

# PATHWAYS TOWARDS STABILITY: YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRANSITIONS OFF OF THE STREETS

Jeff KARABANOW & Ted NAYLOR

## What do you need to know?

There is an abundance of research on homeless youth that looks at the causes and consequences of homelessness. Findings have been quite consistent in revealing that youth become homeless as a result of familial conflict, abuse and trauma, poverty, addictions and mental health concerns, and involvement in the child welfare system. Less is known about how youth are able to exit street life, leaving the picture incomplete. It is equally important to understand the ways that youth get off the street and re-enter what can be called 'mainstream society'.



## What did the researchers do?

Researchers interviewed 128 young people experiencing homelessness in six Canadian cities (Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Calgary, Ottawa and Vancouver). Fifty service providers

were also interviewed. Complementing this data collection plan were brief case study analyses of a diverse set of organizational structures serving street youth across Canada.

### WHAT IS THIS CHAPTER ABOUT?



This chapter explores the ways in which homeless youth in Canada attempt to exit or leave the streets. Researchers spoke with youth that were no longer living on the street, as well as youth still engaged in street life to discover the strategies youth may use to get off the streets, as well as the challenges they face in doing so.

#### ARTICLE SOURCE

Karabanow, J., & Naylor, T. (2013). Pathways Towards Stability: Young people's transitions off of the streets. In Gaetz, S., O'Grady, B., Buccieri, K., Karabanow, J., & Marsolais, A. (Eds.), *Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice* (39-52). Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

# What did the researchers find?

The findings of this research suggest that there are several connected dimensions to the process of leaving the streets including contemplation (thinking about getting off the street), motivation to change, getting help, transitioning from the street, changing daily routine and redefining one's sense of self. Across these dimensions, the organizational structures (e.g., drop-in centers, youth shelters, supportive housing, job training programs, etc.) available to youth play a significant role in

supporting their exit from street culture. Homeless youth face many challenges in exiting the street, and for some the process was not linear, but took on average six attempts before successfully getting off the street. These challenges include being part of an environment where trauma is an almost daily occurrence, coping with physical, mental, and spiritual health concerns, and a lack of life and employment skills. In addition, street youth often have limited social connections, or networks to utilize in order to move forward.

“...street youth often have limited social connections, or networks to utilize in order to move forward”

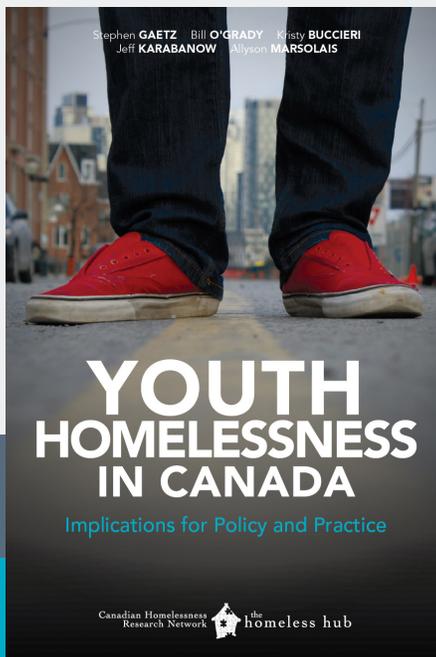
# How can you use this research?

This research can be used to inform service providers and policy makers of the experiences faced by homeless youth trying to exit the streets. It can also be used to recommend the author's suggestions, including developing methods of preventing youth homelessness that tackle poverty, family distress, abuse, and failures in the child welfare system, continuing to support front-line resources, and developing structural initiatives such as supportive housing and meaningful employment opportunities for youth.

## About the researchers

JEFF KARABANOW is a professor of Social Work at Dalhousie University in the Faculty of Health Professions. He has worked with homeless young people in Toronto, Montreal, Halifax and Guatemala and has published numerous academic articles and created several documentaries about housing stability, service delivery systems, street health, and homeless youth culture.

TED NAYLOR is the Principal of Ted Naylor Research & Consultation. He has been working in research, project management and communications for over 15 years, with extensive experience managing a diverse roster of projects for public and private sector clients. He is currently the Project Coordinator for several academic projects, including a SSHRC funded project (PI: Dr. Jeff Karabanow) titled, "Exiting Street Life: Youth Trajectories out of Homelessness."



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