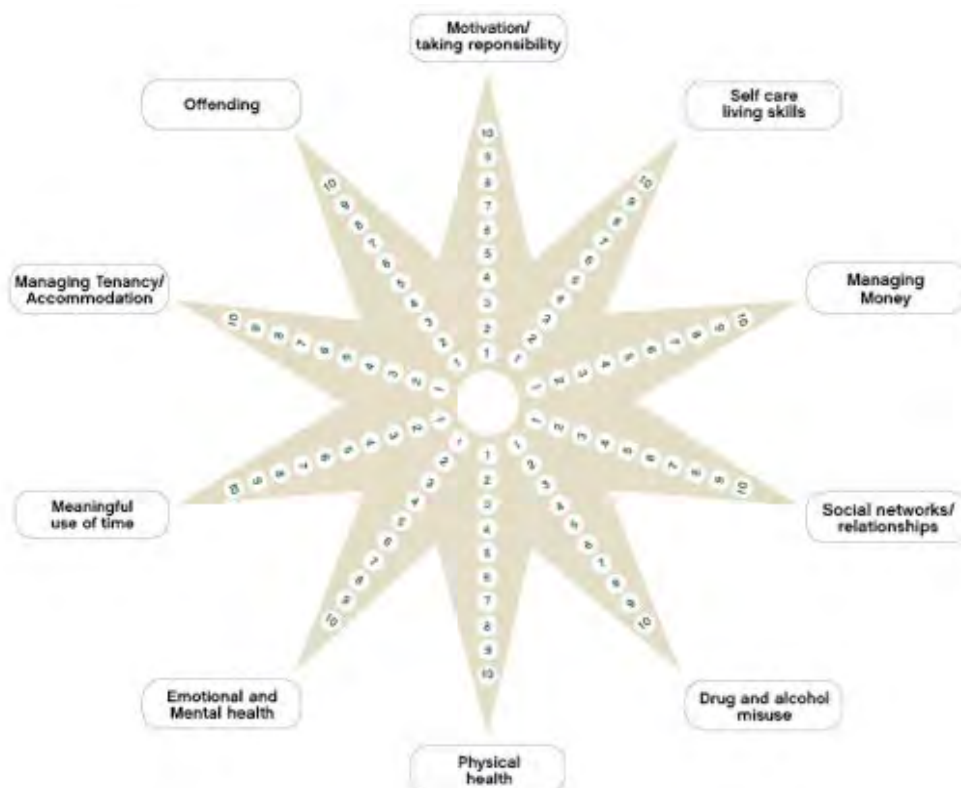
Outcomes Star – Covenant House Vancouver

The Outcomes Star is an approach used to measure change when working with vulnerable populations, particularly homeless people. The model was developed by Triangle Consulting, originally for [St. Mungo's Broadway](#), a UK charity dedicated to supporting homeless people. There are several versions of the Outcomes Star adapted to different groups, such as the elderly and people suffering from mental illness, yet we will focus on the Outcomes Star approach adapted for homeless populations.

HOW IT WORKS

The Outcomes Star method is based on the idea that people experiencing change move through several stages while transitioning from dependence to independence. The Outcomes Star approach identifies ten outcome areas: motivation and taking responsibility, self-care and living skills, managing money and personal administration, social networks and relationships, drug and alcohol misuse, physical health, emotional and mental health, meaningful use of time, managing tenancy and accommodation and offending. Within each outcome area, the Outcomes Star approach measures change through a specific ladder of change. The Outcomes Star Chart, pictured below, provides a visual representation of this process.

FIG.9 OUTCOMES STAR CHART



LADDER OF CHANGE

The Ladder of Change combines the theory behind the Stages of Change model (discussed in the [Theories to Support the Work chapter](#)) with the Outcomes Star. The first stage of the ladder is “stuck”, which means that when people begin a change process, it is initially very difficult. Many people find it challenging to accept that they have a problem that requires change, and/or they may not want to accept help from others. The second stage is “accepting help”, which is when people seek outside assistance, as they no longer want to tackle their issues alone. The third stage is “believing” which is when people begin to acknowledge that they will be able to change. When someone begins to believe in their ability to change, they often anticipate future benefits, and are much more welcoming of outside assistance. The fourth stage of change is “learning”, which is when people try different strategies, in order to change. This is a challenging stage, as most people are not usually successful on their first attempt to change, which can be a discouraging process. The last stage of change is “self-reliance” which is when individuals are able to maintain change without assistance from others. Many individuals begin the ladder at different stages, and do not necessarily progress linearly, as it may take several attempts to reach the self-reliance stage.

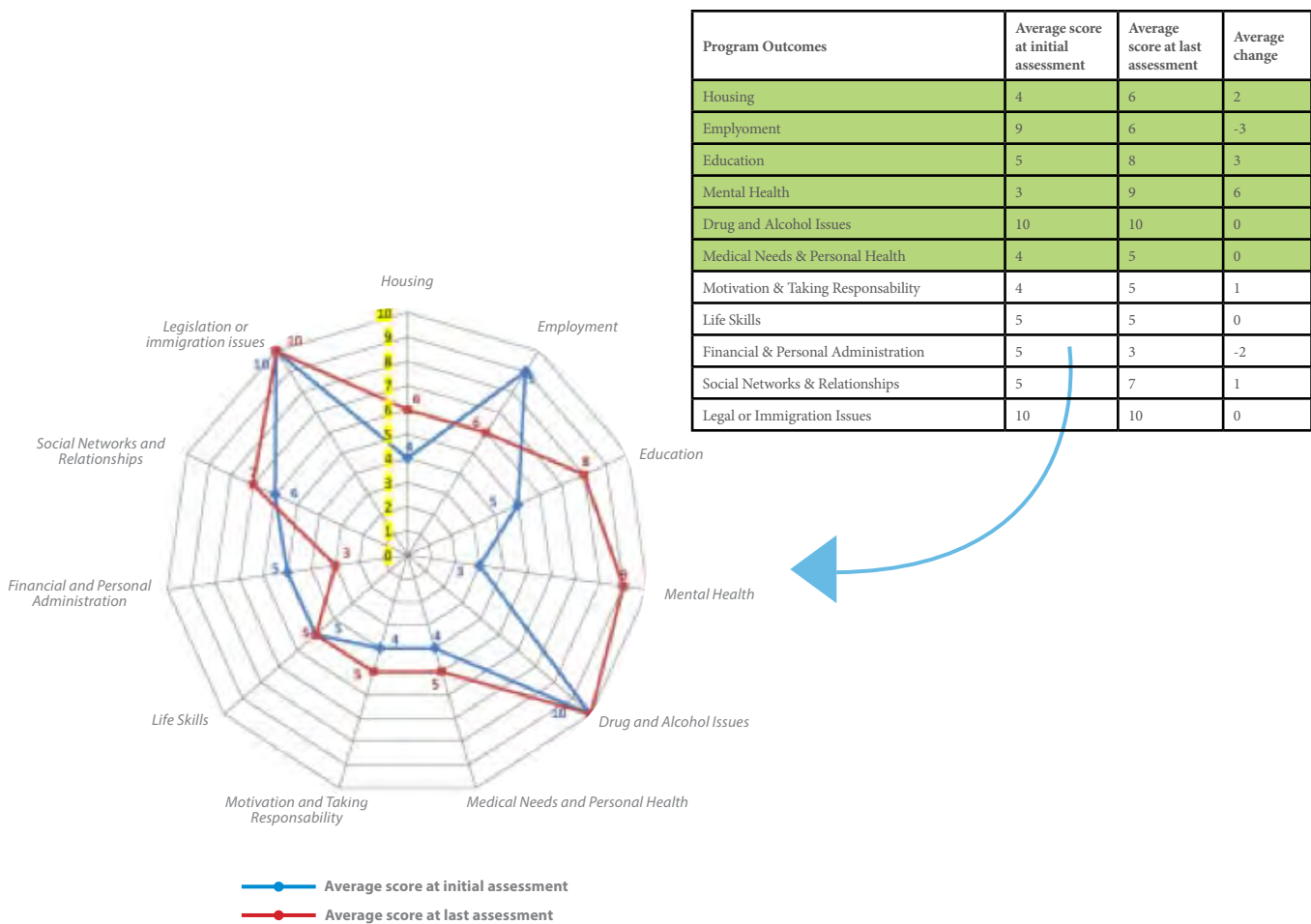
FIG.10 LADDER OF CHANGE MODEL



As you complete the Ladder of Change for each outcome area, you are instructed to measure your progress on the Outcomes Star, by indicating which number you are at, for the different ladders of change. Once you have chosen a number for each outcome area, you link the different numbers together to create your own star, which represents your progress and room for further development.

The image below is a composite of several youth and their progress as viewed on the Outcomes Star. A profile of an individual youth would look similar.

FIG.11 PROGRAM OUTCOMES FOR INDIVIDUAL YOUTH
(8 February 2013 – 9 September 2014, Vancouver)



HOMELESS HUB THOUGHTS:

Overall, both organizations do a great job collecting and using data and making sure that all programs are evaluated. While many funders ask for this level of evaluation, few provide the financial supports to achieve it. Covenant House's private funding base allows them to dedicate the resources necessary to build evaluation in to their work across the board.

Evaluation is certainly critical to any program operation. There are two ways to think about evaluation in a transitional housing program model: evaluation of the individual youth's progress and success of the program activity as a whole. Both agencies have established a variety of measures, including individual surveys, focus groups, the use of Efforts to Outcomes and the two youth engagement tools: the Youth Engagement Scale and the Outcomes Star.

We like Vancouver's method of setting up the parameters for data collection, creating an ongoing process for gathering information and then not reacting to the data for a set period of time. This is a good practice to ensure that you are noticing a trend rather than outliers. One of the keys to good data collection is patience.

It is also important, as Vancouver has emphasized, to not "chase numbers" but have a clearly defined logic model and understanding of what your key indicators are. This makes it easier for you to gather and use data without staff feeling that all they do is fill in forms and create numbers.

Some of the factors in your evaluation may be based upon the needs of your funders. If their primary goal is for you to house youth faster, then you will need to be able to compare how long it used to take to house youth and prove that your methods are making housing youth easier and faster. If funders are more concerned about the development of life skills, then your evaluation methods would most likely include a pre and post life skills assessment of the youth (maybe every few months depending upon length of stay), as well as tracking the types of sessions offered, the number of residents who participated in each one etc.

Listening to the youth and seeking their input was also discussed by both organizations. They also emphasized the need to listen to staff as they are the ones working in the program at the ground level. It is important to include youth and staff input in your data and evaluation methods. When creating your key indicators both groups should be part of that process. Ideally, hard numbers will also be supplemented by qualitative surveys, interviews or focus groups to help understand and expand upon the data. While singular anecdotes are not evidence, gathering stories can help explain trends.

Youth evaluation may form part of your overall data collection but can also be used in other ways. For example, as noted above, pre and post life skills assessments may meet the needs of a funder, but they can also be used to measure and support the progress of an individual youth.

Using tools such as the Youth Engagement Scale or the Outcomes Star measure success and progress by a youth but they can also identify areas of concern for a program. If only a few youth are progressing in a certain item on a scale it could be a sign that program changes are needed to improve service delivery in a certain area.

These tools are also integrated into the service delivery; they are not just separate, standalone evaluation measurements. For example, the areas being assessed in Toronto's Youth Engagement Scale are all embedded into the goals of the program. They make up part of each youth's case plan and are discussed in the Case Management Team meetings.

FUNDING

Funding is a challenging issue. Competition for both capital and operating dollars – whether from government, corporate or private sources – is very competitive. Calculating costs of a specific program at a large organization like Covenant House is complex because of the interconnected nature of the programs. The Rights of Passage and the Transitional Housing programs are just two smaller pieces of the broader services that Covenant House provides.

For example, some administrative, program and management staff work for the agency as a whole or in multiple programs. Youth in ROP are able to access meals provided in the shelter/crisis care. The ROP program is housed in the same facility as the shelter and there is shared physical infrastructure. Other on-site programs are available to all Covenant House youth including ROP. For example, Covenant House Toronto offers an on-site school, medical clinic, job skills training and a mental health day program.

Consequently, it is very hard to indicate the exact amount of money needed to create a similar program elsewhere. The costs will depend upon the size of the program, location (urban vs. rural vs. northern), the integration with other services/facilities, the depth of program offerings etc.

CHT – The Transitional Housing program at Covenant House costs about \$1.7 million annually.

However, the Transitional Housing Program budget can be broken down as follows:

72.8%	\$1, 243, 960	Staffing
3.6%	\$62,108	Program Costs
6.7%	\$114, 404	Food
3.3%	\$56, 537	Mentor Program
6.7%	\$114, 365	Physical Structure (<i>includes Occupancy costs, furniture, equipment, amortization and maintenance</i>)

Total - \$1,708,435

Covenant House Toronto's 2014 annual report provides the following information:

Operating Expenses - \$20, 532, 552

- » 66% Youth Programs
- » 28% Fundraising, development and communications
- » 6% Management and administration

Investment in Youth Services - \$13, 442, 956

- » 59% Shelter and Crisis Care
- » 18% Community Support Services and Outreach
- » 13% Transitional Housing
- » 6% Public Education including Runaway Prevention
- » 4% Health Care

CHV – According to the 2013 Annual Report Covenant House Vancouver's Rights of Passage program costs about \$1, 860, 737 million annually.

The ROP budget can be broken down as follows:

80%	Staffing
20%	Program Costs

Covenant House Vancouver's annual report in 2013 provides the following information:

Operating Expenses - \$12, 099, 583

- » 65% Program Services
- » 27% Fundraising, development and communications
- » 8% Finance and administration

Program Services Expenses - \$7, 865, 411

- » 54% Shelter and Crisis Care
- » 19% Outreach/Community Support Services
- » 24% Rights of Passage
- » 3% Public Education

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

As with any organization there are a great many policies and procedures that support the functions of the organization. Given that the transitional housing program forms part of a larger organization, some of the policies apply to the organization as a whole and are not specific to the transitional housing program.

In many agencies, the policies are decided upon by the board (in consultation with senior management) while the procedures are developed by the staff. In others, policies –especially operational policies—are developed by the staff. Policies are goal-oriented and provide overarching principles, guidelines or frameworks for conducting the business of an organization. Procedures are more specific and provided detailed directions and instructions including who does what, how and when.

Policies tell people what to do. Procedures tell them how to do it.

In developing your policies it is good to ask the follow questions:

- » What is the issue, problem or opportunity for which we need a policy? Can we define it?
- » Do we have a policy that does/should address this issue, problem or opportunity?
- » Do we need an effective guide for our actions and decisions in this area?
- » What do we intend this policy to do?
- » What outcomes do we expect to see?
- » What is the purpose of this policy?
- » Why do we need this policy?

As you develop your policies, consider what areas you need to develop policies in. For most agencies these include: financial, administrative, space management, human resources, safety/security and operations.

In the resources for this section you can find a number of example policies from both Covenant House Vancouver and Covenant House Toronto that may prove helpful in the development of your own policies.

Each policy and procedure is divided into several key components and these provide a good format to follow in the development of your policies:

- » Policy or Policy Statement
- » Overview (sometimes excluded)
- » Purpose
- » Procedure

[See online resources.](#)

CONCLUSION

The Transitional Housing programs at Covenant House provide excellent models for community organizations to look to when planning their own youth homelessness initiatives. No matter the size of the community, the issue of youth homelessness exists and innovative approaches are needed to help solve it. This toolkit provides an example of how to move forward in addressing this critical issue.

Transitional housing, as we have addressed in other resources, including the Foyer Toolkit, Coming of Age and A Safe and Decent Place to Live, is a key method of assisting youth as they grow developmentally. The strength of the Foyer's Hub and Spoke model is clear – youth have the ability to grow and develop the necessary skills needed to sustain them independently.

The two Covenant House models, while sharing many commonalities, are different in how they are implemented. This provides a useful example of how the resources and needs of a community should be used to guide the development of a program to ensure that it best fits the youth in that area.

We encourage you to see these case studies as a starting point. Read, review, pull them apart and reassemble them to create the program that will best serve your young people and your location. We hope that you benefit from the ideas and the collected resources to get your program up and running quicker and more efficiently.



Vanessa, a past ROP participant at Covenant House Toronto shares her success story.

Further READING

- » [The Foyer Toolkit](#)
- » [Live, Learn and Grow: Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Homeless Youth – A Framework for the Foyer in Canada](#)
- » [Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada](#)
- » [A Safe and Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Framework for Homeless Youth](#)

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"I definitely recommend,
like if people are
having a hard time,
to go to *Covenant House.*
I think if you can
just like pull up your
socks a little bit,
they really like to help you."

—*"Patrick", Current Participant, ROP Vancouver*