

**RESEARCH TO IDENTIFY KNOWLEDGE GAPS:  
Working within Formal and Informal Economies: How Homeless Youth survive in Neo-liberal Times**

**FINAL REPORT**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In collaboration with ARK, a non-profit alternative drop-in center serving street youth in downtown Halifax, *this study explored how employment and labor are situated within the lives of homeless youth*. The report is based upon the findings emerging from in-depth interviews with 34 youth in Halifax and seven service providers in St. John's, Montreal, Hamilton, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Calgary. Complementing this data collection, a comprehensive literature review about informal economies (i.e., how and under what circumstances do they emerge?) is included, as well as an inventory of service organizations articulated by youth participants for being supportive within their street experiences. The inventory highlights the specific programming and employment initiatives of these service providers.

There is a dearth of information about the relationships between youth homelessness and informal and formal employment experiences. Framed in the context of broader housing and health issues and social inclusion strategies relevant to young people in HRM, this research explored the ways in which street entrenched young people engage in work activities within both formal and informal economies. In other words, we asked young people to describe how they incorporated non-criminal work experiences within the formal and/or informal economic sectors while being poorly housed, poorly fed, poorly clothed and generally socially, politically and economically excluded from mainstream culture.

The findings of this study suggest that labor occurs within a particular street context and street culture, the relationships between formal and informal work are inter-related, and despite the hardships they experience, young people who are or at-risk of homelessness respond to their circumstances with ingenuity, resilience and hope. Often street-involved and homeless young people are straddling formal and informal work economies while mediating layers of external and internal motivations and tensions. The majority of youth participants in this study had held at least one formal job; however, their ability to maintain employment was usually dependent on their housing situation. In this way, housing (i.e., affordable, adequate, safe, clean) availability is central to the discussion of street youth and labor and employment.

The lived reality of homelessness requires adaptation and survival behavior. Globally, informal economies are one response to this lived reality. Informal economies emerge when there are few alternative means of earning, especially for people at the lowest end of the earning spectrum and those without any formal work; under economic pressure new shadow 'economies' are created in order for many to remain economically viable. The street youth who participated in this study pursue work under similar circumstances. The experiences of work and labor for the participants in this study are situated within a global context and are influenced by individual ages/stages and characteristics layered against mainstream expectations and social exclusion.

Youth interviewed for this study engage in many informal money-making activities including panhandling, squeegeeing, busking, making and selling art, performing poetry and/or jokes, among many other creative pursuits. The diversity of these activities demonstrates the entrepreneurial spirit and creativity/resilience of street-involved young people. They are willing to undertake any number of often undesirable tasks to survive. In most cases, the informal work they engage in is chosen based on what will work to make money in a given location and given external factors (e.g., law enforcement, time of day, weather, etc.).

The legalities of the work are part of their decision-making processes. Youth participants often identified that they preferred doing ‘legal’ work in comparison to illegal activities (i.e., selling drugs and sex work). However, for those youth with more embedded street careers, there is an awareness of how work options are increasingly restricted due to more recent ‘safe streets’ legislations in major cities across Canada. These bylaws directly impact the ability of young people to earn survival money, and further, can impact their future in negative ways (i.e., garnished wages when they *do* enter formal work, criminal record after repeat tickets, fear of getting caught if becoming ‘above board’).

The reality is that the participants in this study cannot very easily engage in formal work. There is a dearth of meaningful formal work available, and when living homeless there are many challenges to overcome to maintain this work. In addition, there are few employers willing to take a risk on an individual who is without stable housing, poor employment experiences and most likely marginal education. Therefore, street youth are left with informal work that on one level provides them with survival money, basic needs, and a sense of citizenship; on another level, belittlement, harassment, and mockery. For some, informal work ‘fits’ with their interest in being independent and being able to move around (i.e., travelers), yet for most, engaging in informal work maintains their marginal and excluded status.

## RÉSUMÉ

En collaboration avec l'ARK, à but non lucratif alternative drop-in centre desservant les jeunes de la rue au centre-ville de Halifax, cette étude a examiné comment l'emploi et le travail sont situés dans la vie des jeunes sans-abri. Le rapport est basé sur les conclusions qui sortent de interviews en profondeur avec 34 jeunes à Halifax et sept fournisseurs de services, à St. John's, Montréal, Hamilton, Toronto, Winnipeg et Calgary. En complément de cette collecte de données, une revue de la littérature sur l'économie informelle (c'est-à-dire, comment et dans quelles circonstances de leur apparition?) Est inclus, ainsi que d'un inventaire des organismes de services articulés par les jeunes participants d'être favorable dans le cadre de leurs expériences de la rue. L'inventaire met en évidence la spécificité de programmation et de l'emploi de ces fournisseurs de services.

Il ya une pénurie d'informations sur les relations entre les jeunes sans-abri et de l'emploi formel et informel des expériences. Placé dans le contexte plus large de questions de logement et de la santé et des stratégies d'inclusion sociale pour les jeunes dans les ressources humaines, cette recherche a exploré les moyens par lesquels la rue des jeunes s'engager dans des activités à la fois formel et informel des économies. En d'autres termes, nous avons demandé aux jeunes de décrire la manière dont ils intégraient non pénale des expériences de travail dans la forme et / ou les secteurs de l'économie informelle, tout en étant mal logés, mal nourris, mal vêtus et, en général, socialement, politiquement et économiquement exclus de la culture.

Les conclusions de cette étude suggèrent que la main-d'œuvre se produit dans un contexte particulier, la rue et de la culture de la rue, les relations entre les secteurs formel et informel sont étroitement liés, et malgré les difficultés qu'ils rencontrent, les jeunes ou les personnes qui sont à risque d'itinérance de répondre à leurs circonstances, avec ingéniosité, la résistance et d'espoir. Souvent en cause dans la rue et sans abri, les jeunes sont à cheval sur le travail formel et informel des économies alors que les couches de la médiation interne et externe des motivations et des tensions. La majorité des jeunes participants à cette étude avaient eu au moins un emploi formel, mais leur capacité à maintenir l'emploi est généralement tributaire de leur situation de logement. De cette façon, le logement (c'est-à-dire, d'un coût abordable, adéquat, sécuritaire, propre) la disponibilité est au cœur de la discussion des jeunes de la rue et le travail et l'emploi.

La réalité vécue de l'itinérance nécessite l'adaptation et la survie de comportement. Globalement, l'économie informelle sont une réponse à cette réalité vécue. L'économie informelle apparaissent quand il ya peu d'autres moyens de gagner, surtout pour les personnes au bas du spectre de gain et les personnes sans aucune forme de travail, sous la pression économique nouvelle ombre "économies" sont créés pour de nombreuses personnes à rester économiquement viable. Les jeunes de la rue qui ont participé à cette étude de poursuivre les travaux dans des circonstances similaires. Les expériences de travail et de travail pour les participants à cette étude sont situés dans un contexte mondial et sont influencés par les différents âges / stages en couches et les caractéristiques principales attentes et contre l'exclusion sociale.

Les jeunes interrogés pour cette étude de se livrer à beaucoup d'argent à des activités, y compris la mendicité, squeegeeing, arts de la rue, la fabrication et la vente de l'art, la poésie l'exécution et / ou des blagues, parmi beaucoup d'autres activités créatrices. La diversité de ces activités témoigne de l'esprit d'entreprise et la créativité / résistance de la rue en cause des jeunes. Ils sont prêts à entreprendre un certain nombre de tâches souvent indésirable pour survivre. Dans la plupart des cas, le travail informel se livrent à de est choisi en fonction de ce qui travail pour

gagner de l'argent en un lieu donné et compte tenu de facteurs externes (par exemple, l'application de la loi, le temps de la journée, la météo, etc.)

Les aspects juridiques du travail font partie de leur processus de prise de décision. Les jeunes participants ont indiqué que souvent ils ont préféré faire «légaux» de travail par rapport aux activités illégales (c'est-à-dire, la vente de drogue et du sexe). Cependant, pour les jeunes de la rue des carrières plus intégrés, il ya une prise de conscience de la manière dont les options sont de plus en plus restreint en raison de la plus récente "la sécurité dans les rues des législations dans les grandes villes à travers le Canada. Ces règlements impact direct sur la capacité des jeunes à gagner de l'argent de survie, et, en outre, peuvent avoir un impact sur leur avenir dans négative (c'est-à-dire, garnies des salaires quand ils entrent dans le travail formel, le casier judiciaire des billets après le répète, la peur de se faire prendre si de plus ", ci-dessus bord »).

La réalité est que les participants à cette étude ne peuvent pas facilement se livrer à son travail. Il ya une pénurie significative de son travail disponible, et quand il ya des sans-abri qui vivent de nombreux défis à surmonter pour maintenir ce travail. En outre, peu d'employeurs sont prêts à prendre des risques sur un individu qui est sans logement stable, les mauvaises expériences d'emploi et très probablement marginal éducation. Par conséquent, les jeunes de la rue se retrouvent avec le travail informel sur un niveau qui leur assure la survie de l'argent, les besoins de base, et un sens de la citoyenneté, sur un autre niveau, belittlement, le harcèlement et la moquerie. Pour certains, le travail informel »correspond« à leur intérêt à être indépendant et être en mesure de se déplacer (c'est-à-dire, les voyageurs), mais pour la plupart, de se livrer au travail informel maintiennent leur statut de marginaux et des exclus.

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the globe, neo-liberalism as a political and economic philosophy has gained widespread acceptance. As a result, there is a renewed faith in the market economy, less involvement from governments in terms of economic and social stewardship, the diminishing of social and economic safety net structures – like employment insurance – and an increase in part-time and casual or temporary employment. Politically, there has been a drastic move throughout developed and developing nations towards individualism, self help, and ‘tough on crime’ punishment portfolios. As such, an increasing number of people are struggling to sustain their livelihoods, preserve a sense of social citizenship and remain politically, economically and socially viable.

Informal economies develop when citizens have few alternative means of economic survival. Marginalized and socially excluded people enter into informal economies in response to poverty and economic dislocation. The experiences of poverty and struggles to meet basic needs are intensified for young homeless people. Informal work is a last option when living young, poor, and with unstable housing. At a time when youth need a strong support system to face the complex and often troubling developmental tasks of creating a stable identity and becoming productive and autonomous adults (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995), an increasing number of adolescents find themselves dealing with an unrealistic test of independence – that of homelessness. Youth make up an increasingly large proportion of the homeless and at-risk population, although their exact prevalence is unclear, as many do not sleep in homeless shelters and so are missed by shelter-based counts (Karabanow, 2004b; Krauss, Eberle, & Serge, 2001; Reilly, Herrman, Clarke, Neil, & McNamara, 1994).

There is a dearth of understanding concerning the relationship between homelessness and the formal (regulated) and informal (unregulated) economy. While much scholarship has focused upon illegal and criminal street activities, there has been little attention paid to formal and

informal economies. To begin to address this knowledge gap, this study explored the linkage between homeless young people and their labor within these economic sectors. Previous research suggests that homeless young people dedicate significant amounts of time and energy to work, either within the formal, informal, and/or illegal economies (Karabanow, 2004a; 2006). In addition, most research on street youth and employment issues explores the constraints and limitations experienced in accessing paid work, rather than eliciting an understanding of the broader context. Gaetz and O’Grady’s (2002) thoughtful exploration of the economy of young homeless work suggests that youth homeless economies tend to be flexible, socially patterned (diverse) and stratified along background and situational characteristics. Informed by this work, *our study attempts to advance and mobilize the knowledge to inform practice and policy by building a clearer understanding about how employment and labor are situated within the lives of homeless youth populations.*

The report is based upon the findings emerging from in-depth interviews with 34 youth in Halifax and seven service providers in St. John’s, Montreal, Hamilton, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Calgary. Using in-depth narratives and a grounded theory analysis, this study endeavored to build understandings based on emerging data trends which form the foundation of our arguments. Complementing this data collection, a comprehensive literature review about informal economies (i.e., how and under what circumstances do they emerge) is included, as well as an inventory of service organizations articulated by youth participants as being helpful in their street experiences (Appendix A). The inventory highlights the specific programming and employment initiatives of these service providers.

## **Study Context – Halifax and ARK Outreach**

Homeless youth across Canada often report family violence, poverty, instability and trauma during childhood and adolescence (Coates, 2000; Karabanow, 2004a; 2006; 2008; Novac,

Serge, Eberle, & Brown, 2002; Toronto Mayor's Homeless Action Task Force, 1990). There are widespread and numerous stories of problematic and dehumanizing experiences within the group home and foster care system, and a large majority of youth arrive on the street out of desperation or with the sense that even life on the street is safer or more acceptable than the life that they are fleeing (Alleva, 1988; Auerswald & Eyre, 2002; Hughes, et al. [in preparation]; Karabanow, 2004a). Once on the street, many youth resort to risky and often illegal activities for making money, finding shelter and food, and defending themselves against the threats of violence and further alienation (Auerswald & Eyre; Karabanow, 2004a; McCarthy and Nelson, 1991). This causes further marginalization for these youth, creating additional barriers to "success," including addictions, physical and mental illness, and criminal justice involvement (Karabanow, Clement, Carson, & Crane, 2005; Karabanow, 2006; 2008; Novac et al.).

Nova Scotia is not insulated from these global trends; neither are street youth. A very marginalized and socially excluded population throughout the world, street youth are not only increasing in numbers through out Canada, but their predicaments are worsening due to economic recession trends, greater restrictions on social assistance and employment insurance, and weakening social safety net supports. Generally, this leaves young people in precarious economic circumstances.

Homeless youth represent a unique subset of the homeless population with very specific needs – they face extreme alienation and disadvantage, all during a life-stage that is tumultuous and difficult for even the most fortunate of young people. Homeless youth are at risk of physical and mental health problems because of their desperate circumstances and the lack of support and guidance from concerned adults render them highly vulnerable to exploitation and risk (Durham, 2003; Karabanow, 2004; Karabanow et al., 2007; Krauss et al., 2001). For all of these reasons, this study explored how homeless and street-involved young people understand, negotiate, and survive on formal and informal work.

Street-involved and homeless youth are a growing population in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM). Despite difficulties in locating and counting homeless or at-risk youth, the HRM Portrait Study<sup>1</sup> identified an increase in the number of visibly homeless youth as one of the most notable trends from 2003 to 2004 (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2004). Framed in the context of broader housing and health issues and social inclusion strategies relevant to young people in HRM, this research explored the ways in which street entrenched young people engage in legal work activities within both the formal and informal economy. In other words, we asked young people to describe how they secured and managed work experiences within the formal and/or informal economic sectors while being poorly housed, poorly fed, poorly clothed and generally socially, politically and economically excluded from mainstream culture.

In collaboration with ARK, a non-profit alternative drop-in center serving street youth in downtown Halifax, *this study attempted to understand how employment and labor are situated within the lives of homeless youth*. In particular, this study was developed to consider the implications of the implementation of municipal by-law legislation targeting the activities of median-panhandling (i.e., ‘flying a sign’ or ‘flagging a sign’) and squeegeeing – both activities that many homeless or street-involved young people rely upon for making survival money. This qualitative research fills a knowledge gap through exploring these issues in-depth with 34 street youth. We also conducted seven interviews with key service providers across the country and explored their insights regarding street youth employment.

## **Mapping of Analytical Elements**

The findings of this study suggest that experiences with formal and informal employment are embedded with street life and daily routines. The layers of stigma and discrimination

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<sup>1</sup> The Portrait Study presents data from a one-night census of street and shelter-based homeless people conducted in Halifax.:

experienced by people living homeless further exclude them from participating in meaningful employment, which often results in turning to informal work due to having no other choice. Most often, young homeless people are straddling formal and informal work worlds in an effort to remain economically viable – formal and informal work intersect in this way. The theme of working conditions highlights what it is like to do informal work (e.g., in public, under scrutiny, with little protection, etc.) and explains that at times, for youth, formal working conditions are as difficult too. Finally, themes related to what work means to homeless youth are presented and highlight the resilience, independence, creativity and critical consciousness of the youth who participated in this study. Service delivery wisdom and recommendations are drawn from service provider and youth interview data and suggest some promising practices and considerations for evolving services.

## **Outline of Report**

This report is framed around in-depth descriptions of street youth experiences with formal and informal work. The following section presents a comprehensive literature review concerning the context and circumstances under which informal economies emerge and how informal economies are understood in North America and more specifically, Canada. The literature review highlights the intricate link between poverty and marginalization and the emergence of informal economies.

Following the literature review, the research methodology is presented including the research questions and objectives, the paradigmatic approach and design of the project, ethical approval, sampling and recruitment, data collection and analysis procedures, and a description of our dissemination activities to date and plans for the future.

The next sections explore the findings and analyses of our data. The voices of our participants become the primary focus of these sections and guide the reader into the lives of

those living on the street. Youth narratives are used to illustrate the lived reality of being young and homeless and in need of survival strategies. Their work within the informal economy is creative, ingenious and labor intensive. To add further context to the stories shared by youth, several service providers' thoughts and commentaries are presented alongside the voices of youth – often affirming what the youth have said and sometimes challenging the positions of youth. In this way the voices of youth and service providers are integrated to present a fuller story of life on the street and participation in formal and informal economies.

The final section of the report focuses on service delivery wisdom and recommendations. Drawn largely from service provider interviews, strategies service providers find useful in supporting homeless youth to find meaningful employment opportunities are presented. As well, commentaries about how agencies and organizations could better serve youth will be drawn from the youth narratives to provide context and rationale for the recommendations and conclusion presented at the end of the report.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Throughout the globe, neoliberalism as a political and economic philosophy has gained widespread acceptance. Within Canada, the onslaught of neoliberalism has translated into a renewed reverence for the market economy, less involvement from the nation state in terms of economic and social stewardship, a retrenchment of social and economic safety net structures, and an increase in part-time, temporary and casual employment. Politically, there has been a drastic move throughout developed and developing nations towards rugged individualism, self help and voluntarism, and ‘tough on crime’ punishment portfolios. As such, an increasing number of people are struggling to sustain their livelihoods, preserve a sense of social citizenship and remain politically, economically and socially included within mainstream Canadian culture.

Street youth, a very marginalized and socially excluded population throughout the world, are not only increasing in numbers throughout Canada, but their predicaments are worsening as critical provisions (such as, affordable and supportive housing units, alternative educational and employment structures, adequate social assistance payments, and relevant health care services) continue to be stripped (Karabanow, 2004a; 2008). At a time when youth need strong support systems to face the complex and often troubling developmental tasks of creating a stable identity and becoming productive and autonomous adults (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995), an increasing number of adolescents find themselves dealing with an unrealistic test of independence – that of homelessness.

### **Formal and Informal Economies**

Formal and informal economies exist in every country. What is known as a “formal economy” is usually defined in homogeneous ways, whereas informal economies tend to be considered through various perspectives (Schneider, 2002; Vogel, 2006). Formal economies are comprised of legal and lawful work which is documented and taxed in an economy; that is,

formal work is taxed and the income is accounted for by companies and governments. All types of income and assets reported to the government (or the tax bureau – Revenue Canada) are included in the formal economy. Most countries measure their Gross National Product based on the formal economy. It is, however, more challenging to give one definition of the informal economy (Schneider).

Informal work tends to be differentiated by the nature of how the work takes place or the nature of goods and services being exchanged (Losby, Else, Kingslow, Edgcomb, & Malm, 2002; Schneider, 2002). For example, providing childcare services and taking cash, or working extra hours at work and getting paid in cash, and not filing taxes would be considered informal work; however, this form of work is *unlawful* as formal regulations are not being followed (i.e., reporting income for taxation purposes), yet, it is still legal. Similarly, panhandling is legal in Canada, but is unlawful if the earnings are unreported. Squeegeeing and median panhandling, on the other hand, are illegal work activities in most cities since bylaw legislation has been enacted in most major Canadian cities banning ‘working in a roadway’ (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002; C. MacNeil, personal communication, August 12, 2008). The illegal side of informal economies, beyond squeegeeing and median panhandling, includes criminal activities which are otherwise jobs for a majority of people in the informal economy (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; Schneider, 2002). The informal economies of selling drugs, sex work, sale of stolen goods, theft and other types of criminal acts that are illegal would be punished in a completely different manner than other types of informal work exchanged (Losby et al., 2002).

Informal work activities are often the only way to survive for street youth and other street entrenched populations and street-involved youth are usually involved in both unlawful and illegal informal economies (Baron, 2004; Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002; Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; Schneider, 2002). Making money is necessary to sustain survival while homeless; this is a global circumstance and informal economies emerge where need is great. Understanding how informal

economies emerge is integral to understanding how these economies represent a global survival strategy for those living in poverty.

### **How do informal economies emerge?**

While informal economies were once treated as a phenomenon in developing countries, they are now emerging in the industrialized nations (Vogel, 2006; Schneider, 2002). There has not been one consistent cause for the growth of informal economies around the world; however, there are some factors, such as neo-liberalism, which are consistently correlated to the emergence of informal economies in developed nations.

Neo-liberalism brings many implications with it, globalization being one issue. Globalization has increased rapidly during the last two decades. Although it has brought various trade benefits and lowered the (perceived) costs of goods and services, globalization has also had some serious consequences. For example, neo-liberal policies have influenced the overall economic restructuring and diminished role of government in providing social services, benefits and housing for the underprivileged people of society (Faux, Salas, & Scott, 2006; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002).

Since the 1980s, the trend of neo-liberalism has resulted in various challenges for low skilled workers in North America (Crow & Albo, 2005). The shifts from manufacturing industries to services, as well as changes in the organization of work, including demand for more qualified workers, play a key role in the emergence of informal economies. Globalization, specifically the development and implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement<sup>2</sup> (NAFTA), plays a very important role in the emergence of informal economies in Canada and the United States (US).

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<sup>2</sup> NAFTA was signed between United States, Canada and Mexico in 1994 to remove trade barriers between the three countries (Becker, Krauss, & Weiner, 2003).

While NAFTA seemed to benefit the Mexican economy by giving the country more low wage exports, making its goods very competitive in the market, it greatly harmed the manufacturing and small scale and home businesses in both Canada and the US. Due to the NAFTA policies, Canadian and US manufacturing industries could not compete with the low-wage imported goods from Mexico, which resulted in huge job losses and the shut down of local businesses in Canada and the US. Manufacturing and low wage industries are often the only option to earn a living for workers with low education levels. In total, the US lost 3.4 million manufacturing jobs since 2001; yet, no new economies are emerging to replace the lost jobs (Scott, 2008). Canada experienced similar effects (Faux et al., 2006). While exports have significantly grown, benefitting some in the nation, there has also been significant employment cut backs in low-wage industries, greatly affecting low-income families.

In addition to free trade and globalization, economic restructuring is another factor leading to increased unemployment, and the rise of precarious employment in Canada (Baron, 2001; Faux et al., 2006). Increased global trade leading to technological advancements, geographical changes in production plants and an increased demand for more educated workers have all caused large numbers of job losses, leaving masses of workers unemployed (Baron; Morales-Gomez & Torres, 1995). Starting with the manufacturing industry, this effect slowly spread throughout the economy, affecting a number of occupations. In response to this global change many unemployed workers dropped out of the labor force, were unemployed in the long term, or engaged in precarious employment, which was often short-term, low-waged, and with few or no security or benefits (Morales-Gomez & Torres). As the jobs were cut back, household incomes fell drastically.

Accompanying these neo-liberal trends is the diminishment of the Canadian government's role in providing social services intended to offset economic downtrends (Faux et al., 2006). Further, the federal government has made major changes in providing and building

affordable housing for low-income people, which has resulted in marginalized populations having little choice but to live on the street and engage in the informal economy (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002). Instead of responding to trends of increasing homeless populations, the government has instead increased property taxes, which results in very expensive housing and limited access to housing – specifically affordable housing for low-income families.

If we look at the general causes contributing to the growth of informal economies around the world, the most common issue is high taxes. Schneider (2002), who studies how to measure informal economies, argues that the more expensive and complicated a country's taxes are, the larger the informal economy is as a share of GDP. Increased tax is the most common cause of the growth of *unlawful* informal economies, including all kinds of jobs varying from production lines to house keeping.

As previously mentioned, informal economies emerge in desperate times; individuals, communities, or populations who need money will create ways of acquiring what they need. Informal economies are often referred to as underground, shadow, invisible and/or black market economies and have been developing as economic survival strategies for many workers who cannot find employment in the formal economy (Losby et al., 2002; Vogel, 2006). These workers are exploited by businesses and employers who take advantage of their social and economic circumstances by offering low wages, unsafe work environments, unspecified work hours, no paid vacation time, and so forth. Along with these, gender and racial discrimination is not monitored – there is no recourse or complaint processes. Often workplace safety and having proper protective equipment are not priorities, and are not always provided to workers to protect them from injury or death. Employees are usually not given the benefits (i.e., pension, health insurance, life insurance, etc) that are usual provisions in the formal economy (Vogel). People working informal jobs are not able to apply for unemployment insurance benefits as they usually

lack proof of previous employment. The majority of those engaged in the informal economy are there not by choice, but by circumstance (Vogel).

### **Who participates in informal economies?**

Informal economies are comprised of a very diverse labor force. Participants of the informal economy are usually the ones who cannot find or engage in employment in the formal economy. These include illegal immigrants, workers who cannot work legally for a variety of reasons (e.g. criminal record), workers who are unemployed due to structural/systemic unemployment, and people, including youth, who cannot engage in formal work due to lack of permanent housing or low level education. Employers often exploit these types of workers as there are no complaint mechanisms in the informal economy – if you complain, you lose your job (Canada and the world backgrounder, 2004). Baron (2001) discusses the emerging trend in the western industrialized states of economic structural changes placing a great impact on local labour markets. This has led to an increase in non standard and low paying jobs. On the other hand, he points out the significant trend of increasing demand for more educated workers. These changes have led to a decline in wages and the rise of long term unemployed workers in the Canadian society (Baron).

Economists, social planners, and bureaucrats explain the rise of precarious, non standard jobs in many ways. Generally, those who are more critical around economic equity and distribution relate the growth of informal economies and work with the emergence of neo liberalism. Often governments focus on the benefits of neo-liberalism and globalization to companies and corporations – even suggesting that the new paradigm provides workers with more choice, flexibility and independence; however, this position does not acknowledge the downsides of this model: “No job security, no guaranteed salary from a single employer, no pension, health, or dental benefits, no sick leave, or paid vacation, to say nothing of the stress of

continually looking for work” (Canada and the world backgrounder, 2004, p. 24). Further, York University's *Just Labour Journal* explains precarious, insecure employment as a change or shift in Canada:

The shift to nonstandard forms of employment is tied to labour market deregulation involving forms of employment that are not fully covered by labour laws and policies. Further, precarious employment is growing in Canada...spreading especially rapidly in urban areas and among women, youth and racialized groups who are overrepresented in the most precarious employment forms and work arrangements (Canada and the world backgrounder, 2004, p. 24)

This is especially the case of street youth who have much difficulty engaging in formal employment due to their homeless status, lack of proper housing, age and education, and often a lack of legal documentation (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; Karabanow, 2004b). Clearly, the neo-liberal shift, the decrease in meaningful, livable work opportunities, and the changing demographic landscape in Canada is placing young people in difficult economic circumstances – before they have even entered the labor force in an adult capacity. In order to meaningfully address youth homelessness and engagement in informal work, we have to understand how youth have ‘ended up’ on the street and what informal work means to young street-involved people in Canada.

### **The informal economy and the lives of street youth in Canada**

Street youth are defined as young people (typically between 16-25 years of age) who do not have a permanent place to call home, and who instead spend a significant amount of time/energy on the street (such as in alleyways, parks, storefronts, and dumpsters), in squats (usually located in abandoned buildings), at youth shelters and centers; and/or with friends (typically referred to as “couch surfers”) (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002; Karabanow, 2004a; Halifax

Regional Municipality, 2005). Homeless youth across Canada often report experiences of family violence, poverty, instability and trauma during childhood and adolescence (Coates, 2000; Karabanow, 2004b; Novac et al., 2002; Toronto Mayor's Homeless Action Task Force, 1990). There are widespread and numerous stories of problematic and dehumanizing experiences within the group home and foster care system, and a large majority of youth arrive on the street out of desperation or with the sense that life on the street is safer or more acceptable than the life that they are fleeing (Alleva, 1988; Auerswald & Eyre, 2002; Hughes et al., [in preparation]; Karabanow, 2004b; 2008).

As explained in numerous research reports, once on the street, many youth resort to risky and often illegal activities for making money, finding shelter and food, and defending themselves against threats of violence and further alienation (Auerswald & Eyre, 2002; Karabanow, 2004a; McCarthy & Nelson, 1991). This causes further marginalization for these youth, creating additional barriers to "success," including addictions, physical and mental illness, and criminal justice involvement (Karabanow et al., 2007; Karabanow et al., 2005; Novac et al., 2002). For the most part, the literature has concentrated on the illegal work activities of homeless youth. There is limited research that discusses informal economies and their role in street youth employment in Canada and little is known about the experiences of homeless youth with various types of legal forms of work-related activities.

Street youth engagement with informal economies is often only discussed in relation to economies of criminal activities (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Baron, 2004). This is misleading. Although, street-involved young people are noted to be more likely engaged in illegal work, less is known about the choice of work – legal or illegal – available to them (Hagan & McCarthy; Karabanow, 2004a; 2006). While some of these youth depend on social assistance and support from family/friends for food, shelter and money – finding the means/money to meet their basic necessities of survival is an everyday struggle for a large number of them (Karabanow, 2008).

Informal economies play a very important role in their everyday survival strategies on the streets from earning money to acquiring other necessities like food, clothing and shelter.

Informal economies, whether legal or illegal, provide work for street youth (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002). The types of jobs these youth engage in vary from short term, part time, informal employment to unlawful and/or illegal activities. Being excluded from the formal economy, street youth rely on flexible money making strategies for their survival, including odd jobs, panhandling, sex trade, squeegee cleaning, drug dealing, theft, among many other activities (Gaetz & O'Grady; Karabanow, 2004a; 2006). Their engagement in informal economies and the process of finding and engaging in different types of work is interconnected and contingent upon two major factors: their circumstances on the streets and what they need to survive. Often street youth 'criminal activities' start with shoplifting food from super markets, convenience stores and engaging in other survival strategies like stealing goods and selling them for money as a means of generating an income (Baron, 2001; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). In some cases, youth who are panhandling, squeegeeing, or busking, for example, might be using these activities as a way to generate income, but have also created a money-making enterprise that allows them to stay away from more criminal money-making pursuits.

Throughout their street existence, young people are socialized by others to the various means of survival (Karabanow, 2006). Street culture, networks and their circle of friends play a very important role in learning money-making strategies (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Karabanow). Street youth apply for legal formal employment through the usual means such as dropping applications to employers or using informal networks (friends/family) to find opportunities (Baron, 2001). Other ways to formal employment were through employment counselors or workers at youth drop-in or youth-support resources. An important factor, however, leading them to engage in informal economies, specifically illegal work, are negative

formal work experiences and feelings of exclusion from society (Baron, 2001; Baron & Hartnagel, 2002; Karabanow, 2006).

It was noted that street youth who have negative perception of the fairness of the labor market were at a higher risk of committing crimes as a means of earning an income (Baron, 2001). This is one strategy street youth use to ease the financial strain caused by real or perceived unfair treatment in the labor market (Baron & Hartnagel, 2002). However, it is important to note that most North American criminology research on street youths' informal money-making are almost always situated in the context of crime instead of work (a way to earn money), whereas earning a living in the formal sector – where income is reported and tax paid – is considered as work or employment (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002). This means that most of the research is focused on understanding how street youth become 'criminally involved' rather than understanding what street-involved young people need to become self-sufficient *without* becoming criminally involved. Further, the contextualization of street activities (e.g. squeegeeing cars, panhandling) as 'crimes' does nothing to address the motivation (i.e., survival) driving the pursuit of these entrepreneurial activities.

While some street youth may not engage in criminal activities like drug dealing and prostitution, the majority are in no position to make a choice between types of work due to lack of alternatives (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Generally, differences in work patterns between males and females included a higher number of women working in the sex trade than men, while jobs which had more public exposure such as drug dealing and squeegeeing were performed by males (Hagan & McCarthy; Gaetz, 2004; Carter, Friesen, Polevychok, & Osborne, 2007). Hagan and McCarthy suggest that a majority of street youth do *not* prefer to engage in certain (illegal) money-making strategies like prostitution, among others. Indeed, in cases where street youth *can* choose their work, it has been noted that the work chosen does not only signify a way they choose to earn money, but it is also a reflection of the contexts of where they are (such as

background factors and social networks) and represents their perspective towards society in general, which demonstrates that these so-called “deviant” and “delinquent” young people are actually reflective and rational human beings who *desire* meaningful work – contrary to much public discourse (Baron, 2001; Gaetz & O’Grady; Hagan & McCarthy; Karabanow, 2006; 2008).

### **Benefits, risks and challenges are involved**

Street youth living on the streets, are vulnerable to a variety of risks and danger. Apart from being harassed by the police and mistreated by the general public, these youth are at a greater risk of experiencing physical violence while earning money (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; Karabanow, 2004). Street youth are victims of all kinds of violence. Those involved in more criminal activities (e.g., drug trade, theft for cash, sex work, etc.) often experience more physical violence (e.g., being stabbed by people, assault, rape) than those who are involved in unlawful activities (Baron, 2001). Hagan and McCarthy (1997) suggest that street youth engaged in drug dealing experience high rates of physical violence.

Baron (2001) argues that street youth are more likely to engage in criminal activities because of the nature of the street setting; therefore, young people who spend their time in dangerous and poorly supervised locations or engaged in delinquent behaviours are situated in closer proximity to other criminal offenders, and thus, are placed at greater risk for victimization (Baron, 2001; Kennedy & Forde, 1990; Lauritsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991). Baron further argues that the whole process or reality of living on the streets and earning money positions street youth where they encounter a wide variety of people. As previously mentioned, street youth experience marginalization from the general public (as well as other street-based populations), which therefore positions street youth at high risk of being victims of violence and abuse almost everywhere. Gaetz (2004) explains:

For young people who are homeless, the implications are clear. Their very public lives are in general played out in spaces that bring them into contact with hostile strangers, potential offenders, other homeless people, and people with serious substance abuse issues or mental health problems. Their low level of guardianship (Miethe & Meier, 1994), resulting both from their weak social capital and from the fact they often frequent dangerous urban areas, limits their ability to protect themselves or to be protected, making them suitable targets (p.189-215).

Further, Baron (2001) also suggests that the same factors which increase the proximity to crime make street youth more likely to be victimized: spending time in dangerous locations, socialization with other offenders, and a lack of guardianship or supervision. However, social responses to 'delinquent behaviour' usually involve increasing law enforcement efforts as a means of curbing the circumstances which lead to both crime and victimization. Yet, research on street youth victimization suggest that police are not necessarily interested in protecting street youth as much as they are interested in 'managing' their presence – some street youth reported being picked up by the police simply for spending significant time (i.e., 'hanging out') at or in a public place (Karabanow, under review) . In this way, law enforcement can play a role in victimizing street youth and preventing them from approaching the police when they are victims of sexual, physical or emotional abuse and harassment by other members of the society (Gaetz, 2004). This circumstance often leaves street youth with no one to turn to for support; street friends become the only people they trust and admire. Yet, in these close 'street' relationships victimization through physical altercations is considered a part of the street culture and an expression of care and protection (Karabanow, 2006).

Working in the formal economy also brings many risks and challenges for youth who try to engage in formal work. Most have a very hard time finding formal employment due to lack of stable housing, which means they do not have an address nor contact number where employers

can reach them. Many youth reported not being able to find jobs because of the criminal records or often being picked up by the police (Gaetz, 2004). As reported in recent studies (Baron, 2001; Gaetz) street youth do not have the social contacts to find employment. Some youth have argued that most of the jobs they used to work in were now lost due to economic restructuring (Baron).

An important part of the challenge in finding work in the street setting is addressing the multiple layers of stigma and discrimination that come with living homeless, including emotional trauma, mental health issues, hygiene, chronic physical health issues, poverty, not having anywhere safe to store personal belongings, and so on (Baron, 2001; Gaetz, 2004; Karabanow, 2004). Layered with social rejection and political and economic exclusion, the multitude of challenges can overwhelm and potentially damage any remaining self esteem/self confidence of a young person. Further, constant rejections from employers can result in feeling “useless and unwanted” (Baron). Baron highlights some of the complexities of street youth entering into formal employment, including that some youth are forced to leave jobs due to irregular attendance, not maintaining the job standard, and for engaging in conflict with management. Others quit the jobs themselves for a variety of reasons – including leaving prior to attendance or other standards become a termination issue or because the amount of money they are earning is not improving their circumstances (Baron).

Street youth participating in informal economies (legal but unlawful work) earn much less money than those involved in criminal activities (Baron, 2001; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). In addition, it often requires more time, energy and resources (e.g., housing, documentation, etc) to find formal work, as compared to informal work. Other advantages to informal employment included independence, control of their own time, and not having a work hierarchy (Baron). In this way, informal work can be a more rational and practical endeavor than searching for formal employment. Young people can feel a strong sense of belonging living on the street that is absent from the rest of their lives; this is an often mentioned reason for why many youth do not return

home or in fact exit street life (Karabanow, 2004a; 2006; 2008). This sense of belonging on the street is a reflection of shared realities, shared contexts, shared struggles and shared marginalization. All street youth are engaged in some form of money-making activities – whether legal, unlawful, or illegal – thus, working within informal economies becomes an embedded part of everyday life on the streets. However, participating in these activities and living within street settings tends to maintain street youth in very vulnerable positions where they can become involved in and with all kinds of violence, abuse and exploitation (Baron; Gaetz, 2004; Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; Hagan & McCarthy).

All these factors, specifically social exclusion and victimization, contribute to further marginalization of street youth. Being socially excluded and being apprehended by the police can be motivators for engaging in illegal activities (Gaetz, 2004; Baron, 2001). Not being able to secure a job in the labour market, at least for those who search for formal work, creates more frustration and a rationale for choosing illegal activities over formal work (Baron). Nevertheless, engaging in illegal activities ultimately position street youth where they are further socially excluded, leading to further marginalization. Clearly, a new response to street youth and the context of their lives (i.e., street life), as well as a reframing of the legal, formal work world are necessary to influence the current response of social exclusion (or social control) generally used to manage the ‘problem’ of street youth. The trend of criminalizing some unlawful work (i.e., squeegeeing, panhandling) clearly will not address the greater social and economic disparities experienced by young homeless populations, and in fact, this approach may result in deepening the entrenchment of street-involved young people to a point where they may rely on major criminal (rather than minor unlawful) activities to meet their basic needs of survival (Karabanow, under review).

The lead investigator’s previous community-based research project was a NHI-funded study exploring street exiting strategies amongst Canadian street youth (Karabanow et al., 2005;

Karabanow, 2008). Over and over, young people in the study spoke of the significance of employment to both their economic situation and their emotional status. Further analyses are needed to uncover just how various types of legal employment, situated within formal (regulated) and informal (unregulated) realms, impacts these marginalized populations of young people. Although much research has explored street youth relations with illegal and criminal work, there has been a dearth of investigations on the relationship between informal legal and unlawful economies and young people living on the street.

Our research explores the linkage between homeless young people and their work within various economic sectors. More specifically, we were interested in building a clearer understanding about how work and labor are situated within the lives of homeless youth populations. Our research methods and approach are outlined in the following section.

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed qualitative methods informed by grounded theory to examine street youth experiences within formal and informal economies of labor. Over a seven month period (July-January 2009) in Halifax, NS, data collection and analysis were conducted in an iterative manner congruent with grounded theory processes (as described by Strauss and Corbin, 1990), and to ensure new information was forthcoming in subsequent interviews. Compilation of analysis and writing took place from February to April 2009.

Framed in the context of broader housing and health issues and social inclusion strategies relevant to young people in HRM, this research captures the ways in which marginalized street entrenched young people engage in both formal and informal economies. Specifically, this research attempts to understand how street-involved young people incorporate employment experiences within the formal and informal sectors while being poorly housed, poorly fed, poorly clothed and generally socially, politically and economically excluded from mainstream culture.

The research objectives of this project were:

- i) Explore experiences and impacts of formal/informal employment on street youth;
  - Explore the relationship between being homeless and formal/informal employment
  - Explore how this population integrates employment within their daily survival on the street
  - Experience of employment - on hopes, sense of self, sense of citizenship and inclusion, health and social needs
  - Shed light upon the wisdom and insights of service providers working with street youth
  - Develop a comprehensive literature review on youth homelessness and employment
  - Build an inventory of street youth employment-based programs and strategies across Canada.
- ii) Inform other non-profits of the relationship between youth homelessness and employment
- iii) Inform government and community stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of various strategies and models; and,
- iv) Widely advance and disseminate our findings

To accomplish this, a qualitative inquiry informed by grounded theory was used.

## **Qualitative Inquiry and Grounded Theory**

A qualitative inquiry is best suited to delve into the complexities and nuances of how young people attempt to engage in formal and informal economies within the context of being homeless. Exploring homeless and at risk young people's perceptions and experiences of work in this way provided a rare opportunity to learn about these adolescents, their strengths and struggles, and their interactions with various services and organizations, broadly situated. In addition, this approach provided a detailed understanding of the intricacies of homeless youth strengths and struggles in terms of social and economic inclusion as they attempt to work and remain economically viable.

This study is informed by grounded theory which is best suited to examine naturally occurring behaviour during social interactions to illuminate shared meaning held by participants. Grounded theory is conducted in an iterative manner, allowing for data collection and analysis to occur in successive waves until no new information is forthcoming (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory analysis involves the process of identifying common and dissimilar themes while building conceptual narratives from the data through open, axial and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin). This process facilitates the fracturing of the data into conceptually-specific themes and categories; rebuilding the data in new ways by linking primary categories and auxiliary themes into a path analysis; and, constructing a theoretical narrative shaped by data integration and category construction (Strauss and Corbin). Using grounded theory to guide the process, the research design is community-based and naturalistic, using semi-structured interviews with both street youth and service providers working with street youth.

## **Research Design: Community-based approach**

This project was developed and implemented in collaboration with ARK Outreach (ARK) in Halifax, NS. The research issue reflects a need identified by ARK; the organization

collaborated on how best to explore the issues, and participated in proposal development. The community was involved from the outset of the project, and Dorothy Patterson, ARK Executive Director, is a co-investigator on the research team. In this capacity, Dorothy guided the research process and community involvement, negotiating any difficulties encountered along the way (e.g., during recruitment), and contextualized the data during research team discussions.

Dorothy's front-line experiences and her relationships with the young people who access ARK made this project possible. The community/research partnership is the cornerstone of this project and was integral to the community buy-in, in particular for the youth participants. To further ensure our project was grounded in community and the lived experiences of young people, three youth who frequent ARK were invited to be involved in the project as an advisory committee.

### **Youth Advisory Committee**

The project engaged a group of street youth to act as an advisory committee to inform aspects of the research process (supporting the analysis of data, write up of findings, and presentations of our work). The Youth Advisory (YA) met with the research coordinator several times per month and the youth were compensated for their time with an honorarium. The YA mentored the research coordinator in street youth culture, jargon, and context; the research coordinator mentored the YA in research process and execution – reflecting the 'mutual learning' of community-based research.

The research coordinator worked with the YA to develop their understandings of their role in the project, explore how research 'works', and what expectations they could have at the end of the project. Part of their role included recruitment activities, such as speaking to other street youth about the project, the 'agenda' or intentions of the research team, and how they understood the research would be used in its final form. This resulted in more participation, as

having young people – from the community – representing the project instantly enhanced the ‘street cred [credibility]’ of the research.

Also, the YA enhanced the analysis of the data and helped shape the research team’s understanding of which messages were most important to highlight from the perspectives of the youth. The YA attended a full team meeting for analysis discussions; they participated and contributed their understandings while considering and reflecting on the research team’s thoughts and commentaries. In this way, the analysis and findings presented here represent the shared collaborative effort and understandings of ARK, the research team, and the YA.

### **Ethical Approval**

The research methodology and ethics protocol was vetted through Dalhousie University Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board; the project was approved in May 2008. All youth and service providers participating in this study were provided with informed consent (Appendix B and Appendix C, respectively) before participating in interviews. Informed consent included allowing time for asking questions about the project, clarifying what the research was about, and explaining how data would be collected (i.e., audio-recorded, with their permission), handled (i.e., transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist), cleaned (i.e., by the research coordinator; audio-tapes destroyed after interviews ‘cleaned’), and stored (i.e., locked in a filing cabinet in the office of the research coordinator at Dalhousie University).

The analysis procedure was also explained during informed consent to clarify who would be reviewing full transcripts (i.e., only members of the research team) and how long the data would be kept (i.e., five years as per Dalhousie University policies). Youth were told how demographic data would be used in a general way to illustrate the diversity of the sample, but would not be presented in a manner that would identify any one participant. Finally, at the end of the interview, participants (both youth and service providers) were given an opportunity to

reflect on their interview responses and decide if they were comfortable having direct quotes used from their transcripts. Any issues or concerns about data were noted on the consent form and followed during the ‘cleaning’ of transcripts – that is, any piece of the interview data that participants were uncomfortable with having directly quoted were removed and not included as data. The analysis presented here aggregates the data and findings in an effort to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. In our presentation of the findings, no names or identifying markers are mentioned.

## **Recruitment**

Purposive sampling was employed for both youth and service providers. Using community networks and the relationships of our community partner to the young people they serve, youth were recruited relatively easily. The youth trust ARK, and so they trusted that this project was something they could support.

Youth were invited to participate in the study through various recruitment strategies enacted by ARK and the network of the YA. Posters (Appendix D) were presented as a potential recruitment tool in the original project proposal and the ethics protocol; however, ARK enacted a more active recruitment strategy (i.e., networking, word-of-mouth, referrals from research team members), which they advised would be more effective and efficient, and so did not require posters to encourage participation. While poster content was prepared, it was not used.

Youth were invited to participate based on the study criteria: young people 16 to 24 years of age (most common age range when considering youth on the street) who identified as homeless or street youth. During the summer months (July/August) youth who were ‘traveling’<sup>3</sup> or moving around were recruited for the first round of data collection; and in the fall, youth who

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Travelers’ are a sub-population of street youth normally characterized by their movement around the country – not staying more than a few months (at the most) in any one city. ‘Traveling’ is a summer activity for most. ARK thought it was important that the study capture the experiences of this population.

were more ‘settled’, and likely pursuing or engaged in formal work, were recruited and interviewed. This strategy was suggested by ARK as a way of diversifying our sample.

To complement the voices of street youth, service providers were recruited from across Canada through professional networks (of the research team) and according to a list (kept by the Research Coordinator) of organizations youth participants mentioned in their interviews as being particularly helpful. Organizations were invited to participate via email communication; a letter of invitation (Appendix E), interview guide (Appendix F), and a brief outline of the intention of the research were circulated for consideration. Service providers were invited to respond if they were interested in receiving more information or scheduling an interview time. The research team invited key service providers from across the Canada to share their observations, opinions, and ideas about supporting homeless youth in exploring work and employment options, and to share practitioner wisdom and insight into the relationship between homeless youth and formal and informal work.

## **Data Collection**

One-on-one interviews were used to collect in-depth stories from youth 16-24 years who identified as street or homeless youth, and to elicit understanding of the issues from service providers. Interview guides (Appendix F and Appendix G) were drafted by the research team to shape the narratives collected around key aspects of employment and labor – including daily routine, preferences, school and mentors, benefits and challenges, and ‘dream jobs’.

### Youth Interviews

ARK and the Youth Advisory recruited participants. One-on-one interviews were conducted at ARK or a local coffee shop – the location was determined by the youth to be interviewed. Most interviews lasted 45 - 60 minutes. Youth participants were compensated \$15 for their time. The youth semi-structure interview guide (Appendix G) began with questions

related to formal work experience and then moved into experiences with informal work. This approach was used to encourage youth to describe their experiences in a way that reflected how they might view formal and informal work differently. Interview questions focused on experiences with formal and informal work, daily routine, being housed/homeless, education experiences, and so on. In addition, a short demographic survey tool (Appendix H) was completed with youth participants to gather information specific to the particular group of youth that participated in this study.

Nuanced adjustments were made to the interview guide during the course of the study to accommodate interview ‘flow’, emerging themes, and arising issues. Over time, and as our qualitative method requires, the youth interview guide was revised and enhanced to capture new concepts as themes began to emerge from the data. The youth interview guide was revised three times to reflect our growing and evolving understanding of the issues, complexities, and the interrelatedness of concepts.

The second round of youth interviews (i.e., the ‘fall’ data collection round) elicited very little new information, despite expectations that youth settling in the Halifax community for the winter months would have different stories of labor and employment. After extensive discussion, the research team decided to work with the data available and stop the youth data collection portion of the study at 34 interviews, declaring theoretical saturation – the point at which no new information is revealed – was achieved. A total of 34 interviews and demographic surveys were conducted with youth; however, one interview audio tape failed and the interview did not record. This interview was excluded from interview data analysis, resulting in a total of 33 qualitative interviews analyzed.

#### Service Provider Interviews

More than 20 organizations were invited to participate in the study; however, a total of seven service providers were interviewed, representing the major cities of St. John’s, Montreal,

Hamilton, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Calgary. Recruiting services providers proved somewhat difficult in this study – many agencies stating that they were understaffed and overworked to engage in any research area. In this light, it is quite telling how overwhelmed front line service providers are in the current Canadian political economy. While significant players in the lives of street youth populations, these non-government agencies tend to now be the *only* players supporting homeless youth, and as such, feel consistently overwhelmed. We were not surprised that so many organizations simply could not find the time to speak to us!

Service provider interviews lasted about 45-60 minutes and inquired about organizational programming related to employment, how youth talk about their experiences with both formal and informal work, and ultimately, invited service providers to share their visions of best practice approaches if financial, human and physical resources were not at issue.

Seven service provider interviews were conducted December 2008 – February 2009, and a semi-structured interview guide directed interviews with service providers (Appendix F). Participating service providers offered great insights about the complexities of providing front-line service to street youth.

## **Data Analysis**

In-depth interviews were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This approach is best suited to examine naturally occurring behaviour during social interactions to illuminate shared meaning held by participants. Grounded theory is conducted in an iterative manner, allowing for data collection and analysis to occur in successive waves until no new information is forthcoming. Analysis involved the research team reading and rereading interview transcripts and locating common and dissimilar themes to build conceptual narratives from the data through open, axial and selective coding structures (Strauss and Corbin).

Coding structures were developed through research team discussions (i.e., research investigators, research assistant, YA, and research coordinator). Further, the research coordinator facilitated coding and analysis meetings with the research team to explore the direction of the interviews, emerging themes, and potential options for further investigation. These discussions enhanced the connection of the research team to the data as they provided a forum for deliberating potential meanings of interview data and an opportunity to build consensus around what we are learning and wanting to explore more in-depth in subsequent interviews. The research team is well versed in this style of analysis.

A face-to-face full team (research team and YA) meeting was held in early January to review the data and begin preliminary discussions. Prior to this meeting, the research coordinator met with the YA every few weeks to discuss and analyze the data related to street culture. The YA read through the quotations linked with this code to provide an interpretation of the culture as a whole. They were thoughtful and critical in their analysis, and demonstrated that even those with limited research experience can meaningfully contribute to data analysis. The research team's understanding of the data was enhanced by the perspectives offered by the YA.

Data from the short demographic survey (Appendix H) was entered into a statistical software package and analyzed for broad trends to demonstrate the diversity of experiences as well as the similarities. The purpose of collecting this demographic data was to describe the participants of this study and to reflect the sample we recruited. The analysis is presented in the next section of this report.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were reviewed ('cleaned') for any errors or omissions, and any inaccuracies were corrected. When the transcripts were reviewed, any identifying information was removed, like names of cities, friends, programs, illnesses or other potentially identifying characteristics to assist in maintaining anonymity. Transcripts were uploaded to Atlas.ti, a qualitative data management software tool.

After a preliminary review of transcripts, the research team agreed on an initial coding structure to apply to the transcripts. These codes were used to structure and group the data. The research team read and reread transcripts to identify common themes and sub-themes, which were then compared, discussed, argued, and reshaped as necessary as Strauss and Corbin (1990) outline in their analysis process. This process continued until the main themes and concepts were captured within one grand narrative (major story-line). In particular, the YA's analysis of the code 'culture' ensured the research team understood their youth culture, as the project and knowledge arising from it are all very much embedded within this cultural reality.

Service provider transcripts were not entered into Atlas.ti as there were fewer transcripts and a less in-depth analysis was required as service providers were speaking to more specific aspects of their work. However, the analysis process was similar to that of the youth interviews. Research team members read and re-read transcripts, proposed codes for grouping data, and determined a shared story emerging from the data.

The data analysis presents the voices of street youth as they share their experiences and reflections with respect to their formal and informal work, how they understand the dynamics between the two and make sense of this aspect of their lives. To add further context to the youth participants' voices, service provider commentaries and reflections are integrated and interwoven among the voices of youth.

## **Dissemination**

The findings arising from this study will be shared and disseminated through various strategies. To date, preliminary findings have been presented at two major homelessness conferences<sup>4</sup>, and one student conference<sup>5</sup>. Further, information resulting from this research was

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<sup>4</sup> Partners Solving Youth Homelessness, Toronto, November 2008 & Growing Home: National Housing Conference, Calgary, February 2009.

presented in community materials published and distributed by Community Action on Homelessness<sup>6</sup>. As well, this research will be available in various forms through internet portals such as [streetconnect.org](http://streetconnect.org) and [homelesshub.ca](http://homelesshub.ca) where it is accessible to a broad international (web-based) audience. In addition to this final report, scholarly articles are in preparation for submission to academic journals in the near future. Finally, a research symposium, planned in partnership with the community (that is, the project provides in-kind financial support in exchange for information and guidance on how best to return the findings to the community) will be held in the very near future to profile findings from this study within the context of other local homelessness and housing research and issues.

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<sup>5</sup> Crossroads: Student Research in Health, Halifax, April 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Community Action on Homelessness. (2009). *Halifax Report Card on Homelessness*. Halifax NS: CAH.

## STREET YOUTH AND WORK

Street youth and their labor exist within a globalized reality; street youth are a marginalized population for whom participating in informal work is a response to local and globalized trends. In this context, informal work provides a means of survival when poor and socially excluded. There are many stereotypes and derogatory ways of talking about street-level informal work ‘activities;’ very rarely are they considered work. However, for street youth, informal work represents expressions of creativity, resilience and entrepreneurship that accommodate the realities of being homeless and/or traveling<sup>7</sup>.

Street youth work – everyday in most cases – often doing the least desirable work available, with no job security, and at the mercy of public opinion and scrutiny. Illusions of panhandling and squeegeeing, among the other menial tasks street-involved youth perform to survive, are often considered deviant or criminal. These assertions do not acknowledge the physical and social conditions these young people endure in an effort to sustain their survival each day. Yet, through these activities, young people can support themselves and maintain arms-length involvement in mainstream culture. Nevertheless, the ongoing encroachment into public space (e.g., public parks) and the criminalization of many youth ‘enterprises’ (such as squeegeeing) through municipal bylaw legislations demonstrates the public discomfort with public displays of poverty.

In previous work, Karabanow (2008) outlined the lack of academic research focusing on street youth career patterns, recognizing that most literature concerning street youth focus upon how young people end up on the street and the cultures they experience as a result. This provides little guidance for how youth disengage from street culture and reinvent their identities. This

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<sup>7</sup> Some youth participants identified as ‘travelers’. As a sub-population, ‘travelers’ tend to be youth who do not ‘settle’ in one place, rather they move around the country (and continent). Being on the move is part of their lifestyle; however, many do not start out as travelers, but adopt this identity as it fits with their identity and provides a context for understanding their way of life. They are not interested in settling in one spot – therefore, formal work is not really congruent with their goals.

presentation of how and what work street youth incorporate into their lives while living homeless highlights the day-to-day reality of work and homelessness, illustrates how both formal and informal work is integrated into the experiences of homelessness, and demonstrates street youth's ideas and dreams for a sustainable, stable future. Interwoven with the commentaries of youth are the voices of service providers, whose critical reflection often echoed the voices of the young people we spoke to and added further context to the story of street youth and work.

### **Participant Demographics**

Table 1 below presents a demographic 'snapshot' of youth participants. Specifically, Table 1 outlines youth participants' age, gender, orientation, whether they are from Nova Scotia or not, their housing status, and primary source of income. As indicated in Table 1, the average age of youth participants was about 21 years of age, and 32% of participants were young women; 68% were young men.

Sixteen percent of youth participants identified sexual orientations other than heterosexual. Some literature argues that many homeless youth are escaping homophobic and oppressive home lives – openly identifying as gay, queer, or bisexual can be very difficult for young people who have families or living arrangements that do not support, or may even be hostile or abusive toward, non-heterosexual expressions of sexuality (Karabanow, 2004). This partly accounts for the over-representation of sexual minority youth in homeless populations (Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002).

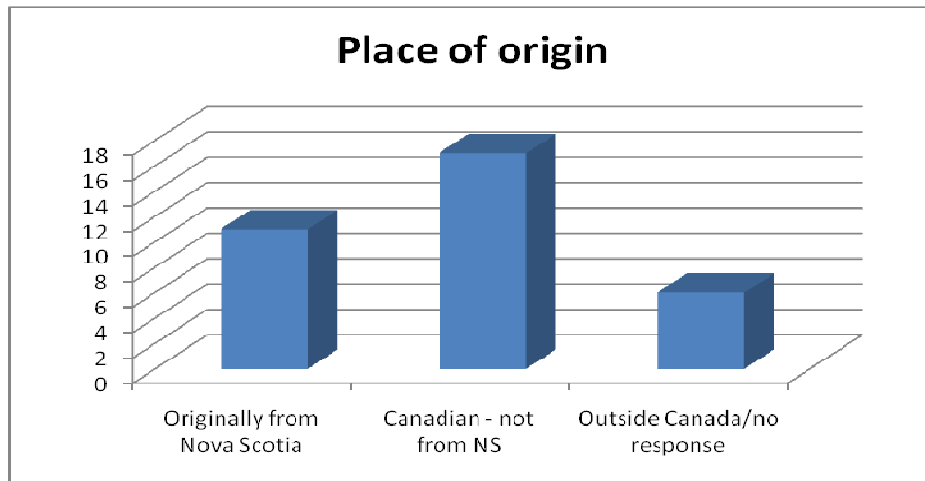
Caucasian was the primary ethnicity reported. Some youth identified as Aboriginal (e.g., First Nation, Métis, Inuit, or 'mixed') and a few noting ethnicity other than Aboriginal or Caucasian or a combination of more than one heritage – these are presented together as 'other' to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Twenty-four percent of the participants did not identify an ethnicity.

**Table 1: Youth Participant Demographic Breakdown**

<b>Age</b>			
	Range:	17-24	
	Mean	21.2	
	Median	22	
	No response	n=3	
<b>Gender</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
	Female	11	32
	Male	23	68
<b>Sexual orientation</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
	Bisexual	4	12
	Gay	1	3
	Queer	1	3
	Straight	28	82
<b>Ethnicity</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
	No response	8	24
	Other	5	15
	Aboriginal, Metis or First Nations	6	18
	Caucasian	15	44
<b>Place of origin</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
	Originally from Nova Scotia:	11	32
	Canadian - not from NS	17	50
	Outside Canada/no response	6	18
<b>Current living arrangement</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
	Has own place	3	9
	Has a place with roommates	4	12
	Squat/sleeping rough	16	47
	Shelter	2	6
	Stays with friends/couch surfing	4	12
	Rooming house	1	3
	No response/mixed/unclear	4	12
<b>Sources of income (includes multiple responses)</b>		<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
	Disability	3	9
	Social assistance	3	9
	Formal employment	1	3
	Busking	8	24
	Squeegeeing	17	50
	Panhandling/sign-flying	17	50
	Hustling	2	6
	Binning	1	3
	Other informal/bit work	3	9
	Student loan	1	3
	Savings	1	3
	No income	2	6

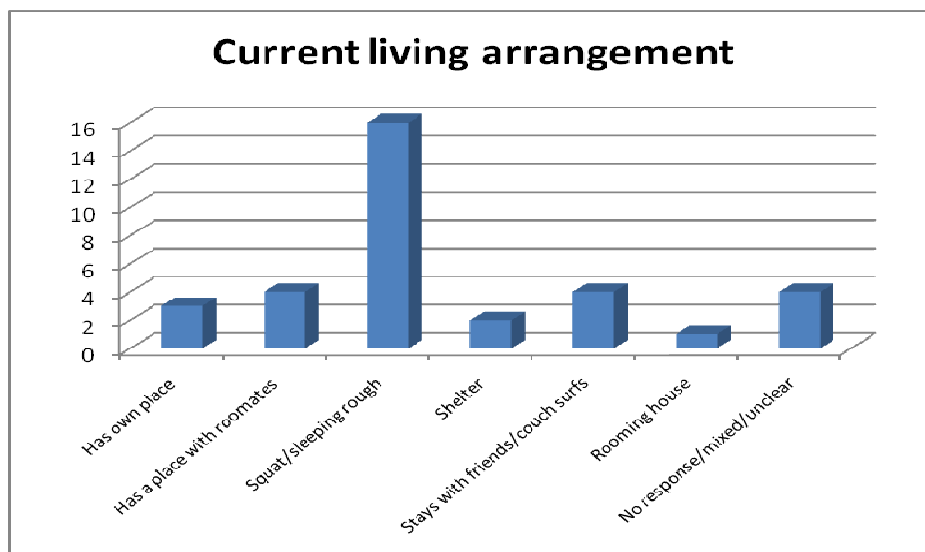
As illustrated below in Table 1 and presented in a separate graph in Figure 1, most of the youth participants (82%) were from Canada, with 32% identifying Nova Scotia as their home province.

**Figure 1: Place of origin**



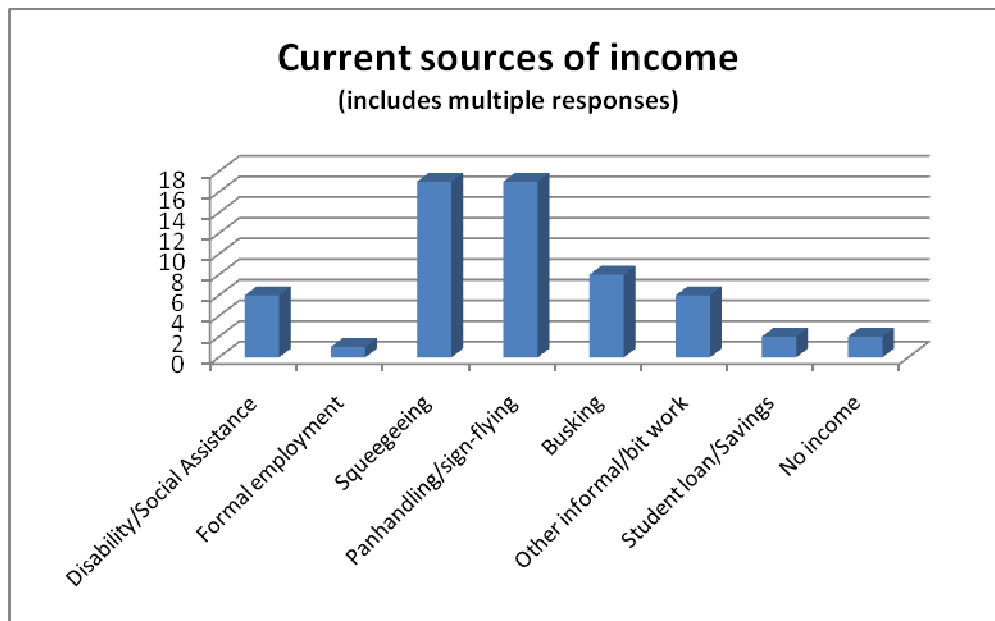
Youth participants reported a variety of current living arrangements, as listed in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 2. Only 21% of the youth reported living on their own or with roommates in steady accommodation. Most of the participants relied on alternative accommodations or were sleeping outside or were moving between options on a daily or weekly basis, which demonstrates the precariousness of the shelter available to the youth participants.

**Figure 2: Current living arrangement**



When asked about their current source of income, most participants listed multiple ways they acquired money, as listed in Table 1. As Figure 3 highlights, the youth primarily relied on informal work, such as squeegeeing, panhandling, and median sign-flying as well as busking and ‘bit work’ (day or very short-term jobs) to make money. Only one participant was formally employed at the time of data collection.

**Figure 3: Current sources of income**



### Defining Formal and Informal Work

The language of formal and informal labor is drawn largely from economics literature, as outlined in the literature review, and our definitions reflect this economics perspective. Formal work is generally described as work that is documented, where earnings are taxed, may provide some employee protections (e.g., EI benefits, workers compensation, CPP, etc.), and is considered *legal* work. For the young people interviewed for this project, the formal sector included unskilled, labor, short-term, and temporary work experiences – in particular, most jobs available to young people seem to be either in the service sector (e.g., restaurants, call centers,

fast food, cleaning/janitorial, child care, and so on) or the labor sector (e.g., construction, roofing, bricklaying, yard work, snow removal/landscaping):

*I was a dishwasher, cleaner, waitress, and then I worked some construction.*

*Warehouse work at a department store and just general labor.*

*I basically worked at kitchens and I started off as a dishwasher and then worked up to cook.*

Conversely, informal work refers to short-term or ad hoc work where earnings may not be reported or taxed (e.g., paid ‘under the table’), availability of work is precarious (i.e., no stability, benefits, or protections); and includes illegal and *unlawful* work. Unlawful work can include anything from casual babysitting and lawn mowing to the drug trade and organized crime – the ‘unlawfulness’ is that often income from this work is not reported and, therefore, taxes are not paid.

The youth participating in this study spoke of many different kinds of informal work from babysitting and doing yard work, to making and selling jewelry and artwork, to flying signs and joke telling, to panhandling and squeegeeing. Street youth are creative and resourceful in their informal work:

*Squeegee, panhandle, um, I've dumpster dived some, like if it looked really nice....Um, a lot of females that I have travelled with use to make, like, have necklaces and stuff like that. We'd sell jewelry while panhandling usually. I'm not musically talented so I don't play any instruments.*

To clarify, there is illegal and unlawful informal work; this project focused on specific informal, illegal work - that is squeegeeing and median panhandling - and unlawful work; however, *criminal* activities, such as drug dealing, sex work, theft, and other illegal/unlawful means of street-based moneymaking were not explored in this study. While there much evidence

and literature<sup>8</sup> to suggest that homeless youth do engage in criminal activities, this project was more interested in examining informal work that exists on the margins of criminality yet is situated outside of the formal sector.

Generally, life on the street is difficult at best, and presents numerous (and layered) challenges to finding meaningful work. The youth participants in this study highlighted many of these tensions, including constantly being ‘moved’ by police or park patrols, not having the ‘right to sleep’ in public spaces when living outside, experiencing disconnect between service provider hours and work hours, and the complexity of trying to ‘carry your life’ on your back, get and hold a job, and negotiate life on the street. There is a routine to ‘street life’, but it is a routine largely influenced by the individual, the circumstances they find themselves in, and what they need to do to sustain their survival.

### **Daily Routine of Work and Street Life**

To develop an understanding of how homeless youth experience work and homelessness, it is necessary to consider the context in which ‘work’ happens. In this study, interview questions explored how youth organized their day-to-day existence, including when and how they wake-up, what their ‘routine’ was, how they incorporate work into their day, and what they did ‘after work’. While there were some individual differences, a collective experience emerged from the data. As one youth explains in the following quote, there is independent choosing and strategizing around the day-to-day planning, but often money – determining whether they need it or not and how much – is the largest influence in determining how street youth spend their day and adapt their routine:

*I wake up...I generally pack up my stuff and go grab a fruit or a bagel with cream cheese and coffee or juice, depending on how I feel. Sit down, have my little breakfast and then go outside and have my*

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<sup>8</sup> Baron, S. (2003). Self-control, social consequences, and criminal behavior: street youth and the general theory of crime, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 40(4). p. 403-425.

*coffee...and then I just, I walk around for a bit, especially if I'm in a new town. I like to explore a bit and just get to know where I am and then, yeah, I try and find drop-ins where everybody else hangs out.*

*It pretty much depends like, if it's a week day and a drop in is open, you know, I get up, maybe like if I get up early enough, like 7:30, 8:00, I'll go like to somewhere where I can sit for a little while. Like make my breakfast or my coffee and then come to the drop in. It's easier to work once you get something in you, like food or whatever. It's harder to like do anything if you've got like no water or no food or like nothing like that. It's a lot harder to like get going when you're on empty. So it's usually like, well on the weekend it's harder because there's no like, there's no drop in or no food or anything. So weekends are a lot harder.*

*A typical day is wake up, make sure everybody's, you know, make sure the dogs have water. Um, if anybody, usually somebody has some canned food or stuff, we'll sit around and have some breakfast first and kind of get ourselves in the, you know in a good mood to get ready to go and make a day's living. And some people go busk and either, you know everybody goes and usually does their own thing and then we'll all meet up again when everybody's done and hang out for the night.*

Homeless youth spend a large portion of their day finding ways to make money and meeting their basic needs for food, shelter, and companionship. When asked about their 'routine', it was not uncommon for participants to argue that there is 'no routine' on the street as they tend to (and can) do what they want when they want. Perhaps this is a testament to their resilience and adaptability to the circumstances of their lives – they approach the dynamics of living homeless with expectations of change and, at times, chaos. However, after the first 15-20 youth interviews it became clear that a routine exists within the seemingly chaotic reality of street life:

*I just get woken by the sun or some cop kicking me in the head...or some (park or municipal) worker... 'oh you have to move.' But yeah, usually like, just wake-up, let the dog run around (do its business), and then give her water and her food. And usually like, I don't know, walk around. Like if there's not a drop-in I'll usually try to keep a bit of change on me, and if there's a drop-in, eat food, drink coffee, and then like,*

*here, like everyone goes to one corner.... It's like if you don't feel like (working), then you go sit down and you have no money. That's how it works, you know. (laughter)...Like people don't have to, but if they don't, they don't have any money.*

*Depending on what you have to do, but when you're living on the street, you really don't have a time, so it's kind of when the cops wake you up, that's your personal alarm clock. But if not, sleep in if you want, right. Because it's your choice if you, if you desperately need to make money, you're going to wake yourself up. You're going to get going.*

Money is central in planning or scheduling a 'day'. If there are extra saved funds or one is not expecting to need much, participants said they may 'take the day off':

*If I'm lazy, I'll just make (enough money for) food and smokes and just read. Or I just won't do anything. If I still have money in my pocket I'll just be like, 'I'm having a lazy day. I'm not squeegeeing nothing. I'm sitting my ass down and enjoying my day.'*

*If I make enough bank, I'll just save some and then I don't have to pan for a few days.*

These young people appear not to be very interested in making large amounts of money through informal work – they tend to make approximately \$20-40 per work stretch (3-5 hours) – rather they only work to make 'their goal,' an amount reflecting how much money they expect to need for the day and depending on what they want to do (e.g., travel, go to a show, buy some food, etc.). As such, much of their informal work is intentional and purposeful:

*I have a goal in my head of what I'm trying to make, you know. Whether it be for a drink, whether it be for a meal, whether it be for you know, a ticket out of town, something like that.*

If money is in short supply or there are goals to be achieved (that require money) like saving for rent, caring for animals, or to ensure wellbeing and survival (i.e., food, clothes,

shelter, gear), youth develop a routine that revolves around what work they can do to ‘make their goal’:

*Um, I just put it in like my backpack, the bottom of my backpack and saved for three or four days because uh, my shoes got eaten by a dog. So I was walking around with my toes out of my shoes for three days and I was just, I'd had enough. I couldn't look at myself anymore. I was just like, okay, I have to do is this, to pay for boots.*

The daily routine of homelessness and informal work is not significantly different than the routine required to maintain formal work – there is still a routine. The difference in routine is who is in control of setting such a structure. Informal work scheduling tends to be determined primarily by the individual versus in formal work it is determined by the employer. For the youth we spoke to, this was a significant difference between working informally and formally. For them, one of the benefits or attractions of being able to work informally is not having anyone supervising, setting hours, telling them what time they start, when to take a break, and when work is done for the day. In contrast to formal work, the ‘informal work day’ is determined by the individual – they decide what work they are going to do, when they are going to do it, where they will work, and for how long, which is much more compatible with street life and, as the narratives suggest, is one way youth conceptualize ‘freedom’:

*Freedom. Freedom. Straight up. It's like, I can go where I want, when I want, how I want. If I want to pick up and leave tomorrow, I could. Throw everything I own into a backpack and away I go. Just plain and simple, freedom.*

*When I think about getting a job now, I think about I as like giving up most of my freedom and like, you know, because yeah, it sounds shitty to say but when you get a job, you do. Like you have someone telling you what to do and everything is different than when you are just like living, making money for yourself and living how you want to.*

The youth clearly indicated that they valued the freedom that informal work can provide. However, working informally is precarious and requires adaptability as the effectiveness of informal work relies on a number of factors. There are many decisions to make and factors to consider before choosing a particular informal work activity:

*Um, depending on you know, where I'm at and what's the best, easiest way to make money, go try and make money.*

*You know, it seems like some places, like every city's got the way to make money, you know, and you meet the other kids in town and they kind of fill you in, like okay, you know, or you find out for yourself. You know you try flying a sign and it sucks; you try busking and it sucks; then you try squeegeeing – oh it works here. Okay cool. And then the next town it's something different. It changes.*

*I guess it depends on how you feel or like, if you want to go fly a sign or you want to mix it up a little bit or like, every time is different, you know. Sometimes panhandling is a little bit more easy; sometimes squeegeeing is; sometimes flying a sign is; sometimes it's a good spot; sometimes it's a bad spot.*

*Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad, it all depends man. It's a gamble pretty much every day. You wake up in the morning and it's like playing the slots man.*

As these quotations illustrate, the economics of homelessness are in constant flux and largely determined by external forces.

### **Economics of Homelessness**

Most of the youth participants in this research were embedded in informal work. Yet, very early on in the interviewing, it became clear that the young people we were speaking to were also engaged with formal work on various levels – looking for a job, leaving a job, having a job to go back to, or were indeed working in the formal sector. In some cases, youth held trades

certificates or has previous training and thus eligible for more gainful employment, however, in most cases, youth were working in unskilled labor or service industry jobs. Their engagement with formal work – even if they were not employed at the time of the study – demonstrates that these youth were not necessarily disinterested in having work:

*(Having a job) it made me feel more productive, like I was doing something with my time, you know, and I liked my job.*

*I like just knowing a trade, like being good at it and uh, feeling like I actually did something instead of just like nothing.*

*That's kind of, I guess, how I started working, like having a drive to work (a job) because I was kind of doing something good and then it evolved into (other work).*

The participants often related having a formal job to feeling better about themselves and the money they earned when it came from an 'honest day's toil'. However, they do face numerous obstacles to getting a job. Young marginalized people face a variety of challenges in securing gainful employment – getting and keeping formal jobs can be difficult enough for people who have some stability and a network to support them. Young homeless people are often trying to get a job while balancing the realities of being homeless:

*Like it's hard you know, and people are like, 'go get a job' and you're like, 'well, I can't because I have no housing. If I have no housing, then I can't get a job because you need a fixed address, you need a fixed number, you know, there's like so many things that like interfere with that.*

The youth in this study rationalized their informal work in light of their circumstances. They acknowledge that informal work is often the only work that is available to them in their situations, and in many cases, participants did not feel like they needed to justify what they were

doing – their work is a reflection of the economics of homelessness. From their perspectives, informal work was less a choice than a necessity for survival when formal work was simply unattainable. Their motivations for working informally are the same as why they work formally – to make money to survive even if they consider work like panhandling as ‘demeaning’ and ‘having no dignity’:

*It's demeaning, you know and people do it and people are probably fine with doing it for the rest of their life....That's not for me though....I want to live a normal life.*

*Well, see, panhandling's not for everybody. It's not a job that's for everybody. You have to, um, you have to not have dignity. You've got to just be like, like you know, like 'I'm begging for change and it's like, whatever, it doesn't fucking matter.'*

The vast majority of participants acknowledge that informal work is often unpleasant, but at the same time the youth we spoke to argue that informal work *is* still work, and that for some of them, depending on their age, where they are from, how they are involved with the justice system, and whether they have identification and other necessary papers to be eligible for formal employment, informal work becomes *the only* work available to them. Further, despite the potential loss of dignity, working informally can facilitate their independence and foster self-esteem:

*It's necessity. It's just like, uh, when I was working formally I needed to go to work to make money. Well now I still need to go to work to make money, I still think about it as work. I've had people come up to me and tell me to get a job and I'm like 'I have a job. You're looking at it, like this is how I make money'.*

*It gets tiring, you know...it's not so bad when I'm doing it because I know why I'm doing it and I know what I'm there to do. You know, I can't feel bad about it because it's pretty much what I have to do right now....Like I just want to be seen as just like people you know, like I'm not like some bum or whatever.*

*It's the only way I can make money, but I mean I guess I could probably like, like if I didn't do it at all I could probably like just find food in the garbage and just walk around all day digging through trash cans and eating like pizza crusts...stuff like squeegeeing just helps me like feel more like, I don't know, like a member of society I guess, even though it's not really like formal.*

As the previous quotation suggests, many of the youth participants have developed diverse survival tactics – including informal work – to exist on the street. They are usually willing to ‘do what they need to’, even if it means for example, eating food that someone else threw in the garbage. This is not how most youth imagine spending their time, but it becomes their street realities in order to survive. In this way, they engage with informal work out of circumstance and through learning from others in the same predicament:

*I ran out of money at one point. It's like oh well, just need to make some money somehow. Everyone else was like flying signs and panhandling and squeegeeing and shit. Then I just kind of did it, like to get more money after that, so I kept on busking and shit.*

*I mean, how do you learn respect? It's just engrained. You learn it; you just go out and hang out with the people. I've been hanging out and doing this kind of thing for years. It just, you get the flow of it, you catch on, you know. It's like learning how to walk, learning how to eat, learning the fire's hot.*

Keen observation skills and developing relationships with other street-involved people are part of the process of survival and acculturation. The young people interviewed in this study described a culture specific to street-involved young people.

## **Culture**

There is a clear culture and ethic by which the street youth live. Although youth will describe themselves as ‘irresponsible’, the reality is the youth demonstrate responsibility and care in many ways, whether they are caring for a dog, working with or for a partner, staying in

touch with family, or experiencing ‘social pressure’ to find employment. They respond to the pressures they are faced with in a way that reflects their values – it is group-centered and focused on need:

*Definitely, definitely we’re very communal people, very contributing to each other, very aware of each others needs.*

Working and living in groups is purposeful – it is about feeling safer (especially for young women) and also about feeling connected. When a ‘crew’ (one way the youth participants referred to their close peer network) is working together they are often laughing and joking with each other, trying to keep positive, and usually share a collective goal, as this youth explains:

*You know, you don’t feel so confident when you’re there by yourself and everybody’s yelling at you. You’re walking the line on every [traffic light]....nine out of ten people are giving you like you know, the fuck eye or like, you know, it’s kind of embarrassing almost. But when you’re with somebody else, you’re more confident and it’s kind of okay, you know. Especially if somebody will attack you, like it’s happened, you know. You have somebody there to protect you almost or help you out.*

They spend time in groups for pragmatic reasons, including safety and protection. They also look out for each other, even young people they might not know well or who might be ‘new’ to the street, as this young person articulates:

*Most people will sleep in groups. It’s like a pack, you know. Like they don’t want to get fucked around and if they see someone alone, they don’t even know them, they’re not going to let some little, some girl sleep by herself, you know. So we all sleep in spots together.*

Often groups that work together socialize and sleep in one spot together. Spending time in groups is also about socializing and having a community to ‘be with’ when living homeless and working informally:

*If it's raining too much, a lot of times what we'll do is, if it's a really, really bad day, especially if I made really good money the day before, I would supply everybody with everything. I'd make sure we all got food and like, everybody just throws in whatever they can, kind of have a day off. You know, play dice or cards.*

*A lot of times our friends have guitars and stuff or we find a nice quiet spot in the park or you know, wherever we can get away and just hang out and listen to music and tell our stories and you know, survive another day.*

The crew becomes an extended family of sorts – even though youth describe the changing scenarios of crews from place to place, those who want to work in groups have created a culture for themselves. In many ways, the culture of the youth participants reflects a culture of care that, perhaps, develops in response to the shared difficulty and hardship they face. There are often similar struggles like home-life/parental/familial/social system experiences shared among homeless youth. As they try to make sense of their lives and their homelessness, they create their own community (or ‘family’) on the street:

*Oh, well the way we do it, like when we're panning most people they'll just like sit together and they just split halfway and then if you're squeegeeing, like everyone just like...most people just go out and they just like try to find a car. Me and my friend...we'll just split everything down the middle. People are pretty good with that...it's weird, you wouldn't think so.*

*I like to try to make money in groups too. Fly a sign with a friend, squeegee with a friend. It just makes it, it's not so boring. You don't feel so stupid just standing there, like 'duh'.*

In some ways, youth participants characterized their culture as ‘collective’; each person uses their gifts or talents to make money throughout the day, and when they are done they return to an agreed upon location and determine what they can do with the money they have acquired. Sometimes individuals work for themselves, but ‘crews’ often pool their resources to ensure that

everyone (dogs included) is fed, watered, and taken care of (e.g., have necessary medical supplies, able to get new footwear, etc.). It is almost a communal orientation:

*If the money's good, I'll go off by myself, make my own money, but if the money's shitty, everybody will like get together and like sort of like throw every dollar you get, throw into a hat. Like communal beer, communal cigarettes, communal food, you know, like everything gets thrown in together.*

*Well, if we're squeegeeing and there's a group... it's usually an individual effort for each person because each person has their own, they have their own agenda for what they need... But at the end of the day, if somebody did pretty good and somebody didn't do so good, we'd lend that, not lend them, but just give them what they need to help them out. Because we're all social; we all want to hang out. So if I'm going to go and relax, if I'm done making money and my friend's five dollars short and I have an extra five bucks, I give it to him. That way he can come hang out instead of having to stay out there by himself.*

For many, the culture of care offers acceptance and support in a group they call their own, and can insulate these youth from the harshness they encounter on a daily basis. Further, street youth are particularly vulnerable while they are homeless as the nature of street life is precarious and is an existence shared with other street-involved people and relationships that must be negotiated, which can be psychologically and physically exhausting. As one youth explains:

*Sometimes you get a little bit like, some people turn a bit schizophrenic or paranoid because there's always like crazy people around. So then you're like more vulnerable because you're always outside.*

The youth nurture a culture of care with each other, despite how little care some of them may have experienced in their lives, as one response to their vulnerability. There is mutual sharing – an almost communitarian way of working, living, and surviving with each other. ‘If your buddy needs help and you have the means to help, then you help.’ This is a testament to the

resiliency of homeless young people in the face of difficult lives and the challenges of street environments:

*With panhandling and squeegeeing, if you meet all like cool, interesting kids and like everyday they want to do something new and it's like a pack of dogs (laughter) you know? You all stick together....You automatically sit down and hang out, in different towns or cities and...sometimes you all pitch in and make money for food and go have a barbeque or you make food and you make a big feast, you know, it's pretty sweet.*

*Like a lot of times I'll go up to the store and buy a big thing of like 12 pizza pockets, use their microwave, and then bring the whole thing down and share it with all my friends.*

While the youth participants clearly value the culture they have created for themselves and view this culture as protective and supportive when they are homeless, one service provider captures a tension within:

*They are so used to living hand-to-mouth and there's almost a supportive community for that [life] that they build among themselves, which is both positive and negative. Positive in that they have social support for, if they're down on their luck they can stay at Joe's, who has a job currently and can pay his rent. So everybody's staying at Joe's because they have no where else to live. But negative because that's also encouraging a cycle of poverty for the whole, if you will, family unit, which they're going to, you know, need to break free of and will break free of eventually because situations will obviously change and fragment and they'll have to move on or something.*

While street life and street communities are most often portrayed as violent, unsafe, unhealthy and exploitative, there needs to be recognition of the strong collective bonds that can form between those living on the street (see Karabanow, 2006; 2008). The culture the youth have created for themselves in response the realities of life on the street can provide companionship, support, and survival, however, as the service provider quote illustrates, this culture can also

create an entrenchment in a cyclical journey. Part of this journey is influenced by the intersection between formal and informal work for youth who are homeless.

## FORMAL AND INFORMAL WORK INTERSECT

*I've worked sometimes being homeless but like, it's just extremely hard. You work [a full shift] and then you've got to go and look for shelter and then while you're sleeping you've got cops and other people waking you up and kicking you out. So you're walking around the city for another twelve hours and then you've got to go back to work. You're not going to do it...it's harder to keep a job when you're on the street...it's almost impossible, like unless you can get a house, but you can't get a house without a job, you can't get a job without a house. So that's when you're kind of stuck in the bind of things.*

Service providers share similar perspectives as youth participants on the realities of 'everyday street life' and formal employment. They also acknowledge that often the two realities – homelessness and formal work – are not compatible. As one service provider explains:

*Usually if kids are a little more rough on the streets then they don't have the...ability to deal with some of their barriers to employment. So specifically, hygiene, health, housing is the big one, substance use, some of those things. And they're in survival mode, just getting by from one day to the next. If they're thinking about [formal] employment, then it's often temp jobs, you know day jobs where they get paid cash at the end of the day.*

Some youth found work that included accommodation, in particular, youth who worked in farm labor or did seasonal harvesting work tended to be housed as part of their employment arrangement. In most cases, room and board were provided, as well as some payment; however, in these situations, pay is often withheld until the work is complete, as this youth suggests:

*I'd do migrant farm work. So that was probably, that was my favorite thing to do. Just go there and you work for two weeks, get a fat paycheque. It's long shifts but yeah, I've done a lot of those.*

Formal and informal work intersect – very often young people are moving between or straddling both worlds. Sometimes this is because they cannot find full-time work with a livable

wage; sometimes it is because they are socially connected to the street despite ‘having a job’; sometimes informal work is a way to fill the day when they are not working in the formal sector. In particular, when they are housed, youth identified that it was important to them to have work:

*When I'm on the streets, it's a lot easier [to not have a formal job] because it's just stressful being on the street and having a job every day. But um, when I have a place, I just feel crappy; I need to work, like I need to do something.*

### **Getting and Keeping Formal Work**

Despite the challenges of being homeless, most of the youth participants in the study managed to acquire formal jobs at some point in their homeless careers. In most cases, youth spoke positively about working formal jobs. They felt better about their circumstances and having money; some even referred to the times when they had formal jobs as when they were most productive – productive in terms of improving their lives and in being able to participate in social activities with friends:

*When I'm working, I mean I get that paycheque and I feel good. I want to go hang out with my friends and like, and you know, I go to a show and like I have a few drinks with all my buddies and I have money and I buy them drinks and I feel good about that. So that's a good thing about having a job and having like an income and having like that sociable uplifting experience where you can just go out and have a drink with your friends.*

*Yeah, it made me feel more productive, like I was doing something with my time, you know, and I liked my job.*

One youth described how he had experience working a number of jobs on a short-term basis, but is now more interested in establishing himself somewhere and creating a future:

*And I also kind of want to move up a little bit. Like I've just been taking any job, dishwashing, bar back, bussing, just so I have a job. As where now, I'm like, well, if I have to I'll put a year into a place so that I can move up.*

Most of the youth participants had resumes prepared or had used a resume in the past to apply for work through more conventional avenues. In many cases youth would use online services (e.g., government job banks, Kijiji.com, or other internet-based employment services) as a way of finding work they could apply to and acquired formal jobs in this way. However, most of the formal work the participants were eligible for was embedded in the unskilled labor and service/hospitality sectors, which tend to be more informal in terms of hiring protocols. Often word-of-mouth, 'cold calls', or having a friend already employed at a place would lead to formal employment for the participants, and in many ways, this approach was more effective than traditional routes of creating and distributing resumes:

*I usually checked the classified and stuff like that, maybe the job bank on the internet.*

*I started work and I think my first job, yeah my first job it was just a friend of mine worked there and they needed another person to work in the dish pit. Yep, and then after that just the job bank, the HDRC or whatever it is, and word of mouth.... I mean I only just started today passing out [resumes] to anywhere, not caring if they have a [hiring] sign or not, just like 'here you go!' I'm not sure how that will work out.*

*I found [jobs] on the internet...but out in another city...my girlfriend at the time, she told me that her dad was looking for somebody to help in the mechanic business, so I said I'll do that.*

For young people who are working within the formal economy, yet continue to be homeless (living on squats or shelters), there appears to be a tenuous and fragile intersection.

While somewhat engaged in the formal economy, the majority of their existence/identity lies within the informal/street context:

*Well usually I started in the afternoons and worked back shift...and then go back to the shelter....This is like when I stayed at the shelter, before I had my own apartment...go back to the shelter.... Before the [work] day, I'd mostly just spend most of my time around the shelter or up on the main street, stuff like that.*

*It was kind of stressful at times....like if my time ran out at the shelter. I could get o work, I'd come back, [and] I'd have nowhere to go and I'd have to walk all around the city, trying to find somewhere to go to sleep before I went [back] to work. Sometimes I didn't even get to sleep...and I really couldn't recuperate at work.*

Needing affordable, adequate, and safe housing was indentified by many youth participants as a key reason they did not pursue formal work. They acknowledge that in most cases it was not for lack of trying. Often appropriate housing is not available:

*The same issues everybody has about like homeless people, you know. It's like, 'why are you living like that, why can't you just...' And I was looking for a place at the time but... it's not so easy to find a place out there.*

In some cases, youth participants tried to maintain a formal job without stable shelter and had learned how difficult it was to manage. They explain how living on the street is stressful, despite their best attempts to change their circumstances:

*Yeah, it's better to have a home if you're going to work, that's for sure....and then as soon as you take away the home, the working becomes way too much to handle.*

*I would be able to do my job better because [if I was housed because]... I wouldn't be like maybe wet from the rain or I wouldn't be sore from sleeping on the ground. Things like that. It's just the added stress, too, you know. Because you're not always clean...you can't do your best on the streets because it's stressful*

*and you're never sleeping well and there's like, there's so many different things going on. Like it takes away from what you, like what you could be doing.*

As well, youth identified how having housing was about more than just a roof over one's head, it was about stability in a broader sense, for example having somewhere to store groceries and prepare meals:

*It's a lot easier [to get a formal job] if you have a roof over your head because you can keep food in the fridge and shit. You can buy bulk to survive the week instead of always buying like fast food or eating a fucking sandwich.*

Housing also provides a space for preparing to work. Being able to eat, rest, and wash-up are important aspects of maintaining employment and employability. As one youth articulates:

*Like it's really hard to take construction [work] when you're homeless, just because, you know, you kind of have to eat. Like kitchen jobs are pretty good, except then the whole issue of lack of showering, you know, becomes an issue....Anything working with the public is kind of hard to do when you're homeless because you're probably not real clean shaven – probably not really clean, actually.*

Certainly not having shelter is an obstacle to maintaining formal work, in particular, this affects the ability of any employee to be rested enough to continue working on a daily basis. This reality adds new layers to the experience of entering formal work, where after working a formal job they must find food, somewhere they can sleep, and ideally, somewhere they can wash-up and make themselves presentable for their job. One youth highlights this tension:

*I have friends that have...tried to hold jobs while being homeless. You know, you can't shower everyday....you can't guarantee that you're even going to be able to wake up on time. You can't even guarantee that you're going to be able to sleep the night before; you can't guarantee that you're not going to come in completely soaked and stinking of, well, whatever sewer you slept next to.*

In addition, fostering a state of mind for applying for work is very hard if basic necessities are not addressed, like shelter and food. Hunger and sleep deprivation can make negotiating the world very hard, and decision-making challenging. As one youth illustrates in the following quotation, the focus is on immediate needs, not planning for a future:

*I was really just couch surfing, crashing on friends and back and forth between the shelter and the group home and everything because, you know, I couldn't get a steady job.... I had to live in the moment, in the immediate. I need something to eat and I need to sleep at night, so I'm sitting there with a cup and I'm asking for change.*

Service providers acknowledged and highlighted the layered complexities of how young people experience homelessness and how their lived experiences are often incompatible with a smooth transition into formal work, echoing how the youth participants described their circumstances:

*They don't have a phone number and they don't have an address and they also might have a choppy work history from travelling or from having had [and] trying to overcome a lot of burdens, whether it be alcoholism or some kind of a mental illness. It might be hard for them to have obtained a good reference or a good work place situation or memory or concept to even build from.*

Despite the challenges to be overcome, a number of youth reported being initially excited and motivated and proud about getting a job; however, within a few months they felt defeated, 'trapped', and stressed. Often as they 'worked' to keep their job, other issues would surface or circumstances might suddenly change, and they would find themselves on the street and unemployed, again. One service provider speaks to this 'cycle':

*I think given all the circumstances...I feel like people manage them the best way that they possibly can.... I think though some of [the challenges] can easily be overcome [some young people] end up feeling pretty disenchanted with feeling like they can participate in meaningful work end up kind of stunting that process or at various times they'll have a surge or energy to kind of work through that – try to make it work – and*

*then be overcome by it and then burn out really quickly...it's a bit of a cyclical kind of thing and hopefully, you know, like each time [through] the cycle they swing up, they have enough energy and invigoration and support to keep moving outward, right. But it's pretty hard.*

Some participants shared what the cyclical experience can be like for them – having a job, losing the job and returning to the street, sleep and food deprived, trying to get off the street again – and how it can erode their self-confidence. As this youth explains:

*Do I really want to go talk to that guy when I'm like starving? It's not the thing I want to do, try to beg for, you know, nickels and dimes from an employer when all I really want to do is just eat....The hardest thing is like you holding yourself back and that's what a lot of people in my situation kind of feel, you know. They're kind of like, well, I'm worthless, I'm useless, like why would anybody want me around in their job, you know. So it's like it's definitely like yourself that is the hardest obstacle to overcome.*

Youth and service providers both highlight the need for more affordable, adequate housing and supports that reflect the lived reality of young people who are homeless. One service provider acknowledges how the youth are visibly, in their appearance and demeanor, in a difficult place, but that there are also less visible challenges, such as literacy, that can influence their willingness and ability to engage with the formal work world. These issues are also much more difficult for employers to manage:

*The need for extra support, the precarious housing, like all the stuff that's involved with supporting a work life isn't necessarily there. And I think that sometimes you can see that difference right away....also there's, you know, there's just a variety of literacy issues involved and there are few employers that have the time to really engage in alternative, you know, strategies to deal with varying literacy issues.*

Also, youth relationships with employers can be temperamental. It was not uncommon for participants to share stories of employers or co-workers who 'asked too many questions'. Youth tended to negotiate these interactions by responding with as little information as possible

to halt the questioning. Yet, managing these conversations, deciding whether or not to disclose one's current circumstances, and balancing life needs with work needs can be too much for some young people. There is an element of risk in disclosing (or being put in a position to disclose) homelessness at work – as mentioned previously, stigma and discrimination are rampant, despite the efforts of youth participants to maintain employment in such circumstances. Experiences with negativity while working formally can have lasting effects, and most youth participants indicated, as in the following quotation, that they were very selective about with whom they shared their circumstances, if they shared at all:

*Sometimes you're working with like the real hard working men, you know, and you just kind of don't want to cause waves.... I mean I've been like through disclosing shit like that I've been pretty harshly discriminated against and like, I don't really want to, like, put myself in that situation when I don't have to...So kind of, I don't know, it has to do with how comfortable you are, I suppose, with the person.*

Further to the issue of negotiating relationships in the work place, one service provider articulates how homeless youth often struggle with 'relating to authority', which can significantly inhibit maintaining employment:

*There's a whole social skills bit that a lot of people who come here have missed... relation to authority is a whole thing that they missed in their education.*

Finally, for many of the youth participants working formally meant 'settling down;' herein lies much of the tension between formal and informal work structures. In many instances youth are speaking about systemic difficulties and inequities that keep them from becoming gainfully employed, but at the same time, there is personal resistance to 'settling down'. There are many reasons for this resistance. In some cases, youth participants who establish formal work end up feeling trapped in a routine that is focused on 'work' instead of personal development and

experiential learning (through travel, developing artistic or musical skills, and living with less), as this youth explains:

*Just waking up every day, doing the same thing. Yeah, just it's miserable. Wake up, yeah, go to work, go home and that night dreading the next morning to get up and got to work, come home. It's ridiculous, no way to live.*

Further, for those youth participants who were traveling, it is important to be able to leave town or change locations without compromising work relationships. Youth participants identifying as travelers commented that this was the most significant deterrent to acquiring formal work – they knew that they would not be in any one place for very long and did not want to commit to a formal job that they knew they would leave in a few days/weeks. As one youth explains, it is not that these youth do not want to work; they are willing to work in the short-term as this accommodates their reality. Yet, rarely are short-term jobs available:

*That's another thing with jobs, you know, you're traveling, you want to travel, and people are like, 'well get a job. And it's like, well, you know most of these kids would work if you had like a day (long) job, because it's like, to get a job you have to stop. You have to open a bank account, get direct deposit, then like stay there for the first (weeks), usually you don't even get a paycheck in two weeks, you have to wait three weeks and then you know. So that's why most kids will be like, 'will work for the day' or whatever.*

Some youth spoke about extra-supportive employers who made it easier for them to enter the formal workforce because of flexibility in terms of pay schedules, as one youth suggests:

*He'd pay me probably every second day and I'd go. Which was good; which was a lot easier than you know, getting a job and having to wait for two weeks to get paid and still having to get off work and panhandle and do all that stuff, you know.*

As this youth suggests, usually entering the formal workforce requires relying upon informal work to make ends meet. In this way, informal work can support entry into formal work.

### **Linking Informal and Formal Work**

Many of the youth participants shared stories of how they would top up earnings from formal work through informal work. Or, if they were short money, they would engage in something ‘informal’ to make up what they needed. It is a cyclical process; however, when youth find themselves with no job, no where to stay and in financial trouble, they create other means of sustaining themselves through informal work. During the time before receiving a first paycheque, they must still pay rent, eat, dress, and maintain a state of employability without any income. In many cases, youth respond to this reality by continuing their informal work, as this youth articulates:

*I was used to getting money every day as opposed to waiting two weeks for a paycheque. So that was kind of difficult at first. Well, the initial few weeks before you get paid was difficult, because I mean, I'm working but yet I'm not, like I still need [money for] things after work I didn't necessarily have.*

The challenge of this circumstance is obvious – after working for a paycheque, they still have to ‘work’ to survive because they have no or little money. Not only is it physically and mentally taxing to work a job all day and then have to accrue enough money to eat, there is also public scrutiny related to informal work that tends to focus on ‘not having a job’. This experience can be particularly frustrating, as one youth expressed:

*A lot of times when I first start at a (job), I usually end up having to panhandle until I get my first pay cheque anyway. So after work, yeah, it kind of sucks because after doing a full day's work, I have to go and ask people for change and have them tell me to go get a job. You know, it's like it's a little more aggravating when you are working, hearing that.*

The challenge of having a job yet needing immediate money often requires working informally, but this can put ‘newly employed’ youth at risk of being seen by employers/co-workers in the public realm, and as the quotation indicates, can lead to stigma and discrimination:

*So it's like when you go to get a job afterwards, they've already see you [panhandling], so it's like you're sort of stuck there in a way. They keep on pushing you down, like making sure you stay in that spot because they remember you as being that person. So just like, okay, as long as you do that, like I don't have to worry about you because you're over there doing that thing. You don't come work for me; you go do that now.*

Work – whether formal or informal – is important to the youth participants for acquiring what they need to sustain themselves and survive while they are homeless. Informal work, in particular, can provide financial support for homeless and marginalized people as they try to move into more formal work. In our study, most of the youth were relying on informal work as a means of economic survival and as a means of ‘bridge funding’ to support entry into formal work. Further, informal work – the willingness to do it – can be a safety net of sorts. If the formal job does not work out, youth participants indicated they would return to informal work. In this way, their safety net is their informal work.

### **Informal Work as a Safety Net**

The current reality is that informal work is often more readily accessible for young homeless people, and it provides a means of making money when there are few options. As illustrated, the participants in this study cannot very easily engage in formal work (not that there is much out there or incentive to do it). It is important that we remember that temporary and casual, minimum wage work is not necessarily going to provide stability, even for young people

with seemingly fewer expenses. In which case there is a rational economic argument for choosing informal work over labor in the formal sector. Further, when working informally, youth are in control of their day and have the freedom to work as little or as much as they like and depending on what they need that day. In contrast to having to maintain employability while homeless, informal work is a way to make money that is more achievable given the realities of being homeless:

*It's my way of making money and it's my way of doing something. Just my way of life.*

*Um, I just, like I was homeless and I needed money to survive and so I, it was just a way to make money.*

*Well, sometimes it's something to do. Sometimes it's something to do but it's mostly because of money.*

*It's really just, well it's like any other job really, you know. You'd rather not be there.*

The young people in our study saw informal work as a means of making immediate money for necessities (i.e., food, medications, shelter):

*We'd go back to panning, make up enough money for whatever we needed for the day, cigarettes, pot, whatever, and then we'd get it and then go back to panning. So it was like, constantly making money.*

*I'll go and sit down on the corner and I'll go squeegee or I'll go busk or I'll go pan or anything like that and make up the money I need.*

*Fast money – immediate money. My needs for that day are like done within an hour.*

*Quick money. It's instant. You're not waiting on a cheque, you don't need to settle down and stay anywhere to do it right? You can just go about your life.*

In some cases, informal work provided an avenue for saving for particular survival items (e.g., new footwear, backpacks, and damage deposits for apartments) and providing for family, friends, or children:

*Everybody pitches in to make sure the dogs eat first and foremost.*

*[Working informally] is pretty important right now because without this my children would go hungry, they wouldn't have no diapers on their bums, and you know, uh, I'd be homeless without a place to raise my children. So this is a very, very important thing for me right now.*

*I saved up for my backpack, I saved up for my sleeping bag, saved up for my dog. I'm saving up to pay back for my dog's [vet bill].*

Finally, informal work provides a way of earning money that can assist street youth in surviving without engaging in illegal or criminal activities. This was highlighted by several youth participants – it is something they are proud of – as they are not interested in becoming entrenched in criminal activity, but they need to survive each day. One youth articulates her understanding of this relationship between informal work and the choices of her peers:

*Most of the kids I know, they're not like bad, they're not like, they don't rob people, you know. Like they just, you know it's like, they're not the people that like, you know, they don't really steal, you know., They don't sell drugs, they don't, you know, they're not prostitutes. They're doing it because that's how they make money....I remember this kid, he had this line, "Keep it real, it's better to beg than steal."*

### **Informal Work Fits Reality of Homelessness**

Short-term planning is somewhat central to how youth shape their day – this is a context of the economics of homelessness. Living 'hand-to-mouth' is difficult, and long-term planning in this circumstance can lead to disappointment and frustration; in many cases, one cannot see beyond finding a next meal. Yet, engaging in work – even informal work – can provide these

otherwise excluded youth with a sense of accomplishment and, depending on the activity, meaningful work. Engaging with the public and sharing particular life stories can be a way for street youth to reflect on their experiences, and in some cases, feel pride in how they have managed to survive and get by with much less than most:

*If you're going to get a bill dropped, you usually always have told them a story about yourself and get to like, you get to kind of, not fabricate but like clean up aspects of, you know, your tale of travelling. So it's like, yeah, it's a bit, it's the only part of it that you kind of get to feel some pride and accomplishment when you've told somebody like what you've actually done....I've made it further across this country than most people who would have the money to do, you know, to travel with...I've made it further than them with feet.*

Living homeless and working informally can be an avenue for expressions of creativity (e.g., selling art, busking, etc.), but for most, engaging in some form of work demonstrates their willingness to be productive and organized, and prove to mainstream culture that they are far from a common perception of being lazy:

*Like I said, I'm not a lazy person. When I go work, I work my ass off.*

*I work everyday, it's just a different type of work. Like I get up early every morning, like I go to bed, like I work at least twelve hours a day, but it's not like normal type of work*

In many ways, as one youth notes, informal work is about the 'survival of the fittest' – if homeless people are not willing or able to do some form of work, their ability to protect or maintain their health and wellbeing can be compromised:

*I'll still do it the next day because I need to, to survive. Survival of the fittest – you can't be lazy (laughter).  
If you are then you'll probably not last out here [on the street].*

Yet the social stigma and discrimination people living in poverty experience on a daily basis can erode self-confidence and self-esteem. For many of the youth participants, being able to work

informally was a strategy to combat the negativity they encountered each day. Being able to work – even informally – is important for nurturing and maintaining a positive self-concept while homeless. A few youth spoke to how they generally felt better about themselves, more in control of their circumstances, and emotionally and psychologically stronger when engaged in some form of work. They were proud of the independence they were able to maintain through informally working. In some cases it gave them a sense of purpose:

*If I'm not doing something, like I just feel like crap because like, I'm feeling like I can't support myself or like, you kind of get depressed after a while because like you're not doing anything. Like you just feel like useless.*

*Oh yeah, doing nothing drives you like completely insane. Like nobody can really hold onto their mind in a situation where you have absolutely nothing to do. You feel like you have no purpose in life and like you just feel like you don't belong anywhere.*

*At the time it just seemed like a really good employment thing. I mean, it's like, like it fit our lifestyle completely. I mean, we would just sit in the park anyway, we might as well be out there washing windows. I mean, you've got to do something right?*

The idea of informal work as ‘doing something’ assisted some youth in shaping a positive self-concept, as well, the particular work they chose could frame how they understood their role and identity in light of being homeless and poor. In particular, those young people who identified as ‘squeegeers’ reflected on their work as providing a service – a service which the public could choose to use – and that this kind of activity (i.e., providing a service or good in exchange for money) was more honorable than ‘just panhandling’:

*A person who is squeegeeing is not bumming for money, okay. They're actually working for the money that they're getting.... If you say 'no', they're not going to wash your window.*

*I actually prefer to squeegee wherever I could because I feel I'm doing something. I'm offering them a service instead of just sitting there going, 'oh, give me your money', you know. Like I don't like that, like I try to offer as much as I can.*

*Usually I feel pretty good about my self you know. Like I'm out there, especially when I, I feel like especially with squeegeeing, I'm providing a service and I don't like just like doing nothing. I feel like I have to give something back to receive something, you know. So it's like, if I'm providing a service.*

Further to ideas of providing a service, some youth reflected on their informal work and described it as 'providing entertainment'. Not unlike squeegeeing, the role of 'entertainer' involves an exchange of goods (e.g., a song by a busker, a poem from a writer, a piece of artwork from an artist, a joke from a comedian, etc.) for money. Regardless of the 'entertainment', youth participants referred to 'engaging the public' as their job:

*Panhandling isn't just sitting there and doing nothing, you need to keep up conversations with people. I like to say...my job is entertaining drunk people.*

*Most of what I do requires making people laugh....if I have a funny sign that requires kind of talking, kind of getting them into a good mood.*

As the youth in the previous quotations suggest, flying signs is an example of how humor is used as a means of engaging an otherwise disengaged public. When asked about sign slogans and what they thought was most effective, youth participants shared their favorite sayings:

*Zombies coming, spare change for chainsaw.*

*Family kidnapped by ninja's, spare change for kung fu lessons.*

*Out of work supermodel.*

*Travelling, broke, and ugly – anything helps.*

In many cases, the youth identified these particular slogans as most effective because they were clever, thoughtful and funny. Clearly, having a sense of humor can pay off, as one youth suggests:

*[The sign is] serious you know, I'm traveling and I'm broke but it's also like, you know, funny and people love a sense of humour. It's like, 'oh, you're poor but you've got a sense of humour about it, so here's ten bucks.'*

While many of the youth participants shared stories of positive encounters with passersby, highlighted how they could survive from the money they made through their informal work, and even argued that they were able to be independent and 'free' because they worked informally, most young people would also agree that informal work very much reflects a last option for making money in the face of hunger, extreme poverty, and marginalization:

*I ended up in this big city. I couldn't get a job there... So I had to find other ways to make money. I wanted to work, I just couldn't. So panhandling was my last option.*

When young and poor, it is difficult to find decent work because of a lack of education, work experiences, stable housing and hygiene. As a last option and under difficult working conditions, informal work accommodates the reality of homelessness for the youth participants in this study.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

The conditions of informal work can be enjoyable at times, but generally, young people spoke of difficult experiences that come with such labor. However, participants in this study share their reflections about formal work experiences, illustrating how formal work can be challenging as well, depending on the circumstances of the employee and the ethics of the employer. Some participants spoke very positively about their formal work experiences, but there are tensions (e.g., fear, wariness, distrust) in the stories related to feeling secure in a job, as this young person explains:

*Well, I was a good worker...I was fearful of losing my job and I didn't want to lose my job and I worked hard. I figured it I'm working, I'm going to work.... So I took it seriously and I did well there, I guess.*

One service provider further explains that even though there is a strong work ethic – a desire for formal work – there is this sense of ‘insecurity’ among youth who attempt to pursue formal work:

*I've only ever experienced people have a strong desire to work.... I think they have, there's a general nervousness and kind of cynicism about their, even their own ability to sustain meaningful work and so I think...it's hard to make sure there's positive experiences or even positive takes on interactions with employers and stuff.*

There is a tension between the formal and informal world – benefits and risks to both. When working formally, youth participants indicated that they expected to be treated as adults, they expected to be paid, and they expected their earnings to provide them with more stability than informal earnings, but this was not always the case. Some youth participants shared examples of times when they had to argue about the hours they worked, fight to be fairly compensated,

paycheques would be withheld, and there was a theme of conflict with supervisors and managers, which often resulted in termination of employment by either the youth or the employer:

*The employer just like...wouldn't have the money on time for the paycheque, or wouldn't pay you the money on time. You'd have to fight with them to get the money, fight with them to get hours, you'd have to fight with them to get even proper tools to do what you've got to do a the time or wait or so on and so forth.*

*They weren't giving me the correct hours. They kept screwing me around for my paycheque. Like when we had our pay come in, we'd always go up to the boss, do we have our cheques in? No...they're coming next week. And a lot of [staff] just walked out and quit right there because they were getting tired or it; it was an ongoing situation.*

Service providers acknowledge and affirm the youth perspectives around such conflict with employers:

*I mean we've certainly heard enough experiences where youth have, like you know, quite negative interactions with employers. Where they're just treated, like not equal to other employees, or you know, like a lot of people are quite heavily racialized in the community here...so they're stigmatized and racialized and so it makes the whole experience really difficult.*

*We only hear the youth's story, [but] we do hear some exploitation around kids not getting paid, thankfully, it's infrequent. We have a lawyer who comes on site one afternoon a week...so we refer kids who have had employers not pay them [to] take legal action.... I'm thinking of a situation where I wrote a letter to an employer and just reminded him of the Employment Standards Act, that he need to pay this youth and, you know, the youth was able to get the paycheque just because we exerted a little pressure on [the employer] from our position of power.*

Dealing with the negativity and at times, harassment, that accompanies formal work can be frustrating, particularly because there are expectations that once homeless youth acquire formal

work their lives will stabilize. However, as one youth illustrates, the formal work available to young people can come with similar working conditions as informal work:

*I guess when I'm panhandling I deal with the same type of situations and people... [when I work formally] it's just in a room with them and working with them. I mean, I experienced the same types of things while I was panhandling, in a different environment.*

In this way, street youth are faced with somewhat of a dilemma to negotiate. They must determine how to make money and decide if they will pursue formal or informal work, or both.

### **Formal versus Informal**

While negative formal work experiences were mentioned by some youth, others noted ways that formal employers supported them in maintaining their jobs while homeless or transitioning into housing:

*I didn't have to work in the mornings. [My employer] knew I was homeless so he asked me what would be better for me to work. He was actually really helpful.*

Having an employer who had some appreciation of the experiences and realities of homelessness made all the difference for youth who were trying to formally work while being precarious housed or homeless:

*Well with the construction job, I pretty much, I knew the person that I was working for. He was, yeah a good friend of the family so when I was living outside at that time, it would kind of like be an afternoon job. He'd kind of like, I kind of picked my hours I guess, you know... Yeah I would just show up, probably work six hours a day or something and then he'd pay me probably every second day and I'd go. Which was good; which was a lot easier than you know, getting a job and having to wait for two weeks to get paid and still having to get off work and panhandle and do all that stuff, you know.*

While this circumstance may not be officially ‘formal’ (as it is unclear if taxes were being paid when the youth was receiving cash-in-hand every few days), this arrangement clearly facilitated some stabilization for the youth participant. Other youth shared similar stories of working ‘under the table’ for some time – often at the request of the employer as an ad hoc ‘probation’ – and after a designated amount of time would be formally on payroll:

*There was one job I was at, where he said alright we’re going to pay you cash, you know, see how you do, once you do alright we’re going to put you up on the books or whatever and keep you going full time.*

It is important to note that this experience, even if it appears as a positive move, was not always rewarding for the youth participants. In particular, they would not necessarily have the personal documentation (such as a social insurance number or bank account) to accommodate being on payroll, which would lead to quitting the formal job, as this youth explains:

*I did that for a short period of time because I didn’t have a bank account and it was really hard to get a bank account, and I still don’t have a bank account because I can’t get my IDs and stuff done. So I had to quit that job because he wanted to stop paying me cash, he wanted me to get on the payroll and I couldn’t do that. So I quit it.*

Difficulties with working formally ultimately leave homeless youth with few opportunities to make money unless they participate in informal work activities. Even though most of the youth participants had worked formally, they tended to rely on their informal work to survive on a daily basis. There is daily strategizing in both the formal and informal work realms, for example, hiding homelessness and poverty from employers and, as one youth suggests, landlords too:

*To sit there and have your face shown to everybody....Let’s say you go for a job interview but you still have to go and panhandle. So you go and panhandle and your boss walks by you. Like that is so humiliating, you know? Or what happens when your landlord walks by you and you’re just trying to get bread and butter,*

*you know, but they don't look at that; they don't care. They jus say 'you're a druggie, that's all you are. You're not trying to eat.' Really? Like seriously? I'd be selling my shirt if I was a druggie*

*The only thing about construction is they don't care how dirty you are, everybody stinks of sweat anyways by the end of the day. I mean, when you first show up in the morning and you already reek of sweat and you're dirty, they kind of look at you funny but often times there's at least one other guy who went out drinking the night before in his work clothes and woke up in them this morning and came back in anyway. Really, they just think you went with him.*

In addition, deciding how much personal information to disclose to employers or co-workers who become curious can be difficult:

*Well, [co-workers would] ask questions, right, but I'd kind of beat around the bush about it and...I wouldn't' give them a full answer....Some them tried, they offered to help in a way, right, but I just felt like, yeah, can't take that....I can't be a charity case.*

Then there is the reality of how much money they can make working formally and the routine that accompanies it – often the money is not enough and the routine becomes unfulfilling or meaningless, depending on the work. Feeling unfulfilled while working formally was an often mentioned reason for leaving formal work.

*Well every time I get a job....it kind of got frustrating....and I just didn't really like the system....and then I get like, stuck in a routine and it drives me nuts and I take off.*

The youth are introspective about the idea of routine. Most of the participants acknowledge the similar routines that accompany formal and informal work – there are specific activities to be done at specific times in order to make money. One youth captured this experience and tension between formal and informal routines:

*Even, I guess when you're not working you still sort of have a routine, people naturally get into sort of routines in their lives but with working it's like, it's almost like a routine that somebody else has set for you, not your own routine. It's every day I have to be up at six o'clock in the morning to go to work and every day I'll be home and that, and that affects your off time too because you get home from work and you're tired. So your routine will be, even on your own free time, it seems like it's almost controlled by your employer as well because you've got no choice but to come home. I always did labour kind of related jobs, I was always tired. I'd come home, have a meal and a sleep usually, you know and now, when I'm not working, which is now, it's completely different.*

Further, one youth acknowledges how different ideas of 'work' are not well received by civil society. That is, there are expectations around work that reflect a paradigm that only values certain work under particular circumstances – largely, participating in the formal work sector is considered 'better', more acceptable, or a 'step-up'. Yet, in many cases, the youth participants challenged conventional ideas about work and saw their informal work as one way of resisting the status quo, even if it was not always appreciated. As one youth explains:

*They look down on you because you're not living the way that so many people, in general, like so much of the population. It's been engrained in their heads that you have to work this certain way and uh, and you go against that, you know, change is bad.*

Conversely, some youth participants accept conventional ideas of work and reject informal work as character-building or challenging the status quo. For these youth, engaging in informal work is a reflection of how desperate they are, is not something they are proud of, and is an activity they would prefer to avoid:

*You're begging for money; you're not doing anything for it...That's the lowest of the low and that's something I would never want to see myself have to do again.*

In their own ways, participants in this study rationalize their engagement in both the formal and informal economies. They also illustrate how they strategize around their work and money-making activities. As much as they strategize around acquiring and keeping formal work, the youth participants also clearly strategize around informal work and often attempt a variety of activities to earn money to survive. With informal work, strategizing is focused on how to make the most money in the shortest amount of time as homeless youth are balancing many needs – money being only one. Therefore, they are often negotiating immediate needs while considering the span of their day and other matters to which they must attend (e.g., appointments with agency workers, making it to scheduled drop-in meals or programs, and finding shelter). Sometimes their mood influenced how they went about working informally, for example, if they were having a ‘low’ day or were in a bad mood they would opt for activities that required less public engagement (e.g., flying a sign in a median) or would choose more passive means of working (e.g., put out a cup and read a book rather than converse with passersby).

*If I'm lazy or something, you know, I'm not going to want to run and play in traffic and do all that, you know. If I'm in a bad mood, I'm not going to really want to like talk to people and shit like that. So flying a sign is probably the easiest thing to do then. But if I'm in a good mood, yeah, I'll go squeegee and stuff...or panhandle and talk to people like outside of bars, talk to drunks and stuff and con them into giving me money.*

*I've always chose squeegeeing over panning if I could. I mean, there's certain days where I just like didn't want to squeegee, I just wanted to do something different, like a change of pace and uh, just like you have, if you're in a good mood, you can sit and like interact with people. Like strangers and you just like talk to them about whatever and they'll give you money and it's only once in a while for me this happens, because I'm never really in that good of a mood that I can just talk to people like that.*

As in most business enterprises, where young people decide to informally work impacts the amount of money made and the time it might take to earn what they need. Location considerations reflect the various communities they might find themselves in, for example, major urban centers, smaller cities, and rural towns often have different ideas of ‘acceptable’ ways of working informally. As one youth explains, the work they choose must be congruent to the community in which they find themselves:

*Depends what, depends where I am. I don't really feel comfortable squeegeeing in small towns, I feel like I'm going to get the cops called on me real quick. Um, flying a sign usually works pretty well but again, some towns you get the cops called on you real quick. So a lot of small towns, it's easier to just sit down with a little cup and smile (laughter).*

As another youth suggests, even urban settings require creativity to find good working locations that pay off, but it might mean ‘commuting’ to find a better earning spot.

*Sometimes different spots are way fucking better than other spots....So you go on the outskirts a little bit, you know, you take transit, I don't know, a little transit somewhere and just fly a sign or squeegee up there.*

As well, particular neighborhoods or districts within urban centers can be more lucrative, especially on certain days of the week.

*Like, if it's a Sunday, maybe it won't be so busy downtown, so I would probably be better off [squeegeeing]*

*I feel safer when I'm working the bars [district] because there's a lot more people around me.*

Time of day is also a consideration. Given that the youth participants generally rely on the public as a ‘market’ for their work, they need to be working when there are people around to engage. This usually requires working early mornings, lunch hours, and evening traffic rushes – both automobile and pedestrian traffic are necessary for most informal work activities to be profitable.

*Before people are going to work, if you're out really early...Sometimes that works or like lunch time when they're out, like in lunch or whatever, like in busy towns....And then there's like the dinner rush and like when people are going home.*

*Basically, [money can be made] whenever there's a lot of people. Like if you're going to fly a sign, like wait for rush hour. Like here's going to be a lot of cars backed up, you know, you can hit them all up and make a bunch of money. You know, if you're going to be squeegeeing, the same, you got a bunch of cars around, like traffic's slow. If there's a cop, you know, down the way, you can see him, like they're not going to be able to drive up and you can just belike, 'oh buddy, cheers.' You know and like, if you're going to be like panhandling on the street, you know, like if there's some kind of like little downtown festival thing, you know, you're probably going to make a lot of money. Bar crowds, you know always make, drunk people like to give lot so money. Um, fucking just depends like what you're trying to do, you know.*

Much informal work occurs outside and at the street level, which means inclement weather can significantly impact the ability of street youth to make enough money to sustain their needs. As can be expected, Canadian winters are particularly harsh and therefore very difficult to work through, however, almost everyone mentioned that rain was the most challenging in which to work. Not only is it cold, wet, and uncomfortable to be outside and exposed as a 'worker', generally the public mood is less than pleasant when it is raining, which means it can take much longer to make enough to get through the day. Working in the rain is always hard regardless of what city they find themselves in.

*Well, if it's raining, nobody's outside. Nobody's outside, I make nothing.*

*Being homeless when it rains is like the worst because you can fly a sign but you're just going to get soaked. Panhandle but nobody's going to be out, you know. People don't like to kick down when it's raining for whatever, you'd think it would be the opposite you know, like people would be like, man, he's hard up you know. Like, but like people, I guess people are just pissed off that it's raining. Nobody likes to kick down.*

In particular, those who prefer squeegeeing as a work activity feel as though they cannot make money working in the rain:

*Well the rain's always an issue.... it's kind of a piss off. And you can't make very much money either. Like I've actually squeegeed in the rain and I have made money but I don't like to do it all the time. Only when you're in a really good mood and like people know that you're in a good mood, they tend to give you more money. But if you're just like miserable because it's raining out and you're just like argh, give me money, everybody's just like no.*

As the previous quotation suggests informal work positions homeless young people very much in the public realm and at the mercy of the public's charity. This can be a way to make money, but it also exposes them to the wrath of an often misunderstanding civil society:

*I've had people just go off on rants, like 'fuck you, you stupid worthless piece of shit, blah, blah, blah, get a fucking job, why don't you just go fucking die,' and like, try to spit on me. I've been kicked and stuff. Like a lot of fucking crazy shit, man, like just for saying 'hey buddy, you've got a little bit of change?' ...I've had people throw stuff at me out of cars and shit. Like just, people get pissed off, man. Pissed off pretty hardcore sometimes.*

In particular, young women shared stories of harassment (mostly of a sexual nature) while working informally, and indicated that they strategize around these issues to protect themselves:

*If I was a male I probably would [fly a sign for work] but I'm a girl and if you're holding a cardboard sign "will work" usually people get the wrong idea. I'd feel weird holding a sign like that, especially with perverts and stuff.*

*Like making suggestions of me going and prostituting myself, making suggestions of me just doing the dumbest things. Like I've had some guy come up and offer me like five hundred bucks to do this most disgusting thing, I'm not even going to mention it because it's very vulgar, gross and I was just like, I didn't know what to say to him. My jaw hit the ground, almost literally hit the ground and I was just like, I didn't know what to do. So from then on, I kind of hid underneath the sleeping bag.*

Combating the negativity associated with street level work is an ongoing exercise for the youth participants. They see it as ‘part of the job’ and keeping positive is key to maintaining hope in the face of extreme circumstances, as this youth suggests:

*You’re just like, you’ve just got to be like on top of the world kind of. You just like, no matter what [people are saying to you]. Like something will come through and you’ll just be happy.*

Next to the verbal harassment and threat of physical violence the youth experienced, what frustrated them the most was how uninformed the ‘public’ they engaged with are about the realities of homelessness, in particular for youth, and how hard they *do* work when engaged in informal activities. One youth argues that her willingness to work hard should be a characteristic valued by a disengaged public, but instead it goes unnoticed:

*I hate squeegeeing; I hate it so much. I find it so degrading. When someone like drives by and like screams something at you, like ‘get a job’, its like, man, I do work you know, I do. If you knew what I did, you’d probably want me, you’d probably want my work too.*

Another youth expresses his dismissal of those who do not understand:

*I consider people who walk up to me and just tell me to get a job ignorant.*

Other youth shared perspectives on how they feel degraded while working informally, despite knowing they had few other options at the time. Working through these feelings is important to maintaining a strong sense of self while being homeless. Yet, feeling like they have skills that go unrecognized is, however, one of the many hardships that accompany informal work as these youth indicate:

*I just hate having to do any of that stuff because I know I have skills. I know I have talents and when people drive by and see you standing on the side of the road with a sign, it’s like that’s it. That’s what she has to offer. She’s frigging like waste of society, you know or something like that. So I just fucking hate it so much.*

*I'd just sit there with my cup and you know, pretty discouraged. Like you know, it feels, it's pretty embarrassing to have to sit there with a cup, like begging for change and eventually I'd sit there long enough and get some money.*

Working informally requires being in public and being visible – to everyone. The experiences of working in public was intensified further for those youth who were living homeless and working informally in communities where they had extended family members. The threat of being seen working informally by extended family was particularly difficult as there was often no context for understanding their behavior and circumstances within their family system, and they felt they needed to hide the fact that they were working informally, as this youth explains:

*Because I'm in my home city, I have a lot of family there. I don't really like panhandling or flying a sign. I just feel like I'm going to run into either a family member or uh, somebody that knows my family, you know. I have, I have done it and I don't like it, not in my home town.... One time I was about to run into the road to fly a sign and I seen my cousin walking down the road. I was like, oh shit, just sit down; hide the fucking cardboard.*

When they could not hide and were seen by family members while informally working, explaining their situation was difficult, as this youth indicates:

*I guess it's sort of degrading. Like I mean, like you know, I mean you see your uncles and aunts and family drive by and stuff, and they're just like, 'What are you doing? Like why don't you have a job? What are you doing this for?' And you're like, 'Oh, I need the money.' It's sort of degrading and uh, yeah, as far as working in public goes, I mean, everyone sees you there.*

A number of the youth participants explained how they were not so concerned whether or not the public gave them money – they viewed it as a personal choice – but it was being ignored, misunderstood, and accused of being delinquents or criminals that was hardest to reconcile. They

often wished the public – whether making a ‘drop’ (giving them money) or not – would try to understand how and why they are on the street, engage in a conversation, and be part of the solution, rather than simply criminalizing and ignoring their ‘public’ existence.

*Since they passed the [by-law legislation], I guess the community feels that it's their job to take it in their own hands. So you get a lot more people that area a lot more aggressive, jump out of their car with their wrench and try to beat you up and just stuff like that.... Just because they know they can take it out on a squeegeer doesn't mean it's going to affect us. Like you can yell at me, you can give me the finger, it doesn't matter, buddy, because there's a hundred people that do that to me every day of my life, you know.*

Surprisingly, in the face of public scrutiny, criticism, harassment, and mockery, these youth maintain a particular ethos – there is etiquette to working informally that is shared.

### **Etiquette of Informal Work**

During the interviews, youth participants were asked about the rules of informal work. Probes related to this question inquired about whether particular people were allowed to work over others, if work was determined by which group you were with (e.g., squeegeers, punks, travelers, etc.), and whether there was ‘turf’ or territory that certain people worked over others. Interestingly, most of the youth commented that they did not understand the idea of rules, but, as some youth argued, etiquette would be a more appropriate way of describing what goes on:

*I mean there's like etiquette to it. Like if you're like fucking you know, if you're sitting there and then somebody walks like to the next block and sits down and starts cutting you off, that's not cool. You know, it's like, have some kind of like courtesy you know.*

*It's very, not rule-based but etiquette would be the better word than rules, you know. Yeah, respect, realization that these people are all in the same boat as you and it's not hard because they're your friends you're talking about, you know. And you want to be good to your friends generally, unless you're a total asshole and huh, most of my friends aren't.*

As one youth commented, there is an illusion of ‘no rules’ when living on the street, yet for the youth participants there are clearly structures that they have to honor – street rules – in order to survive the often unpredictable, volatile, and dangerous reality of sharing street life with a diversity of people with different agendas and different issues. Negotiating the street requires, as this youth emphasizes, having first and foremost, respect:

*Like a lot of people think when kids are living on the street that ‘oh, they just don’t want to listen to rules’.*

*There is a lot of rules within living on the street because if you mess up, you’ve got a lot of homeless people that you’ve got to deal with. So there is a lot more rules than living at your mom’s house, you know what I mean?...So there’s a lot, you have to have a lot of respect. If you don’t respect another person, they won’t respect you and it all goes down the line. You know, so there’s a lot of...the unspoken rules, I guess....And just respect, respect, respect. That’s the number one rule, to have respect.*

Part of having respect is honoring the fact that other people also need to make money. This means negotiating space or ‘spots’ to work, and as some youth phrased ‘not cutting someone’s grass’ – meaning, picking a place to informally work that would not interrupt someone else’s traffic flow (and opportunity for money):

*Well, if someone is panning, you don’t pan right beside, like you move down a few blocks or if someone is flying a sign, you know, ask them ‘how long are you going to be here or do you mind if I [work here too].*

*Yeah, you just respect people’s space and respect their need to make money. Just wait your turn.*

*Be respectful to everybody around you. Be respectful to the cars; don’t’ fucking try to cut people’s fucking grass under them, you know. Don’t try to think you’re better than everybody else and try to stay semi-sober, like no matter how wasted you are...try to keep it clean.*

Further to honoring the ‘spot’, it is important not to ‘burn out’ a particular location. ‘Burning out’ a work location refers to overstaying one’s welcome. Work spots that become too popular or over used can be problematic – the public will often notice if someone is in the same place day

after day, and usually respond by limiting their ‘drops’ when they may have been freely given previously. As well, being in the same location on a daily basis can result in negative assumptions or stereotyping of the individual, which is a reality of the work that must be accommodated. This public reaction has implications for everyone who might be trying to work the same spot, and part of the etiquette of the street is to be sure that others can come after you and still be able to make money. The principle is ‘make what you need and then let someone else work’, as these young people articulate:

*I generally just make up what I need to make, not more than that, and then leave. Because you burn out spots, you know; that’s why it sucks. You can’t stay in one spot and busk the same corner or fly the same corner or squeegee the same corner every day for a month because people are just like, ‘what in the hell is this kid doing?’, you know. ‘He’s probably a junkie...he’s out here everyday’...That’s the truth of it and I’m aware of that. So I do it when I have to do it and I like to move around to different spots, you know, keep moving.*

*You only stay to make exactly what you need and then you leave.*

Most youth participants also shared the sentiment that there were some people you openly engaged in conversation and other passersby that were not to be asked:

*You never ask anybody with kids; like you don’t ever ask anybody with a child for spare change. You don’t ask the elderly, you don’t you know, you just have to have, it’s common sense. You just have to have respect, you know....*

*My only rule is don’t ask people with kids...especially a woman pushing a stroller or like with young kids. Like I just, I don’t like that and if someone does that when I’m there I get really embarrassed and like angry. I’m like ‘why would someone do that?’ Because like we’re struggling, obviously, [but] they have a kid, they need money more than we do to raise their kid, so I just don’t like that..*

As the quotations outline, this is about respect, but it is also an expression of understanding the predicaments and precarious livelihoods of others – a sentiment that many would not expect from young homeless people. However, there is a sense of obligation to protect others from the experiences they live and that even when working informally there is some responsibility to present themselves in a reasonable fashion, rather than as hostile, rude, or threatening, as one youth expresses:

*You don't sit there and curse and swear, you don't smoke a joint while you're doing it, like you don't do any drugs or anything visible like that. You just be respectful, make people understand that this is just something you're doing; you're not being rude about it, you know. If somebody's rude to you, you just smile and nod and say, have a nice day.*

Informal work exists in the public domain and the youth participants' lives are also lived out in the public realm. This challenges notions of youth not wanting to be part of society, leading one youth to note that they are indeed 'part of society' since they are consistently 'out there' working:

*When you are on display, everybody's poking and clawing at you and then it's just that, well do I want to really work for you or you know. So it kind of makes we decline wanting...a lot of people always give squeegeers a hard time because 'we don't want to be part of society,' which is not true. We are really part of society; we're out there everyday. Like you know what I mean? We are a major part of society.*

When asked what made it easier to work informally, one youth shared an interaction with a pedestrian that made him feel proud of his presence and made him think about his role on the street in a new light:

*I had this one lady the other day, like I was squeegeeing and...people were walking by and I was asking them for spare change. But this lady, she already had a loonie in her hand, you know, and she like gave it to me and she was like, 'I really like that you guys are out here.' And I was like, 'What? You do?'...Usually people don't say that and she's like, 'Yeah, it makes me feel safe.' And I'm like, 'Wow.' I thought that was*

*the opposite of, you know, it's the opposite of what people are saying....It made me feel good because like...people were being mean to me and I wasn't making any money and then that lady came up and said that and like, it made me smile and gave me energy and stuff.*

Interestingly, while the youth view themselves as part of society (and as the previous quotation suggests, some members of the public do too), they also acknowledge that they are often not seen for the struggling young people they are. For the vast majority, being in the public denotes a sense of anomie (social exclusion), alienation amid aggressive judgments and persistent harassments, including being followed or having questions asked about how the money earned will be spent, and other intrusions into private lives with no where to go to escape the daily onslaught of street life, as this young person notes:

*When you do that [public work], there's no privacy in your life at all, you know. Like people will, like I used to be followed to see where I was going after I would leave a corner, to see what I was spending my money on and stuff. And like, it's that sort of like violation....It's like it's none of your business and there's just no privacy on the street and you know, like yeah, I always used to think like man, it's bad that I'm standing out here crying but it's like, if I had an apartment or a room, I would go there and cry.... So it's like, there's nothing, just yeah...I cried because I just had no shelter and privacy or nothing.*

Dealing with the general public and their hostilities is one risk of informal work, however, as more cities have enacted legislation against street level activities like squeegeeing, panhandling, and flying signs in medians, negative interactions with law enforcement agencies (e.g., municipal police, RCMP, contracted security companies, etc.) have increased. The youth participants are very aware of how their informal work is criminalized, and they acknowledge the risk of getting caught. Yet, as this youth explains, they persist and create strategies for avoiding ticketing, despite the very public nature of the work:

*For me, when you're working in the public, you're also in the eye of like the cops, right, that's...their whole thing. So you just, like most kids now, they say 'six up'. Like they always have eyes out for like cops and they always watch each other. I think that's the biggest thing when you're out, because if [the public] can see you, the cops can see you.*

As another youth notes, it is best to present positive behaviors – do not do anything to draw attention, like treat a dog poorly, and be respectful of everyone – when working and to always watch for law enforcement:

*Don't beat your dog and just have respect and keep six.*

'Keep six' or 'six up' entails watching for law enforcement when working in public. In particular, squeegee crews have had to be hyper-vigilant as squeegeeing is criminalized in most major cities in Canada. Nevertheless, there are still youth who are squeegeeing to sustain their survival, which means if they get caught, there can be legal implications. Often, as the following quotations illustrate, there are tactics or strategies (beyond good behavior) the youth participants use to avoid interactions with law enforcement:

*[Bylaw legislation] just makes it hard because you get moved so much, like by the police, that you don't have enough time to sit down and like make money because the cops are always saying, move this way or you can't be here and blah, blah, blah.*

*In this city you don't get moved if you're standing up [when panhandling], so generally I just stand up when I see a cop.*

These exchanges with law enforcement may encourage less informal work in particular areas, and as a result, youth participants did seek out alternative 'spots' to make their money. The

implications of working where law enforcement might frequent are too costly, as this youth explains:

*Not like a common spot [where] the cops come because it is illegal now and you do get a hundred and some dollar ticket now.*

For obvious reasons, relations between homeless youth who are working informally and law enforcement officials are often tenuous. It is an unfortunate conflict because, as the youth in the following quotation highlights, homeless young people have very few people advocating for their safety and have few choices in terms of protecting themselves. While some law enforcement officers are friendly and understanding, there are many who target street involved young people; as one youth participant shares:

*And then there's cops, they're just, like some cops I can't, like I'll say some of them are really nice, but some of them are just really, like they don't even seem like – they're just robots....But you're an easy target; you're at the lowest of the scale.*

Street youth are tremendously vulnerable and, another youth argues, are also deserving of protection:

*When you're like a squeegee kid or a panhandler or just don't have a home, like you're such a vulnerable person, you know, and the cops give you a hard time. When really, the cops should be like protecting you because you don't have any form of security or anything.*

As a result of the tension in relationships between law enforcement official and street-involved young people, there are legal considerations in the realm of informal work.

## **Legal Considerations**

A question concerning the legalities of informal work related to bylaw legislation was asked in the youth interviews. In response, some youth explained how they ceased a particular

work activity (usually squeegeeing) due to ticketing. Nevertheless, most youth participants indicated that if they needed money, the possibility of being ticketed would not deter them from “doing what they needed to do to get what they needed.” The bottom line is that these young people are desperate due to their circumstances and must sustain their needs despite the known risks:

*Yeah, well you always have like a risk of getting a fine and stuff.*

*How legal it is, I don't care. I'll do it no matter what the law is on it. It's just, it affects a lot of people that hear about this law, like the people that are in the cars of whatever and they think it's illegal for them to give me money too. So they're scared to...they think if they give me money then they can get in trouble for it too....I've actually had to explain to some people that they don't get in any trouble for giving me money; I'm the one getting the tickets, I'm the one out in traffic or whatever.*

As a result of the bylaw legislation found nationwide, young people who are using informal work as a way to meet their needs tend to be treated even more harshly and with even less respect by mainstream culture (i.e., people yelling/accusing them of doing something illegal, people being less respectful, etc.). Much of the experiences with ticketing comes from young people's squeegee work, however, in some cases, youth are being criminalized just for ‘being’ in a public space:

*On the topic of ticketing...I have thousands and thousands of dollars in judicial debt and the average person who can actually afford those thousands and thousands of dollars of judicial debt usually has close to none. Now, because of this judicial debt, I can't be a tuck driver and I'm never going to be able to pay it back and all this money that I owe the government is simply because I'm trying to eat and trying to survive.*

As previously established, there are limited opportunities for this population to make money and deciding what work to do is often based on the legality of the work. As more ‘visible’ work, like squeegeeing, is criminalized, young people find other, less visible and riskier, ways to

make what they need. In this way, ticketing may in fact be pushing some youth into rougher aspects of the street economy, such as the drug trade, organized crime, sex work, and theft. In most cases, this is not desirable to the youth. As the youth emphasizes in the following quotation, most youth do not want to become entrenched in illegal activity to survive:

*They're trying to take out squeegeeing you know, like the way people make their money. If we don't have this, where would we be? You know, stealing stuff, doing like robbing cars, like robbing houses? No. We don't want to do that. At least we're doing this instead of that.*

*Of course there's kids that you know, if you can't squeegee, they're going to sell drugs or something. Something that's a little harder for the cops to catch you doing or you know, girls might go out and prostitute themselves or something.*

Many of the youth participants acknowledged being ticketed for informal work (or related issues) in various locales across Canada. While in many cases youth are providing false names or otherwise avoiding ticketing and fines, for youth who accumulate a significant number of tickets there are concerns for their future should they move off the street and establish themselves in gainful employment. Most youth have friends and acquaintances who have been 'found' some time after leaving street life and are implicated for past ticket fines, resulting in garnished wages. This could in fact be financially crippling enough that it moves a young, barely established person, back into housing insecurity and/or poverty. They also acknowledge that this will likely be an issue for their future – either impeding them from pursuing formal work, as the previous quotation illustrates, or could haunt them after they maintain a formal job and the 'system' catches up with them to garnish their wages to pay off judicial debt:

*I used to get eight tickets a day and some of them were for five hundred dollars a ticket right. So, and I'm just so afraid to start becoming successful because then as soon as I start making money and having a bank account, putting money in, they will come after me for all of those tickets that I never paid for.*

Lastly, the participants in this study spoke pragmatically and with wisdom when asked to reflect on the criminalization of squeegeeing and median-panhandling specifically. They illustrate the futility of this approach in addressing or managing homelessness and poverty, which begs questioning, as the youth do, of the futility and pragmatics of this approach:

*It's pretty stupid to give a ticket to someone who is like, asking for money....It's stupid because they (the ticket issuer/city) know they're not going to get it, right.*

*They give you a two hundred dollar ticket while you're trying to make, you know, a couple of bucks for food. You're not going to be paying back that ticket any time soon, you know. It's like yeah, in order for me to pay off that ticket, I'm going to have to squeegee even more and I'm just going to rack them up; it just doesn't make any sense.*

*When you're ticketing like a person that's already broke and trying to make money, it doesn't make any sense.*

*It's like, you're making money and you get ticketed like two hundred bucks and you're trying to make twenty bucks for the day, you know. It's just, like, so ridiculous.*

One youth challenged notions of 'law and order' in light of the criminalization of informal work and the intensity of street level surveillance, suggesting that there are more acute criminal issues needing the attention of law enforcement than informal youth survival work:

*It just doesn't make sense because there's so much more that the cops should be doing, like catching real criminals and doing things that, you know, if women don't feel safe like walking down the street at night, why aren't they doing something more about that? Why are they frigging, you know, attacking people that are just squeegeeing a window?*

Service providers shared their commentary on the usefulness of a ‘ticketing and fine’ approach to the diverse issues driving youth homelessness and street work. In particular, one service provider believes the legislation provides an excuse for the general public to be disengaged from the issues and can even perpetuate misunderstanding:

*I think people will definitely, either they’ll say that that kind of legislation is happening or they feel that that legislation endorses their behaviour of um, avoidance or you know, non-responsiveness or even the perpetuating of kind of hatred, you know, toward people that are panhandling or squeegeeing.*

Yet, another service provider argues that in her region, programming targeting panhandlers has some success, in particular for young people. In this way, she values the legislation as a means of addressing broader issues, such as access to housing:

*And so it’s been wonderful having work that’s being done by the city, realizing that um, instead of focusing the financial resources in um, keeping people on the streets, let’s put it into housing people and um, it’s having dramatic effects in the numbers on the streets as well as the illegal activity on the streets. So few of our kids are panhandling and having to scrape by.*

However, for most cities and regions in Canada, bylaw legislation is not coupled with interventions. While legislation may result in what appears to be a decrease in informal work, the reality is, as one youth suggests, that the legislation does not change the fact that homeless people need to make money everyday.

*I know this one guy, he still flies a sign out there but he’s gotten like seven tickets and he’s still out there, so that shows how much people care about the law.*

Clearly the legal implications do not eliminate the need for informal work. This tension creates the illusion that money earned in particular ways is less honorable – maybe even ‘wrong’ – when in fact, most youth participants in this study shared stories of trying to avoid problematic

work activities (e.g., theft, sex work, and other criminal activities). Several youth capture the tension of being labeled and stereotyped based on informal work activities when using informal work as a strategy to survive:

*I'd rather just like do good than bad*

.

*It's currently a good source of money. It may be illegal but it still pays the bills.*

Legislation and law enforcement perspectives on homeless youth and how they earn street survival money do not reflect the importance of this work in the lives of the youth. Many of the participants felt that public awareness will be key to shifting mainstream perceptions of homeless youth, as the current trend of ticketing practices, they argue, is not the solution. Given the realities of street work, the conditions under which they informally work (e.g., public response, weather, location), and balancing the challenges of remaining viable on the street (e.g., finding food, shelter, keeping safe, etc.) the youth participants still find meaning in their work.

## WHAT DOES WORK MEAN

As outlined in the previous sections, street youth work under difficult circumstances and in a variety of ways. If they are not formally employed, they find alternative informal ways of working as a means of earning an income in the interest of supporting themselves and others, as a way of demonstrating citizenship, to exercise freedom, independence, and individuality, to pursue their dreams, and ultimately, to survive.

### **Taking Care of Self and Others**

Being able to make money while homeless is necessary to meet basic needs of survival. One of the benefits of working (either formally or informally) is being able to care of others. As the youth participants suggest, it is also a way they are cared for by partners and peers.

*Oh it's pretty hard. Especially if you don't have any money for anything.... It really, really sucks but you've got to kind of deal with it. Like I get, I am in pain a lot when I'm you know, have my period and stuff and it, thank god I have a lovely boyfriend to help me out right now but if you don't, you know, it's pretty shitty.*

*[My boyfriend] works a lot now. He's always up, he's, I don't know, we just motivate each other. We've both been through a lot together.*

*But sometimes friends would give me money or something and I'd be like, yeah I'm hard up right now, can I get a couple of dollars?*

*Like yeah, like you'd go out and make money and stuff and meet your buddies up at wherever your camp is or your squat or whatever and like, you know, like what do you guys want to do today. You know, I've got some pitch to go in on a bottle of whiskey or something, you know if everybody throws down like that, definitely yeah.*

For youth participants with children, working formally was about providing for their children and meeting the obligations of parenting. Being able to support children was a key motivating factor for participants who were parenting or expecting children:

*I've worked when I've been on the street, yeah and that was pretty rough. Sleep outside and then go to work the next day, sleep outside again, go to work the next day. I did that until I had a place...I was working to get a place, yeah, for me and my pregnant girlfriend.*

Yet, the challenges of being homeless, trying to accrue and maintain work, save up for housing, and contribute financially to the support of children can be difficult, as this young person explains:

*The problem with it is that if I'm trying to save up some money to get my own place, I always have...to like just put some aside for her and the baby and everything, and it's kind of hard for me to budget both of that....It's kind of hard, yeah, it's pretty hard.*

## **Citizenship**

*Society tells you to do this and this and this and well, I'm not living in society, really. You know, I'm kind of living outside of society because I mean, really, the government doesn't say that we're in society, they say we're outside, we're just like hoodlums, we're scum, you know, we're just bums, you know.*

The youth participants are very aware of how they are positioned 'in society'. Some view themselves living outside of society, but others argue (as highlighted earlier in the report) that they must be part of society because they are 'in society' everyday as their work is consistently situated within the public realm. This tension around citizenship is a key theme of what work means to the youth who participated in this research. The tension is internal, as this youth explains:

*You feel bad because you're on the streets, so you go out and make money. While you're making the money you feel bad about taking other people's money but you have to come back and do it again the next day. So you've just got to do it.*

However, other youth comment on how their informal work brings them into contact with the public in a positive way. The street level exchanges and conversations they have with passersby present learning opportunities and time for developing new perspectives on life and the world. These moments can facilitate a sense of belonging, even as outsiders, as these youth participants reflect:

*Because you have like strange people come up to you, having the oddest conversations and you know, you get the real bible thumpers and you get, you just get everybody. Everybody's different, so I enjoy it. I think it's fun meeting all those weird people who aren't like you. Like I'm not saying that they're weird because they're not like me (laughter). That was so rude.*

Being 'on the street' provides unique opportunities for doing 'community service,' such as helping others, in particular older people. As the quotation suggests, supporting others can be personally fulfilling and nurture positive self-concepts, which in turn can assist with acquiring formal employment in the long-run:

*I understand everybody needs to think of numero uno as the base pillar but helping other people in small things like, I don't know, helping an old lady cross the street with her groceries. That gives you some pride, just because you did something nice. That pride can build up and you'll feel better about yourself and everyone else around you will notice. That can help you get jobs too.*

Although much of the psychological processing of social experiences and consequences of doing informal work is personal and internal, many of the youth feel that working informally is not different than working formally in terms of the effort, dedication, and motivation required.

Part of working informally is presenting themselves as hard-working citizens, as one youth noted:

*[I work] about as much as a regular work day. I'm out there every day, trying to keep it consistent so that people don't think I'm a slacker or something*

Another youth shared his feelings about how the work activity of squeegeeing provides a sense of belonging and contribution to society. In particular, one youth comments on having money allows for choices and possibilities that otherwise would be unavailable:

*Stuff like squeegeeing just helps me like feel more like, I don't know, like a member of society I guess, even though it's not really like formal. I'm not paying taxes but I still feel like I'm like doing something, you know. You know, like working you know, then I get money and then I like got the choice to like ride the bus instead of walking or like, you know, go buy some food and eat something, or you know, just like, I don't know, just having money man, it just opens up certain possibilities.*

Finally, some youth participants commented on how once they earned some money, they felt more engaged with society – reserving the right to spend the money they earned how they see fit, just like anyone else, as this youth explains:

*I don't feel like [I should feel bad] when I've worked for it, that's my money. Hell no, you can't tell me what to do with it, I worked for this.*

### **Freedom, Independence, and Individuality**

Freedom was a commonly mentioned element of motivation for engaging in informal work. Youth participants who identified as ‘travelers’ repeatedly expressed how formal work does not fit with a travelling identity:

*They're just doing [informal work] because it's the easiest way to be able to keep moving and doing your own thing, you know. And also, living on excess. Like again, like we can survive on fifteen dollars a day, twenty dollars a day easily. We don't have like bills to pay and we don't need shiny things and you know*

*what I mean, a lot of stuff. Like we have basic essentials and if you don't agree with those basic essentials then don't give them money, you know. It's no big deal.*

Even though informal work provides a means for money-making when traveling, the reasons for traveling were less clear. In a few instances, youth participants suggested that traveling was about a state of mind – about being able to ‘start fresh’ – and leaving behind potentially traumatic or unhelpful situations in pursuit of “something new, something more, something else”:

*I would call I wandering. Like I was just, because I wasn't so much traveling, like ‘oh I want to see the world’. It was like, I need to leave this spot and I need to go somewhere new, somewhere where I can try to start fresh.*

There is an undercurrent of an alternative value system among some of the youth that may be a reaction or response to conventional ideas of ‘success.’ As the following quotations illustrate, some youth participants conceptualized their existence within notions of ‘living off excess’ and being at a time in their life when they want to explore diverse avenues of citizenship. Many youth participants challenged commonly held ideas of how to live and argue that they are making a choice to try an alternative way of living – expressing their individuality and living with less – despite how uncomfortable ‘society’ might be with it:

*Like I just quit a better, well better in that it was better paying, you know, but I'm trying to avoid that kind of inflexible work situation right now....I realize I could go and get another nine to five job, you know. I'm trying to live alternatively right now though, an alternative style.*

*Because you see most travelling kids, like they wear the same clothes forever; they can't go to work in that.....Like I don't have a lot, I have my dog food, my sleeping bag, a tarp, like all the essentials, but for like clothes and like anything that's like excess, I try to keep it at a bare minimum because that's all like weight that's like on my back.*

The values in pursuing an alternative way of living are independence and control. For many youth participants, informal work is flexible and they can adapt what they are doing to suit different contexts and circumstances. Usually, formal work does not afford the same benefits in terms of scheduling and access to work. As one youth explains,

*I find with working informally, it just, instead of adapting to work, you make your work adapt to what your lifestyle is, you know. It makes it so even though it seem like, you know, some people think you're lazy because you're doing that. But you know, these kids are like walking around with like heavy backpacks all day. They fucking hitchhiked; they crossed the country, you know what I mean? They build their camp every night, they're not lazy.*

Further, for some youth there is an ethic of 'anti-formal' work that contextualizes and influences their alternative way of living. This ethic is less focused on traditional models of work and income and more focused on nurturing talents, pursuing passions, and considering alternative ways of 'making a living', as explained by some youth:

*Somebody could choose not to live life working, you know, their own way. And maybe they want to be an artist, so they just sit in their house and paint all day or, uh, they want to be a musician so they sit there and play music all day.*

*I don't like society really or like, I'd rather, I wish there was like, there was no jobs at all. Like we'd all just like work, like have a life, you know but that's just not the way it is.*

*Nobody wants to realize that there's alternate ways of living and I think it's important to get it out here that just because someone's panning on the street, it doesn't mean you should be looking down on him...I tell people all the time – they tell me to get a job – and I say, 'quit your job; you're jealous!'*

There is a thread of this 'alternative living' theme within some (not all) stories, but it is unclear whether this sentiment drives all decision-making for those claiming they are living alternatively.

The story of anti-capitalism is not presented by all the youth participants, but many challenged the status quo; however, perhaps this reflects a more subtle commentary about nurturing or wanting to create a more caring society. One service provider explains how many of these young people are motivated to foster ideas about humanity and equity in the face of the harsh reality of homelessness:

*I mean at some point we have to really listen to what this means. Like what do these, like we keep building studies around exploring some of these issues but I don't know, like are we afraid to talk about um, common humanity and spirituality or, like we're afraid it seems to actually talk about how it is that we're living in the world together. But that's about structural inequality and so if we have to go through, we do have to determine that we need to tear some of these structures down together but to do that we're going to have to, it's a lot of reengineering and reorganizing.... And yeah, I think we're at a critical time of change, I'm hoping that we'll all grab hold of it.*

## **Dreams**

Most youth were working in order to create a future for themselves, even if they were currently informally working, there were often thoughtful descriptions of what they would like for themselves in the future. When asked about 'living a good life' and what it would look like, most youth reflected traditional ideas of stability, sustainability, and security. As these youth share:

*Food in my fridge. A place to wake up that's mine, with food in my fridge and now worries.... Basically, needs are taken care of – when I wake up I don't have to do the menial tasks that give me what I need.*

*Making enough money that I can pay off a mortgage and a job that makes me happy because really, above everything else, happiness is what, you know, stirs me.*

Some youth participants describe wanting to have a ‘good job’ that allows them to build an adult life – maybe with a partner and children – and acquire conventional goods, such as a house and a car:

*Money, you know, bank account, nice house, cars, you know. Wife on my arm, you know, 2.3 kids, little dog or something, you know, the normal lifestyle.*

*Living a good life would be to have a house, you know what I mean, to have a house, a backyard, food to eat. I'd feel like I was rich if I had a car in the driveway.... And to actually live in a, I mean not live in the country, but living like just the outskirts of town, you know, walking distance from, you know, something. That would be my dream lifestyle right there.*

Even living unconventional lives most youth participants described somewhat conventional situations. For some participants, there is difference in how they describe ‘settling down’ – it is not about white picket fences, rather it is about sustainable living and a meaningful life, as these youth describe:

*My dream circumstance would be to work, get enough money to get a plot of land and like materials to like build a farm or something. Start off small with just a couple of livestock, then work my way up, plant shit, just sustain it that way and then just like, have a family there. That would be what I'd want it to look like. But nothing else really.*

*I would wake up because the rooster would be screaming like hell and I would want to kill him. (laughter) And I'd feed my dogs and have breakfast, then I'd feed the animals on the farm and then I'll start working the garden and start working on the land. Probably keep on building because it would take me forever to build a house. And keep working, and then take a break and then just go into my pond, which I'll have one and then go swimming because it will be so hot in the summertime and then I'll go back working and then I'll pick up the vegetables and I'll kill some chickens for my meal and then I'll have my meal in the night and then I'll relax and then I'll just enjoy it. I'd be on my porch playing banjos, smoking cigarettes and drinking my moonshine and then I'll go to bed and I'll restart again because I'll have to keep working on*

*my house and keep working on my land. I'd like to have somebody. I believe in marriage, I want to get married one day and have kids. It would be nice to have a little girl running all around, come back home full of mud be like, dammit I told you not to go there. (laughter)*

The youth participants vision a future that is very different than the present they inhabit. For many, they pursue activities that are of value to them – as the quotations above suggest – and a part of which is valuing having animals in their lives. Many of the youth participants had dogs in their care at the time of the interview, and these ‘pets’ were seen as friends, traveling buddies, protection, and security. A number of youth imagined working with animals rather than with other people as their dream work:

*Maybe something with animals, like dogs, but I don't know what. I'm not a vet.... That's a bit ridiculous for me, but work at like an animal shelter kind of thing. Like, not the pound or whatever but just like, like a small time animal shelter, that wouldn't be too bad.*

*I want to do so many things. I want to work for animal control but I also want to work for like an animal rescue kind of thing.... I want to create my own organization for animals.... Not so much a shelter but so much as like a rehabilitation. Like those animals out there who are shunned because they don't like certain things.*

These dreams reflect part of their philosophy of alternative, non-mainstream, ‘back to the land’ orientations – a more communitarian way of life. Perhaps these youth are searching for a less materialistic way to live and hope to be self-sufficient, in which case informal work becomes a means to live such a life. The survival skills the youth participants acquired while living homeless – willingness to work hard, for long hours, for little financial return – can provide the resilience to realize such dreams. Some youth spoke of ‘hippie campgrounds’ they frequented during their travels – these are privately owned spaces where young people can camp outside and

be left alone for little or no cost as long as one contributes to collective labor. In this quotation, a youth is describing his experience at such a place:

*It's just, like these punk rock kids, well they're not kids anymore, they're all old and haggard now but like they, like somebody inherited a bunch of land and um, they turned it into a farm for like tax reasons and you can, it's pretty much you just go there and...for like travelling kids. I've done stuff like that but you don't, that's not really work. It's work but you don't get paid.*

Lastly, there were the youth who hoped to one day create a role for themselves serving other youth. They talked about being 'social workers', running drop-in centers, opening businesses that other youth could work at, and many other such ventures:

*To open up my own restaurant. A small little ma and pa's restaurant, greasy spoon, holds about fifty to seventy people and maybe some shows at night, a lot of Bluegrass shows. But only open for breakfast and uh, lunch. No dinners and it would be over by a senior citizen's home because I figure, they always want their eggs nice and early, all they can drink coffee (laughter).*

*I don't even know if I'll like the work. Like I've done it a couple of times now, being like a youth worker.... But I don't know, like I'm really just going down this path because of my past experience. And it started out as kind of a joke, being like ah, like[to the youth shelter staff], 'Look at you, like it's Friday night and you're at work and you're just watching movies and eating chips and pop.' I'm going to do this job.*

Another youth explained how the restaurant he dreamed of would not only provide temporary employment for travelers passing through or other homeless people, but would also contribute to the broader community in a positive way:

*I've always figured that any traveler kid that's coming through town can work at my place, be a dishwasher or a waiter and you know, if they want to clean off the tables for a minute, they've got a lunch, you know, they've got something to eat. You know, it would be mainly for homeless people but obviously I'd need to make, I need to break even. That's my, I don't care, as long as I have ten bucks in my pocket I'm happ... break even and keep the community fed.*

The youth participants spoke of diverse dreams for their lives. Many individual and unique ‘dream jobs’ were discussed during the interviews with youth participants; however, as presented here, there are some themes around working with animals, ‘working the land’, working with at-risk youth, supporting travelling, and being creative (e.g., being a musician or artist) that stood out. One youth expressed all of these and also added some clarification about why she is seeking meaningful work in her life after witnessing the passing of her uncles:

*I've been contemplating this for so long because it's like, at first I thought I wanted to become, like when I was younger I was like, when I was going through that school program, I was trying to go to medical school for like a doctor, something along those lines....For me now, because I've got so much like, so much good karma to me, I would love to open a place like the drop-in. Somewhere else, not here, like because they already have something like this and if I wasn't doing that, I would love to do like just, it sounds stupid but like create music somewhere. Like being famous for music and travelling the world, and if I'm not doing that it's really simple, I just want to be in the woods with my house and like a lot of dogs, a few chickens and cows and then my farm or whatever. And some day my dream job will be something that I don't feel like, I'm like wasting away you know, and I'm actually, like if I, like I had two uncles that passed away, like got killed at their work and they were getting paid thirteen bucks an hour you know. Like something like that isn't worth my time.*

Perhaps though, the time the youth participants spent focused on survival has, in fact, instilled a work ethic and philosophical morality that appreciates less as more, a need for meaningful work, a need to serve the most vulnerable (i.e., the earth, animals, and young people), and a community consciousness as the components of personhood. The service providers that support, advocate, and shelter these young people spend significant time listening to, honoring, and creating innovative means of engaging youth in activities and employment that is meaningful, which may be why these youth are still able to dream.

## **SERVICE PROVIDER WISDOM**

Interviews with service providers focused on how they understood the experiences of the youth they served in relation to formal and informal work. Organizations across Canada are responding to this reality as outlined in the service provider inventory (Appendix A). Service providers shared perspectives and affirmed many of the experiences reported by the youth participants. The service providers are, in many ways, best situated to determine what interventions are most appropriate for addressing the employment and income issues of homeless youth.

In response to youth-identified needs, some programs are focusing less on employment and job training, and instead engaging young people in educational experiences, arts-based activities, in-house work experiences, and, in a few cases, providing support for informal work. These are the programs that resonate with the youth in this study. Young people see themselves as learners and as teachers; they desire more from an organization than to be told they need a job. In many ways, this ‘get a job’ conversation is a clear indication that an organization/service/program does not understand or appreciate their lived experiences, and may even deny the real difficulties and challenges in their lives.

Presented here are some reflections that demonstrate pragmatic approaches and innovative ways of working with and for homeless youth. Organizations and approaches that honor diversity, are responsive and adaptable, focus on education and literacy issues rather than employment status, and create non-judgmental space (mental and physical) for youth to evaluate themselves and envision a new reality, can perhaps support youth to attain meaningful, gainful, stable work in the future.

## Honoring Diversity: No Two Youth are the Same

The stories and experiences of youth homelessness are complicated and come with no simple solutions. Service providers/policy-makers/program planners strive to consider and accommodate these realities yet some youth may feel excluded and struggle to ask for help, as this youth suggests:

*Most places that you go...you get kicked out. So then it's like street kids feel weird, you know. A lot of them have warrants and tickets, so they think that if you have to like put your name, and a lot of them don't have ID, that's another thing. So it's all these little things that you have to put in perspective.*

When asked what made some youth smoothly transition into formal work and why others did not, service providers tend to argue that they did not know – that is, they saw each young person as unique and individual – there is no ‘formula’ that fits all young people and in fact, as this service provider expresses, their assumptions about who will ‘succeed’ and who will not are often incorrect:

*I don't know how to answer that because there's some people that – I've been working here for a long time – and there are some people that, when I started, I would have never thought would have gotten as far as they have, like in life. And that's maybe really bad on my part and other people that I thought, oh they're only going to be here for you know, a month or two and like eight years later they're still here. And so, I have no idea. [laughter]*

Service providers work tirelessly to innovate, adapt, and provide a continuum of programs and services that meet these complex needs. Most of the service providers identified different employment related programs they offered within a continuum of other services:

*We also have an employment resource centre here, and it's been operating for eleven or twelve years. And so we've um, you know over those years many, many of our, hundreds of our youth have gotten jobs, whether it's temp jobs or into job training programs, permanent employment to apprenticeships to um,*

*going back to school and studying for different careers...Yeah, so we've seen firsthand the effect of our work with kids around employment.*

Some programs pay youth for their participation in different programs when they can, which numerous youth identified as an attractive approach and a reason they participated in the past:

*I was in this, like a program thing, where they pay you to learn film school kind of thing.*

*Them programs are so good, I mean at the end of the program I was in I had a WHMIS certificate, I had a CPR certificate and uh, a couple of other little things man. It was real good, I liked that, it was a good program. They also paid you too right.*

In part as an incentive, in part to help establish new relationships to making money, and in part because they want to demonstrate to youth that their time and work is valued – a perspective most young people rarely hear about themselves – service providers felt it was important to create opportunities for the youth they serve to contribute and be compensated:

*It's not every day but it's about two or three times a week, where people um, get paid ten dollars an hour for whatever it is that needs to be done that day, be it shoveling, be it helping out in the kitchen, being washing all the chairs in the cafeteria.*

*On the street we're called the Liar's Club. Because you can come to us, you can write down a goal, whatever it is and we pay you, once you're enrolled in our program. And so, a lot of people start off, and we expect this, we expect people to come in and you know, think they're taking advantage of us getting money. You know, we're paying people to come in and sit down and think about their choices and their life. So whether or not they go out and do that goal, we're not paying them to complete goals, we're paying them to think about their goals. And so they think they're manipulating us, taking this money but as they go through the program and they keep coming in to get that money, the goals start to make sense to them and they start following those goals. So where it starts with them thinking that they're manipulating us, in the end there's a reversal and all of a sudden they wake up and they're just like, holy, this program has*

*manipulated me, I'm actually doing these things now. That's really cool. No, I've had lots of times where people have shown me their goals when they started and when they stopped and they, this story comes up all the time where it's just like, look at these, these weren't even goals. These were just for me to fifteen dollars, but now look at over the past couple of months. You know, I'm buying food and doing my laundry with this money and that kind of stuff.*

Further, some programs offer internships to youth who are looking for work experience but might need a very supportive environment to build a marketable skill set. In particular for youth living with mental health issues, in-house work is ideal as they can work in an environment they know and around people they trust. This is important to building self-esteem in a space that understands their situation, as this service provider suggests:

*[Two youth] got rolled for their bus tickets. So they come in with this great attitude, saying, hey man is there something that I can do, like can I work and you guys could like buy me a bus ticket and I went, well let's check petty cash. Okay, clean up the food bank, clean up the clothing bank. And so you know, it just gelled; it was one of those moments where it's like, well how hard is this? And then, you know,...it's sort of a three tier program. It's um, like very low functioning, say mental health, hugely entrenched in addictions people will stay in-house and just work at the organization and so they're close to the staff and we know if they fall apart, we've got them. And then the ones who are just coming down and are still a little vulnerable or whatever, or have medication and are working, you know are fairly stable, we can send them out to our sister agencies.*

Service providers argue that all social and legal agencies, as well as the broader community, can play a part in creating different conditions for homeless young people – circumstances where they feel included, supported, and invited to use their individual talents and unique gifts to serve the community:

*What I'm trying to say is that what these young people have lost is their sense of importance in the world in lots of ways and how their voice actually matters and how what they think matters. So what we try to do*

*is incorporate ways that they have, that they see that in fact what they do matters and what they think matters and to publicly profile that.*

## **Service Responsiveness and Adaptability**

Clearly, the participants in this study have layers of both positive and negative experiences with both formal and informal work. This reality requires a multi-faceted response – that is a continuum of services that reflect where the youth are at and how they might create meaningful change in their lives, as determined by them. As the following quotation illustrates, youth accessing different services related to employment can be treated harshly:

*I've lived on the street for a really long time throughout my life. It's really hard because like, you come in [wanting to access services] and people don't, some people don't understand you, you know. Some people do and they're really nice and some people aren't and I've had a couple of people who were super nice to me and they help me out.... Then some people are just like, 'oh you're just scum, blah, blah, blah.'*

Organizations that are successful in attracting street youth are quick to adapt and try to accommodate the diverse needs presented by youth. Adaptations include expanding employment-related programming to include broader professional and business communities to participate in activities – even when doing so requires extensive organizing and consideration of how to maintain the culture of the organization without compromising relationship with the external environment:

*And we really are paying attention to how to implement having professionals, outside professionals come into our space without disrupting the program we're already doing and keeping the integrity first of our program and then having these people come in.*

Beyond exposure to employment related programs or being connected with professional or business people who might provide formal work, the youth participants suggested there were

other adaptations that would create more opportunities for employment, such as having services available all day, everyday (i.e., 24/7), having a shower for washing up, provide laundry service so youth can ‘make themselves presentable’, and provide support around negotiating processes and acquiring employment related documentation, as this youth articulates:

*In order to get a real job, I would let them use [a drop-in address] as their address, you know. I would hook them up with a bank account. They could have a shower here everyday, you know.... I mean, the drop-in is only open, you know, ten until two most days...so how is anybody who's going to work at six o'clock in the morning going to come in and have a shower? In order to get that first paycheque and get that first rent or damage deposit, you know, they need help with that if they actually want to do it. So having a 24 hour service would be pretty good.*

In general, however, the youth overwhelmingly supported the efforts of most drop-in services and credited street youth organizations as the places where they were fed, clothed, and cared for the most. Often developing a relationship with particular service providers is a first step toward change for the youth participants:

*Thank God for the youth drop-in, you know. They kind of feed us and I'd get my buddies to grab me food from here as well, you know, and there's the food bank and everything.*

*Honestly, I just think everybody needs [a strong support and advocate]. That's all I can say to that because I mean, it really just, it really honestly just takes a good friend and a good person that actually like gives a damn what you do with your life, you know.... [One service provider in particular], she'll do anything for you, like if you need help, she can help you.*

Service organizations are adapting their work and responding to the needs of youth – this is an ongoing and constant practice. Developing drop-in services and on-site amenities to ease the stress of street life is a significant part of adapting and responding, however, service providers are also rethinking ‘employment’ programming and are beginning to shift the focus to other intersecting issues, such as literacy and education.

## Education and Literacy versus Employment

The youth participants hold strong feelings about access to education. Few of them had finished high school and few were enrolled in school, although some did identify that they were trying to access GED programming. Despite being ‘drop-outs’ or behind in school, the youth very much recognized the value of education, enjoyed learning, and saw education as a tool for their future, yet in many ways were not sure it was something they could achieve in a large part, ironically, due to the formal educational system:

*Like school is just not meant for me because I like don't process it properly or something or they just don't want to take the time to like teach me. Like I'm a one-on-one person kind of thing, like it was an alternative school too that said that, which is really weird and my social worker's sitting right there and she was like, yeah maybe it's not. And I'm like, but I want to go to school, you don't understand. Like, I love learning, I learn every day, you know. Every day you learn something new and your personality changes and you learn something else and you want to take that in and you want to open your mind up to a lot of different things but if nobody's willing to help you, really what's the point? I wonder why people don't go to school, no wonder why people drop out of school, no wonder why, you know, they don't have a good enough job that society wants you to have.*

Service providers recognize negative learning experiences as detrimental to self-concept and self-esteem. Programming that supports youth in exploring learning options are important to bridging this experience, as one service provider explains:

*So many of our kids, they did not succeed in school and um, you know, would drop out. And so, picking up the pieces of their school, that part of their life is just like facing the demons in their lives right. Whether it's learning disabilities or behavioural issues or just life instabilities, whatever the reasons were that caused them to fail and drop out of school, it just represents huge failure in their lives.*

Even if they are interested in gaining a GED or high school diploma, it may be difficult to expand beyond due to limited resources. One youth highlights the challenges of accessing a post-

secondary education (and the employment and earning opportunities that come with it) because of living in poverty:

*I think everyone should be able to get a university education for free because like, well I think it should be everyone's right to have a good job and to have a good job, you need to have like a good education. And well, I can't get a good education if I'm too poor to afford it, which means, basically saying, if you're poor, you're going to stay poor because you can't afford to be rich.*

In response to these educational realities, many youth serving organizations are offering alternative education experiences – sometimes one-on-one, sometimes in small groups, sometimes academic, sometimes trade oriented – to engage youth in learning in an environment where they are more comfortable. Service providers notice how different young people respond when they are learning in a supportive environment:

*So what was more important was to let them know that they already had a predetermined strength, which was resilience. So when they are introduced to the organization and they're introduced to our climate, um, that's the first thing that we instill in them, is a sense of pride in their resilience and that that is a hard won, self-determined state of being, not something that you can go to school to get or something that you have to have lived through a certain amount of hardship and survived it to be crowned with the term. So it's something that they take, they really do see as um, you know, empowered you know.*

When given appropriate opportunities and options other than employment training, youth tend to choose schooling, as this service provider explains:

*Jobs is not the focus, education is and they can go, what they do, any youth who's living here can go, if they are not working or going to their own school, there's an expectation that they join our school for their gym program every morning. So then they get to look at the teachers, they get to look at the other students and then we start saying, okay, so are you going to go to this school or are you going back to your old school, what are you doing about this? And a lot of them do end up in our school.*

Further, innovative and alternative learning models are considered very effective for engaging youth in ways other than traditional schooling models. One service provider shares their experiences with this approach:

*I would say that any um, strategy that is engaging an alternative method of either learning or um, education or of you know, enhancing capacities, is going to work. Like I think those are the ones that are innovative, those programs, and I think the arts are absolutely, they work really well with youth that experience some street involvement.*

A key aspect of programs that focus on education and literacy is creating safe spaces for youth to find a reprieve from street life, where they feel supported and cared for and can consider what changes they can and want to make in their lives.

### **Creating ‘Space’ for Self-evaluation**

Youth participants recognize how street life can erode self-confidence and motivation, leaving youth with few positive ideas about their self or what they might be able to contribute. One youth articulates how this can create challenges to acquiring (or believing one can acquire) employment:

*Because a lot of it's self motivation, self respect. If you don't feel good about yourself, how do you write a resume? To be honest, how do you write your good qualities if you don't know what they are? If you don't feel that. So I just think we need to like boost people's self respect and like stuff like that.*

Service providers appreciate this reality – they see youth on a daily basis who appear ‘beaten down’ or eroded after time on the street. As focusing on education instead of employment can create ways for youth to discover new things about themselves so too can ‘safe spaces’ for self-exploration – either through goal setting exercises or arts-based activities. The role of the service organization is to provide space, time, and positive support for youth to reflect upon and

reconsider themselves, and to assist in developing positive ways of managing frustration and anxiety. In some cases, as this service provider explains, reminding youth of the growth and change they *have* accomplished – rather than focusing on deficits, poor choices, and ‘failures’ – can have a profound effect:

*So it's kind of helping people get a different perspective and helping them manage that way, that you know, when you're very anxious and frustrated it's hard to think about things rationally. And so what we do is try to create a calm space where they can think about it more rationally and I think that's one of the more important things that we do, helping them manage that frustration about it. And then after that, once they've gotten through that and are thinking clearly about things, I think it's a lot easier for them to realistically think about [their future].*

Another service provider comments on the importance of self-evaluation versus worker evaluation as a tool for youth to determine, on their own terms, where they are at:

*One of the things that I guess makes [a program] successful for individuals is that they have the right to determine how they move through the process... I think what makes any kind of change or transition successful is if it's determined, self-determined. And so, why I believe, for example that the arts are one of the best ways to do this...is because it's probably one of the only ...engagement strategies or whatever, that allows you to determine your own, like to assess your own skills through it. So for example, if you're part of this project of putting a tile mosaic together, with another group, if your hands are shaking because you haven't had enough food or you've been using the night before or whatever, if they're shaking, the information that you get from the process of trying to nip tiles...for the project, that gives you the information that you need. You don't need a worker telling you, 'Gee your hand's really shaking, da, da, da'. So the thing about the arts process is that it allows you um, to engage in self-assessment on a constant basis. It's immediately reflective; it's an immediate and accessible reflective engagement method.... It enlists self-determination and that's really, you know, that's inherent to feeling successful or satisfied in any experience, work, living, anything. And, again, we're operating on the assumption that everybody has capacities, either that can help them move to whatever next step they need to have a healthy, whole life or they have access, or they can figure out how to access those capacities.... I think what makes any*

*experience successful is that it's self-determined and you need to create enough room and flexibility to support that determination.*

Providing opportunities for youth to rediscover themselves in a positive, supportive environment is pivotal to personal growth, particularly during the tumultuous time of adolescence. Service providers who work with youth – walk with them through a process of self-discovery – are more likely to increase their understandings of the unique challenges of individuals, respond more appropriately to all who present at their doors, and ultimately, will be more likely to influence the lives of young homeless people in ways that nurture their resilience, wisdom, caring, and strength and encourage youth to pursue and realize their dreams.

## RECOMMENDATIONS and CONCLUSION

As we consider the experiences of these young people vis-à-vis work and labor scenarios, several core questions illuminate our discussions: How can we further develop the civil society's (and perhaps more importantly, the business community's) understanding about root causes of poverty AND the capacities and skills of young homeless people as a labor-force with a strong work ethic that they can mentor rather than feel at odds with? How do we encourage communities and schools to support 'at-risk' youth in meaningful ways to keep them in school while they are homeless and assist them in finding housing should they want it? How often can the public be reminded that street youth have dream jobs, too? Finally, how do we invite the public to critically reconsider who safe streets legislation keeps safe, particularly in light of the experiences of the young people in this study?

### Recommendations

- 1. Multi-faceted responses are necessary to address the underlying reasons why young people work informally.** Ticketing is not a deterrent. The youth voices presented in this document clearly outline why ticketing is not a deterrent. Ticketing does not address the circumstances of impoverishment and homelessness that ultimately create situations where there are no other options. Policy makers and law enforcement officials must question the futility of this approach, as the youth do, and develop more appropriate, comprehensive means of addressing the poverty of young people, other than criminalizing them for attempting to survive.
- 2. Advocacy work related to employment and youth homelessness needs to challenge public perceptions and focus on building public awareness and education about the hows and whys of poverty.** When asked what they thought could be done to improve their situations, many youth suggested that the public needed to be educated. Perhaps this is a response to the levels of harassment and ignorance they experience during their interactions with the public, however, it could be argued that even political leaders – often considered more informed than the

‘general public’ – often misunderstand the complexity of youth homelessness. Advocacy work that focused on influencing political leaders, business leaders, and the broader community could create new opportunities for youth.

**3. Youth serving organizations need to continue encouraging youth to determine the service delivery and content within organizations.** As service providers indicate, youth driven enterprises tend to result in greater engagement and buy-in – if the youth keep coming back, the organization has achieved something. When service organizations build authentic relationships with youth, they are better able to respond and adapt to emerging needs. Providing a broad choice of activities or programs is helpful, but most important is that the youth feel understood – engaging them in deciding how and which services should be offered is key to demonstrating this understanding.

**4. Employment programming for youth who are homeless should focus on self-assessment activities while providing guidance related to broad aspects of securing and maintaining employment such as literacy, education, basic life skills (e.g., communication, comportment, commitment), relationship to authority, and so forth.** For many reasons most homeless youth do not necessarily have the skills to successful transition from the street to a job easily – often it is a cyclical process that involves many attempts. As the service providers argued, youth organizations are best off supporting youth in assessing themselves and determining what their next steps should be, and often traditional models of resume-building, interview role-playing, and providing access to job search technology or resources are inadequate in the long-term. However, inroads can be made when youth are given the space to consider and articulate what they really want, and through a supported process, can achieve.

**5. Encourage all community members to become involved in addressing and responding to issues of homelessness and poverty.** While it is characterized as a problem for a few, the reality is that homelessness and poverty affects everyone. Significant amounts of tax

dollars are used each year to ‘address’ youth homelessness, however, most funding is distributed within government sectors such as social services, justice, education, and health. It is not that these programs do not need or deserve funding; the concern is whether citizens are getting a fair return for their tax dollar investment. The more involved the broader community becomes in these issues, the more pressure the ‘public’ can put on governments to respond more efficiently, and ideally, in a way that supports and nurtures homeless and at-risk youth to achieve their life ambitions.

## **Conclusion**

While the experiences and insights of young people living on the street and those who support and care for them describe the complexities and nuances of the intersections between homelessness and labor, the grand narrative seems less complicated and intricate. Popular public myths suggest that street youth are unintelligible, lazy and delinquent – in fact these young people appear thoughtful and reflective with a strong work ethic that is steeped within civil society, not outside of it. Rather than deviant and criminal in nature, youth participants increasingly are seeking out employment that is deemed legal and lawful within their contexts. And this seems to be the core finding from our work – these young people cannot very easily engage in formal work – there is not much available or much economic incentive to do so. As such, they are left with informal labor that provides them with survival money, pride, self worth and accomplishment despite the belittlement, harassment and mockery that comes with such activities. It is a rational survivalist decision on their part, for some it fits a lifestyle of travel and independence, for others it provides the daily support to exist within street culture. What is troubling is that this labor continues to maintain street youths’ statuses of marginality and social exclusion at the same time as it allows them a means to survive.

*Interviewer: Is there anything else at all that you want to say about any of this?*

*Youth: Uh, I should probably work now. (laughter)*

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## **Appendix A – Service provider inventory**

### **SERVICE PROVIDER INVENTORY**

This inventory highlights specific service providers from across Canada who work with homeless, street-involved, and at-risk youth. Some of these organizations are small and provide specific services related to education, employment, literacy, or arts-based personal development. However, others are established, comprehensive service centers where young people can access housing, addictions and mental health counseling, can receive medical care, receive support negotiating system supports, and so on.

This list does not include ALL organizations, agencies, and services dedicated to working with youth. Instead, this inventory reflects organizations named by youth participants in interviews as being most helpful in their experiences, as well as the agencies who are known for providing unique and effective care for young people and with whom the research team members have established relationships.

Highlighted in the organizational descriptions are the philosophical approach of organizations and program activities related to education, employment, and life skills building (including artistic development).

#### **Out of the Rain Youth Night Shelter**

*Victoria BC*

Ages served: 15-25 years

Out of the Rain is a multi-faceted program designed to bring together the arts community in order to create awareness about homelessness. Through the arts, creating positive connections, increasing awareness about homelessness and bridging communities of individuals that would otherwise not connect is the objective of this program.

#### **StreetLink**

*Victoria BC*

Ages served: Adults

Streetlink provides the very basic of needs to Victoria's downtown street-entrenched populations: shelter, food and hygiene. It is a link to other Cool Aid services such as the Community Health Centre and other services such as the Open Door, Detox Services and Pacifica Housing. It is the primary resource for the homeless in Victoria and a central program of Cool Aid.

**Broadway Youth Resource Centre**

*Vancouver BC*

Ages served: 13 – 24 years

Broadway Youth Resource Centre is a comprehensive youth service that provides access to education and literacy programs, employment and job training, counseling – mental health and addictions, client advocacy, service co-ordination, clinical health care, and housing for youth, with some programs specific to young people identifying as Aboriginal. As well, they honor youth culture by providing access to phone and computer usage, offering snacks, and celebrating birthdays.

**Directions Youth Service Centre/ Street Youth Job Action**

*Vancouver BC*

Ages served: 21 and under for most programs (day programs: 18 and under)

Street Youth Job Action (SYJA) is a social enterprise initiative of Directions Youth Services Centre that provides mentoring and development opportunities for homeless youth in Vancouver. The project is set up to give homeless youth a chance to learn a set of skills and behaviours to prepare them for the workforce – soft skills like teamwork, punctuality, communication, getting along with others, a strong work ethic, and what it means to be part of a community.

**Purple Thistle**

*Vancouver BC*

Ages served: 15 to 30 years

The Thistle is a youth-run arts and activism centre that offers full-time, paid training programs during the day, focused around arts, community work and/or publishing. Classes offered focus on photo cru, silk screening, video, animation, painting, life drawing, comics and other youth determined activities.

**The Doorway**

*Calgary AB*

Ages served: 17-24 years

To assist young people exiting the street culture in becoming self-sufficient and engaged members of society while also engaging members of the community as partners in this transition. The Doorway is a human process, not a program. Engaged citizens participate with and respond to young people whose lives have taken them to the street for their survival, and who are now seeking a way to integrate back into society. At The Doorway, the movement from street to mainstream is managed by a step-by-step contracting process, shared by the individual and Doorway volunteers. This business planning approach offers a way to think and problem solve personal change. The Doorway operates in a casual business environment, minimizing culture shock and increasing the comfort level for the young people who have made the journey to the office. They provide computer workstations, phones, fax and Internet access to young people who are in the business of building a new life. Further, The Doorway engages in advocacy, direct service provision, public education, program planning, and policy development.

**Youth Emergency Shelter Society**

*Edmonton AB*

Ages served: 15-18 years

The Community Enhancement Program consists of three components available to residential and non-residential youth and families. The Shelter Program serves youth between the ages of 15 and 18 who have nowhere to live and no one to turn to. This program provides young people with immediate necessities such as shelter, food and clothing, and it also serves as a referral program to make sure desperate and alone youth can access a wide variety of community programs. Youth can access the shelter program as often as they need, but each intake is for one night only. The Shelter Program is intended to open the door to teens who are not yet ready or able to commit to positive lifestyle changes in an effort to keep them safe and hopefully begin a relationship leading to further assistance.

**EGADZ**

*Saskatoon SK*

Ages served: 12-19 (some programs 12-17)

The Saskatoon Downtown Youth Center Inc. (EGADZ) is a community based inter-agency organization that provides resources and actively supports services that empower youth at risk to help themselves to reach their full potential. EGADZ provides a safe acceptable place for youth at risk with links to the families, and has the support of the community. EGADZ has youth involved in expressing their needs and determining services they require. EGADZ offers a wide variety of formal and informal programs including a drop-in component, teen parenting program, day support, street outreach, school support program, and other programs specific to particular target groups. This is accomplished through client advocacy, education and literacy, housing provision, and direct service provision.

**Street Culture Kidz Project**

*Regina SK*

Ages served: Children 6-13 and Youth 24-30

Street Culture Kidz Project connects artist and organizations working with children and youth across Canada, and connects diverse community sectors with the Arts including Justice, Social Services, Health and Education. The Project gathers and disseminates research data to support the value of the arts in children's lives while also sharing information on the benefits of the arts to children and youth with communities across Canada. The Project works with communities to develop pilot sites; modeling innovative and emerging infrastructure and programming.

**Resource Assistance for Youth (RAY)**

*Winnipeg MB*

Ages served: 15-29 years

Resource Assistance for Youth (RAY) is a community-based social service organization committed to helping at-risk youth and young adults find a way back from the street. RAY is non-judgmental and non-partisan, employing a harm-reduction approach to all interactions with youth in need. RAY provides emergency youth services to get youth off the street and to improve the social, health and economic well being of youth-at-risk and youth-in-trouble through provision of information, advocacy and referral that will empower youth to make informed choices.

**Covenant House**

*Toronto ON*

Ages served: 16-24 years

Covenant House Toronto is a leading expert in and advocate for homeless youth in Canada. They serve the largest homeless youth population and provide the most comprehensive range of housing and support services through their facilities and in collaboration with community partners, to meet the needs of street youth. Flexible and responsive to the emerging needs of homeless youth, Covenant House's actions are supported by in-depth information and research. As Canada's largest youth shelter, Covenant House Toronto opens doors of opportunity and hope to homeless youth. They provide 24/7 crisis care and have the widest range of services under one roof, including education, counseling, health care and employment assistance.

**Evergreen – Yonge Street Mission**

*Toronto ON*

Ages served: 25 years and under

One of five branches of Yonge Street Mission, Evergreen focuses on meeting the complex needs of Toronto's large street youth population. A wide variety of programs and services are available to street-involved youth under 25. Evergreen is a safe place where street youth can rest, eat, obtain health care, receive parental relief and get help with finding a job or a place to stay. Here, street youth can find a place to belong, someone to talk to and people who genuinely care.

**Sketch**

*Toronto ON*

Ages served: 15-29 years

Sketch creates opportunities for street involved and homeless people ages 15-29, to engage in the arts in a cross-discipline studio environment or in the community. The organizational philosophy is that all people are creative and need the chance to tell or retell stories in whatever way they want to tell or retell them. Sketch views everyone as a part of making history regardless of what a life situation indicates. Street involved and homeless youth seek alternatives to traditional forms of education, therapy and skill building; through the arts,

**Youthlink Innercity**

*Toronto ON*

Ages served: 12-24 years

YOUTHLINK offers a unique set of services and programs for vulnerable youth between the ages of 12-24 and their families or caregivers. All services and programs are voluntary, confidential and free of charge. Youthlink strives to ensure that all youth feel accepted and can explore their strengths, acknowledge differences, cope with difficulties and make positive life choices. This is accomplished through providing counseling services, family support, residential program, co-op housing, inner city drop in, youth skills zone, community outreach, access to clinical health care, direct service provision, education and literacy support, and service co-ordination.

**The Dam Youth Drop-in**

*Mississauga ON*

Ages served: Youth (ages not identified)

Drop-in Programs: At-risk youth of need a place where they can be accepted, supported and challenged to reach their full potential. In a society that is seeing an increase in violence, gangs, and addictions, The Dam that focus on prevention and deal with the root issues.

Young Moms Programs: Each year 6-10 teen moms enter this program. The Young Moms Program is a community of young moms, volunteers and DAM staff that seek to be positive and supportive of each other, growing into healthy individuals and families, through weekly support groups and mentoring.

Outreach: The Dam speaks to 5,000 students a year, plus teachers, parents principals and vice principals to encourage youth to make positive life choices.

**Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa**

*Ottawa ON*

Ages served: 12 and up

The Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa (YSB) serves youth aged 12 and older. We focus on youth with difficulties affecting their physical and/or emotional well-being and development. YSB's philosophy statement recognizes prevention as an important element of the centre's role in the community and as an aspect of treatment. YSB does this by promoting change in youth to enable them to become productive members of their community and attain their full personal potential. YSB attempts to empower young people and support them in making effective, positive and enduring health and lifestyle decisions. Building on the strengths of the family and the youth's immediate community, YSB delivers services in the young person's own environment. YSB promotes intervention strategies which are readily accessible, immediate and least intrusive and coordinate appropriate resources by working collaboratively with other service providers.

**Operation Go Home**

*Ottawa ON*

Ages served: Youth (ages not identified)

Operation Go Home operates the Job Action Centre, an employment centre that provides youth with the skills to market themselves to employers. The Job Action Centre provides youth with the resources they need to be successful in their job search. The staff in the Centre assists youth and potential employers in finding suitable employment based on skills, interest and education. The goal is to ensure that youth find and keep jobs. The staff supports employers and youth once they start working to ensure that both parties are satisfied. For those youth who do not complete their education, finding a career is essential for their livelihood. The Job Action Centre provides youth with assistance in career choices and not just any job that is available in the current market place.

**Good Shepherd Centres**

*Hamilton ON*

Ages served: 16-24 years

Good Shepherd Youth Services is committed to helping youth get off the streets and back on track with a variety of programs and services ranging from emergency food and shelter through counseling to skills training and education.

**Dans la Rue/Chez Pops**

*Montreal QC*

Ages served: 12-24 years

Dans la Rue is a safe place for these kids to go and a place for them to grow. They can find resources that have been tailored to their individual circumstances. But above all, they can draw on an unending source of respect, friendship and encouragement. Dans la Rue has developed various types of reintegration programs for the youth who access their service in order to offer them choices in terms of how they engage with employment. They offer in-house supported employment opportunities, as well as co-op or internship placements with established businesses. Of course, they support resume writing, encourage young people to apply for jobs, and help prepare their clients for interviews and job initiation through providing access to appropriate attire and one-on-one support.

**Youth Quest**

*Moncton NB*

Ages served: 16-24 years

Youth QUEST Central is a multi-resource centre for youth who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The facility includes laundry and shower facilities, academic upgrading, vocational and job-readiness training, information sessions, counselling, directional planning, and artistic and recreational programming.

## **Phoenix Youth Programs**

*Halifax NS*

Ages served: 12-24 years

Phoenix Youth Programs' primary innovative feature is the continuum of care provided throughout our seven programs including: prevention, crisis assistance, emergency shelter, long-term supportive and structured living, independent living, personal skill development, education, health services, and after care services. Phoenix Learning and Employment Centre (PLEC) provides youth with support and learning opportunities for skill development so that they are able to make a successful transition to school. As well, PLEC supports youth to develop the necessary and appropriate skills for meaningful employment. Group Based Employability Skills program is designed to support youth to develop a plan to gain employment, return to school, or a combination of the two. The program includes career exploration and provides youth with practical employability skills: preparing for an interview, writing a resume, developing a cover letter, performing a job search. Workshop topics include: assessing personal strengths and transferable skills, stress and time management, portfolio development and conflict resolution. Participants will earn certification in First Aid, WHIMIS, food handlers, and customer service.

## **ARK Outreach**

*Halifax NS*

Ages served: 16-24 years

The drop-in is a safe place, a place to call home, for street-involved and homeless youth. Like any home, the ARK offers daily meals, showers, laundry facilities, and access to other basics like clothing and socks to the youth who come through the door. Along with these basic needs, youth find a place where they are valued, respected and encouraged to thrive. ARK staff work alongside youth, building relationships and helping them access vital services in the community, such as legal advice, health care, addiction services, mental health support, education, employment, and housing options.

## **For the Love of Learning**

*St. John's NL*

Ages served: 'Resilient Youth' 15-35 years

The main objective of For the Love of Learning is to help resilient youth in the community to both realize and build upon their skill sets. Some of these skill sets include and are not limited to: creativity, literacy, critical thinking, public speaking and entrepreneurship. Most important of all, the project is designed to improve the self-esteem and quality of life of youth participants, and engage them to act, do and initiate positive change in their lives. At minimum, each of the four workshops is comprised of at least 35 hours of in-class work per week. Each workshop runs for approximately 16 weeks. Each workshop also employs at least seven youth full-time through SWASPs, or Student Work and Service Placements, and commissions the work of up to forty youth.

## **Choices for Youth**

*St. John's NL*

Ages served: 16-25 years (in some cases, different ages for different programs)

Choices is a nonprofit, charitable, community-based agency that provides housing and lifestyle development supports to youth in the St. John's metro area. For homeless and at-risk youth, the doors to most employment opportunities are closed. As a fragmented educational experience is often a significant employment and housing barrier for youth, the Youth at Promise Program is integral to the continuum of supports available to youth in the area. The primary goal of the program is to assist youth in obtaining the basic skills necessary for successful transition into further educational or employment related programming. The Peer Mentoring program provides options and tools to open those doors and enable youth to receive crucial guidance and instruction, as well as have opportunity to apply their new skills in a supportive atmosphere that helps build their confidence and self-esteem. Affordable Housing and Employment Project takes a multi-faceted, holistic approach and combine a supportive housing environment with on-site educational opportunities and employment preparation and training.

## **Appendix B – Youth recruitment poster**

[This ethically approved content was written on a piece of cardboard in black marker – in the style of ‘flying a sign’ – to generate interest in and understanding of ‘street culture’]



**A RESEARCH TEAM DIRECTED BY  
JEFF KARABANOW, PhD  
OF THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK  
AT DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY**

**IS LOOKING FOR PARTICIPANTS *AGED 16 TO 24 YEARS* WHO ARE:**

**SLEEPING ROUGH, SQUATTING, AND/OR IDENTIFY AS  
STREET YOUTH OR HOMELESS YOUTH**

**DO YOU WORK/DID YOU WORK WHILE LIVING  
ON THE STREET?**

**WE WOULD LIKE TO INTERVIEW YOU ABOUT  
YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH LEGAL/NON-CRIMINAL WORK.**

**THE INTERVIEW WILL TAKE APPROXIMATELY  
60 MINUTES AND YOU WILL BE PAID \$15.00 FOR YOUR TIME.**

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY  
PLEASE LEAVE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION WITH ARK  
– A PHONE NUMBER OR EMAIL ADDRESS –  
AND WE WILL CONTACT YOU!**

**WE WILL BE HAVING AN INFORMATION SESSION AT ARK ABOUT  
THIS PROJECT ON [INSERT DATE AND TIME].  
IF YOU ARE INTERESTED, PLEASE JOIN US!**

*Funding for this project is provided through:*



**Human Resources and  
Social Development Canada**

**Ressources humaines et  
Développement social Canada**

## Appendix C – Letter of invitation for service providers



Dear Youth Service Provider,

We are pleased to extend an invitation to you to participate in a research study being led by Dr. Jeff Karabanow of Dalhousie University. Dr. Karabanow works extensively with homeless youth, and has led studies in Halifax, across Canada, and in international settings to highlight the experiences and realities of street youth.

Currently, Dr. Karabanow is working with Dr. Jean Hughes (Dalhousie), Dr. Sean Kidd (McMaster), and Dorothy Patterson (ARK Outreach – community partner) on a qualitative research project that explores street youth experiences with both the formal (regulated) and informal (unregulated) non-criminal economies – that is, we are looking at how young people incorporate diverse types of work within their homeless context.

Approximately 20 youth from Halifax participated in the first phase (July/August) of interviewing for the study and we are beginning to interview the second phase (November/December) of 20 youth – totaling 40 conversations with youth. Further – and this is where you come into things – we hope to interview 20 service providers from across Canada about their knowledge and understanding around street youth and ‘work’.

You have received this invitation because of your work with street youth and with agencies that serve street youth. We are interested in speaking to you if you are willing to share your expertise related to how street youth ‘work’ – for example, what they need for support, the benefits of work to youth and the risks, what types of innovative work exists within your area and what improvements you would make if you could. We would be delighted if you would participate in a telephone interview (that, with your permission, will be recorded) that will last approximately 45 minutes.

Thank-you for taking the time to consider this invitation. We look forward to hearing back from you either way.

Sincerely,

Jann Ticknor  
Research Coordinator  
jticknor@dal.ca

---

Dr. Jeff Karabanow  
Principal Investigator  
Dalhousie University  
6414 Coburg Rd.  
Halifax, NS, B3H 2A7  
Tel: (902) 494-1193  
jkaraban@dal.ca

Dr. Jean Hughes  
Co-investigator  
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McMaster University  
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Dorothy Patterson  
ARK Outreach  
Halifax, NS



*This project is funded through*  
**Ressources humaines et  
Développement social Canada** **Human Resources and  
Social Development Canada**

**Appendix D – Youth informed consent form**

[PRINTED ON DALHOUSIE LETTERHEAD]

**YOUTH INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**Working within the Formal and Informal Economies:  
How Homeless Youth survive in Neo-liberal Times**

**Dr. Jeff Karabanow**  
**Maritime School of Social Work – Dalhousie University**  
**6414 Coburg Rd. Halifax, NS, B3H 2A7**  
**Tel: (902) 494-1193**  
**jkaraban@dal.ca**

Dr. Jean Hughes  
School of Nursing – Dalhousie University  
5869 University Ave., Halifax, NS, B3H 3J5  
Tel: (902) 494-2456  
jean.hughes@dal.ca

Dr. Sean Kidd  
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences – McMaster University  
Centre for Mountain Health Services - Mental Health Rehabilitation  
St. Joseph's Healthcare, Hamilton  
100 West 5th Street, Hamilton, ON L8N 3K7  
Tel: (905) 522-1155, X36312  
skidd@stjosham.on.ca

and

Dorothy Patterson  
Director of Program  
ARK  
Halifax, NS  
Tel: (902) 492-2577

In order to receive more information or clarification about the study at any time, or to report any unusual occurrences or difficulties related to the research, please use the following contact person:

**Dr. Jeff Karabanow – (902) 494-1193 – jkaraban@dal.ca**  
**6414 Coburg Rd. Halifax, NS, B3H 2A7**

## INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

We invite you to take part in a research study being conducted by Dr. Jeff Karabanow, who is a professor at Dalhousie University. Taking part in this study is voluntary and you may decline to answer any question and/or withdraw from the study at any time. The study is described below. The description tells you about the risks, inconvenience, or discomfort that you might experience. Participating in the study might not benefit you, but we might learn things that will benefit others. You should discuss any questions you have about this study with the people who explain it to you.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

*This study is interested in your experiences, concerns and insights about being homeless, living on the streets and experiences with work.* We want to understand how homeless youth/street youth understand or make sense of work in the context of street life. We are not interested in any criminal or illegal work – we want to know about your involvement in formal (regulated – receive pay checks, pay income tax, etc.) and informal (unregulated - squeegeeing, panhandling, bottle collecting, etc.) We hope the information and knowledge from this study will help street youth organizations and inform policy makers about homeless youth and employment issues.

## STUDY DESIGN

In collaboration with ARK, a non-profit alternative drop-in center serving street youth in downtown Halifax, *this study attempts to understand how employment and labor are situated within the lives of homeless youth.* This study attempts to fill a knowledge gap by exploring these issues through in-depth interviews with 40 street youth. We will also conduct approximately 20 interviews with key service providers across the country to explore insights regarding street youth employment and to build an inventory of successful employment based programs/strategies for street youth.

## WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY?

You may participate in the study if you are between the ages of *16 and 24 years, are sleeping rough, squatting, and/or identify as street youth or homeless youth, and have experiences with legal/non-criminal working.*

## WHO WILL BE CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH?

The study is being carried out by Dr. **Jeff Karabanow** (Dalhousie), Dr. **Jean Hughes** (Dalhousie) and Dr. **Sean Kidd** (McMaster) at Dalhousie University. **Jann Ticknor** has been hired as research coordinator for this project. In order to receive more information or clarification about the study at any time, or to report any unusual occurrences or difficulties related to the research, please use the following contact person:

**Professor Jeff Karabanow, PhD.**  
**6414 Coburg Rd., Halifax, NS**  
**(902) 494 1193 or jkaraban@dal.ca**

## **WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO**

We would like to ask you a few questions about how work/having a job plays out when you are homeless. The interview should take no more than **60 minutes** and will be conducted by our research coordinator. **If you agree, we would like to audio-tape the conversation.**

## **POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

**The risks associated with the study are anticipated to be minor and include the possibility that participants may find discussing their experiences emotionally upsetting.** Participants will be respected with the utmost sensitivity. There is a chance that an interview may bring up past issues that are still unsettled. In such a case, the interviewer will be prepared to refer you to counseling and support if desired.

## **POSSIBLE BENEFITS**

The benefit of this study is that you will be asked to talk about your experiences and concerns about being homeless and involved with work. **Participant information will help build further knowledge about youth homelessness and possibly influence social policy.**

## **COMPENSATION**

You will be compensated \$15.00 for your time.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY**

**We will do everything possible to maintain your anonymity (privacy).** Each interview will be audio-taped and **a code number will be used instead of your name to ensure a high level of anonymity (privacy).** Tapes will be transcribed by a professional who has signed a confidentiality agreement stating that the interview contents will remain confidential and they will not discuss the content of the interviews with anyone. The research team will be the only people to read the transcripts. Tapes will be destroyed once transcripts have been made. Transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator's office (at Dalhousie University) and must be kept on file for 5 years post-publication as stated in Dalhousie University research policy. In reporting findings through reports, presentations, and publications, all names and any characteristics that might identify participants will be removed.

## **IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to call (902) 494-1193 at any time. You will also be provided with any new information that might affect your decision to participate in the study. You will receive a copy of the consent form at the outset of the study for your records. Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time.

In the event that you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Human Research Ethics/ Integrity Coordinator at Dalhousie University's Office of Human Research Ethics and Integrity for assistance: (902) 494-1462.

## **PROBLEMS OR CONCERNS**

*If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concerns about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Patricia Lindley, Director of Dalhousie University's Office of Human research Ethics Administration, for assistance at (902) 494-1462, [patricia.lindley@dal.ca](mailto:patricia.lindley@dal.ca)*

YOUTH INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Working within the Formal and Informal Economies:  
How Homeless Youth survive in Neo-liberal Times**

SIGNATURE PAGE

“I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby consent to take part in this study. However, I realize that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.”

**I agree to be audio taped**

☐ yes

☐ no

**I agree to allow direct quotations from my interview to be used**

☐ yes

☐ no

-----  
Participant's Signature

-----  
Date

-----  
Participant Code

-----  
Researcher's Signature

## Appendix E – Semi-structured interview guide for youth

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR YOUTH

#### Interview preamble:

Participant Code: _____
-------------------------

Thank-you for agreeing to meet with me today to talk about your experiences with work while living on the street. First, I want to tell you that we are not interested in hearing about illegal or criminal activities you might be involved in – there is a lot of research on this already. We want to hear about the legal/non-criminal work that you might be doing, like bottle depositing, panhandling, and squeegeeing, for example. There might be many other activities that youth use to make ends meet – these are what we are interested in. We want to learn about how street youth participate in ‘work’ and how they understand that experience. The questions are shaped around the idea of formal and informal work – formal work is regulated with pay cheques and income tax charges; informal work is unregulated so activities like squeegeeing, panhandling, and bottle depositing. To start, we are going to talk about any experience or thoughts you have about formal work you are/have been involved with, and then we will talk about the more informal work that you might do.

Do you have any questions about any of this? Are you ready to start the interview? Okay, if you are ready, I will turn on the tape recorder...to start, I’d like to talk to you about your experiences with ‘formal’ work...

---

#### FORMAL WORK

- **Are you working right now?**
  - Have you ever had formal work? Can you tell me more about that?
    - Doing what? How did you find it – did you respond to an advertisement?
    - How long?
    - Why did you leave? What changed?
  - What motivated you to take a formal job? Was there a plan – a short-term goal?
  - Does being in a relationship affect whether you are working or not? How?
- **What is a typical day of work?** Can you tell me more about the routine of your workday?
  - How do you wake-up on time, etc.?
  - How do you get to work – do you live nearby?
  - How much time do you ‘work’?
  - What happens for you when the workday is over?
  - Do you work with other people? How are the people you work with? How are you treated by your coworkers/boss?
  - Does your work know about your homeless situation? How do you decide to share or not?
  - How does the weather affect your work?

- **How does working fit within the day-to-day struggles for survival?**
  - What do you do with your pay?
  - Does your work help you economically? How? Why?
  - Do you go to school? How does this fit in with formal work?
  - How does your type of living arrangement (i.e., shelter, street, squat, friends, own apartment, etc.) affect your work?
- **What does working mean to you? How does it make you feel to go to a regular job – a daily job?**
  - How does looking for work make you feel?
  - Does your health (physical, emotional, spiritual) affect your ability to work? How so?
  - What makes it hard to work? What doesn't? What makes it easier?
  - When you do stay in a job for a while, what keeps you there?
  - How have you been 'mentored' in jobs you have had? Who are your mentors?
- **What programs have you used to help find work? Can you tell me a bit about that experience?**
  - How was it helpful? Not so helpful?
  - How would you change work-related programming if you could? How do you want to be supported in your work to support yourself?

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## INFORMAL WORK

- **Have you participated in 'informal' work?**
  - Doing what?
  - What made you start working informally?
- **What is a typical day of work?** Can you tell me more about the routine of your workday?
  - How do you wake-up on time?
  - How do you decide what work you are going to do? Are there options? What is the role of 'signing', using cardboard signs on the street, in finding work?
  - Is your work close to where you live? How does where you live affect the work you can do? Do you go to school? How does this fit in with informal work?
  - How much time do you 'work'?
  - What happens for you when the workday is over?
  - When working in a group, how do the dynamics play out? Cooperative or hierarchical...
  - How does the weather affect your work?
  - How does your type of living arrangement (i.e., shelter, street, squat, friends, own apartment, etc.) affect your work?

- **What are the ‘rules’ or ‘etiquette’ of informal work? How do you conduct yourself when you are working informally?**
  - What do you do if you find someone who is not honoring these ‘rules’? How do you respond?
  - Do you work ‘in public’? How does this make you feel? How does it influence your decision to work or not?
  - Do you take ‘breaks’? How do you organize or make sure you have breaks/food/time for the bathroom/etc? Where do you take breaks/eat/use the bathroom?
  - What about the legalities of informal work? How do these influence your work? How has your ‘work’ changed with the legislation? What else are you doing instead?
  
- **How does working informally fit within the day-to-day struggles for survival?**
  - What do you do with your pay? Have you ever saved up for something?
  - How does ‘who you are’ affect the work you do? The work you have access to? The work offered to you?
  - Do you think gender makes a difference? How?
  - Does your health (physical, emotional, spiritual) affect your ability to work? How so? (Women: How does menstruation affect their ability to work?)
  
- **What does being able to work informally mean to you? How does it make you feel?**
  - How is working informally important to you now? What does it mean for you and your life? How might work structure your day?
  - What makes it hard to work (e.g., tickets, police presence, rude passers-by, etc.)? What doesn’t? What makes it easier?
  - What would ‘support’ for your choice of ‘work’ look like? How would you change things if you could?
  
- **What would be your dream job?**
  - What do you hope to do? How do you imagine this happening?
  - What would need to happen for you to realize this goal?
  - What would ‘living a good life’ look like to you?

### **Post-interview commentary:**

Thank-you for sharing your stories and experiences with me. Now, you may take a few minutes to reflect on your comments and whether you are comfortable with us using pieces or sections of what you have said as direct quotations – any quotations we use will be ‘cleaned’ of identifying information. If you are uncomfortable with the idea of anything you said being quoted directly, please tell me so we can be sure that the informed consent clearly shows your preference. Thank-you again for taking time from your day to speak with me.

## Appendix F – Youth demographic tool

### YOUTH DEMOGRAPHIC TOOL

Thank-you for allowing us to ask you a few more questions that will assist us in better understanding who you are and what your experience is like. As with all questions in this interview, you are welcome to pass on any question you do not want to answer. I have done my best to fill in most of these questions as we talked, so if I can clarify some of these with you now – I will read out the question and possible answers – you can tell me your response and I will mark it down. Once again, your answers are voluntary and you can refuse to answer any question.

1. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male
3. Sexual orientation \_\_\_\_\_
4. Would you like to identify your nationality or ethnic background? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, please check all that apply:

Aboriginal  
First Nations/ Metis/Inuit (circle)  
Caucasian  
Black  
African Canadian  
Latin American  
Asian  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. Are you originally from Nova Scotia? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No  
If no, what is your home province? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What is your current housing situation?  
Have my own place  
Have a place with roommates  
Staying with friends  
Staying with family  
Shelter  
Squat/Rough sleeping  
Car  
Public building  
Private building  
Couch surfing  
Can't find accommodation  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

7. Where does your regular income come from (check all that apply)?  
Income assistance (Welfare)  
Disability  
Full-time work  
Part-time work  
Binning  
Panhandling  
Squeegeeing  
Busking  
Not eligible for income assistance  
Other \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Code: _____
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## **Appendix G – Service provider informed consent form**

### **SERVICE PROVIDER INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

#### **Working within the Formal and Informal Economies: How Homeless Youth survive in Neo-liberal Times**

**Dr. Jeff Karabanow**  
**Maritime School of Social Work – Dalhousie University**  
**6414 Coburg Rd. Halifax, NS, B3H 2A7**  
**Tel: (902) 494-1193**  
**jkaraban@dal.ca**

Dr. Jean Hughes  
School of Nursing – Dalhousie University  
5869 University Ave., Halifax, NS, B3H 3J5  
Tel: (902) 494-2456  
jean.hughes@dal.ca

Dr. Sean Kidd  
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences – McMaster University  
Centre for Mountain Health Services - Mental Health Rehabilitation  
St. Joseph's Healthcare, Hamilton  
100 West 5th Street, Hamilton, ON L8N 3K7  
Tel: (905) 522-1155, X36312  
skidd@stjosham.on.ca

and

Dorothy Patterson  
Director of Program  
ARK  
Halifax, NS  
Tel: (902) 492-2577

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In order to receive more information or clarification about the study at any time, or to report any unusual occurrences or difficulties related to the research, please use the following contact person:

**Dr. Jeff Karabanow – (902) 494-1193 – jkaraban@dal.ca**  
**6414 Coburg Rd. Halifax, NS, B3H 2A7**

## INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

We invite you to take part in a research study being conducted by Dr. Jeff Karabanow, who is a professor at Dalhousie University. Taking part in this study is voluntary and you may decline to answer any question and/or withdraw from the study at any time. The study is described below. The description tells you about the risks, inconvenience, or discomfort that you might experience. Participating in the study might not benefit you, but we might learn things that will benefit others. You should discuss any questions you have about this study with the people who explain it to you.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is interested in your work experiences, concerns and insights about youth homelessness, and how street youth find ‘work’. **We want to understand how entrenched street youth negotiate, maintain, and understand formal and informal work in the context of street life.** This knowledge will hopefully be used by street youth organizations and policy makers to create better situations for homeless youth.

## STUDY DESIGN

In collaboration with ARK, a non-profit alternative drop-in center serving street youth in downtown Halifax, *this study attempts to understand how employment and labor are situated within the lives of homeless youth.* This study attempts to fill a knowledge gap by exploring these issues through in-depth interviews with 40 street youth and 20 interviews with key service providers across the country to explore insights regarding street youth employment and to build an inventory of successful employment based programs/strategies for street youth.

## WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY?

You may participate in the study if you have experiences working with homeless youth.

## WHO WILL BE CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH?

The study is being carried out by Dr. **Jeff Karabanow** (Dalhousie), Dr. **Jean Hughes** (Dalhousie) and Dr. **Sean Kidd** (McMaster) at Dalhousie University. **Jann Ticknor** has been hired as research coordinator for this project. In order to receive more information or clarification about the study at any time, or to report any unusual occurrences or difficulties related to the research, please use the following contact person:

**Professor Jeff Karabanow, PhD.**  
**6414 Coburg Rd., Halifax, NS**  
**(902) 494 1193 or jkaraban@dal.ca**

## WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO

We would like to ask you a few questions about your work with street youth. The interview should take no more than **45 minutes** and will be conducted by our research coordinator. **If you agree, we would like to audio-tape the conversation.**

## **POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The risks associated with the study are anticipated to be very minor and include the possibility that participants may find discussing their experiences emotionally upsetting. Participants will be respected with the utmost sensitivity.

## **POSSIBLE BENEFITS**

The benefit of this study is that you will be asked to talk about your experiences and insights related to street youth's formal and informal employment. As such, **participant information will help build further knowledge about youth homelessness and possibly influence social policy.**

## **COMPENSATION**

We are very thankful for your time and insights.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY**

**We will do everything possible to maintain your anonymity (privacy).** Each interview will be audio-taped and a code number will be used instead of your name to ensure a high level of anonymity (privacy). Tapes will be transcribed by a professional who has signed a confidentiality agreement stating that the interview contents will remain confidential and they will not discuss the content of the interviews with anyone. The research team will be the only people to read the transcripts. Tapes will be destroyed once transcripts have been made. Transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator's office (at Dalhousie University) and must be kept on file for 5 years post-publication as stated in Dalhousie University research policy. In reporting findings through reports, presentations, and publications, all names and any characteristics that might identify participants will be removed.

## **IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to call (902) 494-1193 at any time. You will also be provided with any new information that might affect your decision to participate in the study. You will receive a copy of the consent form at the outset of the study for your records. Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time.

In the event that you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Human Research Ethics/ Integrity Coordinator at Dalhousie University's Office of Human Research Ethics and Integrity for assistance: (902) 494-1462.

## **PROBLEMS OR CONCERNS**

*If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concerns about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Patricia Lindley, Director of Dalhousie University's Office of Human research Ethics Administration, for assistance at (902) 494-1462, [patricia.lindley@dal.ca](mailto:patricia.lindley@dal.ca)*

**SERVICE PROVIDER INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**Working within the Formal and Informal Economies:  
How Homeless Youth survive in Neo-liberal Times**

**SIGNATURE PAGE**

I have read the explanation about this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss it and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby consent to take part in this study. However, I realize that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

**I agree to be audio taped**

☐ **yes**

☐ **no**

**I agree to allow direct quotations from my interview to be used**

☐ **yes**

☐ **no**

-----  
Participant's Signature

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Date

-----  
Researcher's Signature

## **Appendix H – Semi-structured interview guide for service providers**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS**

#### **Interview Preamble**

Thank-you for agreeing to speak with me today to talk about your experiences working with street youth. First, I want to tell you that we are not interested in hearing about illegal or criminal activities youth might be involved in – there is a lot of research on this already. We want to hear about the legal/non-criminal work that youth might be doing, like bottle depositing, panhandling, and squeegeeing, for example. We are specifically interested in both their informal and formal work experiences. There may be many activities that youth engage in to make ends meet – these are what we are interested in. We would like to talk about your insights into how street youth understand ‘work’ and employment, and how they integrate it into their homeless lives.

- What kind of legal/non-criminal work do street youth do – formal/informal?
  - How do youth talk about their experiences with work?
  - Why do these youth work?
  - What do you think works mean to homeless youth?
  - In your opinion, how do street youth incorporate work in their lives?
- What are some of the major obstacles for street youth who want to participate in formal work? What are the obstacles to youth participating in informal work?
  - How do youth manage these issues?
- What kind of programs does your organization offer related to youth and work?
  - Can you describe the programs?
  - How do youth respond to these initiatives?
- What do these youth need to find work?
  - Supports?
  - Systematic issues?
  - What makes some succeed and not others?
  - What can work offer street youth?
- In your province, are there innovative employment programs?
- How have youth been involved in creating or directing work opportunities? Can you tell me more about that?
- How would you support street youth in work of their choosing (within the realms of legal activities) if resources (financial, human resource, facility, system) were not an issue?

#### **Post-interview commentary:**

Thank-you for sharing your knowledge and understanding with me. Now, you may take a few minutes to reflect on your comments and whether you are comfortable with us using pieces or sections of what you have said as direct quotations – any quotations we use will be ‘cleaned’ of identifying information. If you are uncomfortable with the idea of anything you said being quoted directly, please tell me so we can be sure that the informed consent clearly shows your preference. Thank-you again for taking time from your day to speak with me.