



The Philosophy and Principles of the Foyer



THEFOYER,

as an example of transitional housing for youth, has been applied in a broad range of contexts, and much has been learned through adaptation and evaluation. What makes the model effective is its focus on accommodation combined with programming that is situated in an understanding of the needs of the developing adolescent. As such, housing and income, education and training, and providing appropriate supports are all platforms to help young people transition to adulthood and independent living in a safe and planned way.

In developing any successful program, the plan and approach to service delivery must reflect the underlying philosophical orientation of the model.



In this section, you will learn:

- *The philosophy and principles of the Foyer; and*
- *Why fidelity to the model matters.*

ALL EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMING FOR HOMELESS YOUTH MUST BE BUILT ON A CLEAR PHILOSOPHY AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES.

A rule-bound, institutional environment that provides short-term support in the rush to have young people become independent and self-sufficient is an unsuccessful model. Adaptation of the Foyer to your community should be done with consideration of the following:

Fidelity to the Model

The effectiveness of replicating any initiative depends on program fidelity, or the degree to which the program is delivered as intended. This does not mean strict and unwavering adherence to each program detail, as successful adaptation inevitably requires an assessment of the applicability of program elements to the local context. Rather, it means understanding and incorporating the philosophy and key program principles of the Foyer, in order to ensure that adaptation reflects the essential program philosophy.

The Canadian Homelessness Research Network suggests the following as core principles¹ of the Foyer:

- A focus on helping disadvantaged young people who are homeless or in housing need - including young people leaving care - to achieve the transition from dependence to independence;
- A developmentally-appropriate environment to build competence and a feeling of achievement;
- 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.

Supporting Adolescent Development

There is a wide body of research that shows successful physical, psychological, emotional and social transitions from childhood to adulthood require strong adult support (including mentoring), opportunities to experiment and explore (and to make mistakes), learning to nurture healthy adult relationships (including sexual relationships), the gradual learning of skills and competencies relating to living independently and obtaining a job, etc. Unfortunately, when young people become homeless or are in crisis, many of these assumptions about adolescent development are abandoned in the rush to make them self-sufficient. We

need to ensure that support for healthy adolescent development is at the centre of any support system for those leaving care.

Transitional housing models that limit stays to one year, are highly institutional and rule-bound in their approach, and which do not offer aftercare, are not likely to be effective, as they are not at all designed around the needs of the developing adolescent. So, to effectively implement the Foyer model in Canada, there must be a policy framework and funding in place that allows for transitional housing and supports that last longer than one year.

Facilitating Youth Engagement

The Foyer should support and nurture youth engagement with other people (youth and adults), their community, and importantly, with meaningful and fulfilling activities. Young people should have a say in program design, be engaged as part of quality assurance, and most importantly, play a major role in determining their own pathways out of homelessness. A client-centered

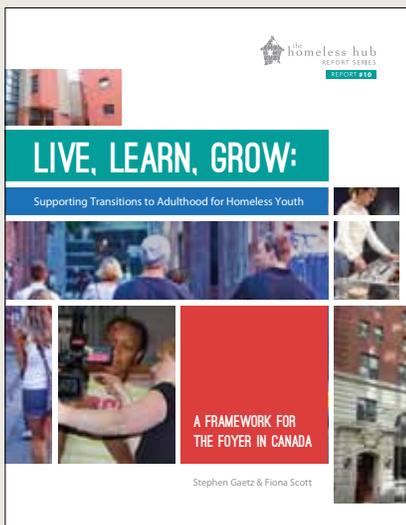
approach to case management should be part of the Foyer's operations. While all of this may seem obvious or go without saying, it is worth remembering that many services for young people fail when there is an overemphasis on control, curfews and restrictions. While all young people (as well as adults) need limits, setting up a young person to fail will not help them move forward with their lives.

The Primacy of Education

We need to put education at the centre of our response to youth homelessness, and this is one of the key strengths of the Foyer model. Across Canada, it is well understood that education should be a central priority for youth, and as a society we do what we can to help young people stay engaged with school as long as possible. Without adequate educational qualifications, employment opportunities for youth can be limited. If they do find jobs, a lack of education will likely lead to low-paying, part time, dead-end jobs^{1,2}. In order to lift youth out of homelessness, they must be given the opportunities, tools and resources to access education that they often lack as a result of their experience with poverty.

Educating Canada's youth is crucial, and for homeless youth, enhancing educational opportunities can produce longer-term, sustainable outcomes and reduce the risk of a return to homelessness. Unfortunately, few programs for homeless youth place educational support as a central focus of their work, in spite of what we know about the social and economic outcomes of early school leaving.

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TOOLKITS

- #1 What is a Foyer?
The Foyer and Transitions to Adulthood
- #4 Foyer Essentials
Part 1: The Program
- #5 Foyer Essentials
Part 2: Accommodation
- #6 Foyer Essentials
Part 3: Organizational Framework
- #7 Foyer Case Studies
- #8 Resources from the Foyer Federation (UK)

References

1. Gaetz, S. & O'Grady, B. (2002). Making Money - Exploring the Economy of Homeless Workers. *Work, Employment and Society*, 16 (3), 433-456.
2. Gaetz, S. (2002). *Street Justice: Homeless Youth and Access to Justice*. Toronto, ON: Justice for Children and Youth.