



**HERE  
AND  
NOW**

**The Winnipeg Plan to  
End Youth Homelessness**  
[hereandnowwinnipeg.ca](http://hereandnowwinnipeg.ca)

Winnipeg Sports Centre

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The plan would not be possible without the active participation of hundreds of youth who shared their stories, hopes and recommendations.

## Thank you for courageously sharing your wisdom.

The development of this plan first began in the collective imagination of local leaders in Winnipeg who have been working for decades to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness. Together with the generous support of The Winnipeg Foundation and the Government of Manitoba, the vision of a shared strategy was realized.

A special thanks to End Homelessness Winnipeg, the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, A Way Home Canada, and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness for your guidance and support.

This document is dedicated to all persons who have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness.

This document summarizes the full Winnipeg Plan to End Youth Homelessness, which is available at [www.hereandnowwinnipeg.ca](http://www.hereandnowwinnipeg.ca)

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# ABOUT THE PLAN

The goal of *Here and Now: The Winnipeg Plan to End Youth Homelessness* is to develop the shared vision, action framework and grounding principles needed for effective systems' integration, policy and program alignment, and collaboration between all community stakeholders. Together we seek to reduce and end youth homelessness through a community-sanctioned strategy that provides youth and their families with what they need to thrive.



## OUR STORY

The story of this plan begins with the experiences of youth on the streets of Winnipeg. For the vast majority **homelessness was not a choice** but the result of structural, system, and family breakdowns. Youth homelessness is a complex social issue with dire consequences for youth, our neighbourhoods and communities. Yet, we know today that **youth homelessness is preventable**.

Local youth-serving agencies have been cooperating to address the needs of youth for decades and began working on a collaborative model that builds on the strengths and knowledge of all stakeholders in the fall of 2014.

## THE CONTEXT

Globally, the strategy is nested in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Nationally, the plan joins in solidarity with dozens of cities currently developing and implementing plans to end youth homelessness across Canada. Locally, the following document aspires to embody growing community mobilization efforts that seek to understand and **address the enduring legacy of colonization and the meaning of reconciliation** in Winnipeg and Manitoba.

## OUR INTENTION

This plan intends to serve as a guide for government, funders and community members committed to ending youth homelessness. By setting a common direction that is grounded in the principles of reconciliation we point to new policy, funding, and program development, principles and priorities.

The strategy is intended to be a living document, one that is regularly revised to guarantee relevance to the emergent and changing needs of youth in our community. This is only the first step of a collective movement.

# The time is now.

## A MESSAGE



My name is Savannah. I am twenty-nine years old and I was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

I was involved in the Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Winnipeg. I went to focus groups, consultations and workshops. I even did surveys.

You are so used to being told that something is happening and then it is not. I was so proud to be a part of it and then it came true. During the plan I felt very involved and important, it was rewarding in itself.

I know about youth homelessness. I know that it is not a choice, it affects your self-esteem and your worth. You do not feel like you belong and sometimes you stand out more than others.

You can make bad choices when you are homeless, like prostitution and crime. You have pressures when you are on the streets and you learn to do drugs.

Youth homelessness is not safe. If you are new on the streets it's like a big sign on your forehead that you are new and vulnerable.

Also, youth homelessness in Winnipeg is getting bigger and bigger. When you are homeless, you can go under a bridge and there are 15 people and you are not alone. On the streets you have a sense of belonging and people get too comfortable there, so they don't want to leave.

We need a plan to end youth homelessness because we deserve to feel like we are worth something, worth getting off the streets.

We need to make youth feel like they are valued, and give people the choice to get clean and get housing when they are ready.

We want to feel accepted in society.

We need a plan because we need to be safe. We can make the streets safer for the youth that are on the streets, reduce suicide, and get youth off the streets if we work together with this plan.

I imagine a day when drug dealers won't have prey to take advantage of.

I hope that this plan:

- a. Builds confidence and self-esteem in youth
- b. Gives youth a sense of belonging and
- c. Gives youth a sense of trust and safety

I know that when you have a house, you have a base. I couldn't go to school because I didn't have a roof over my head and I was hungry. Even though my school had a food program, I could not get a good night sleep to focus for the next morning. Having a house was the base I needed to accomplish my goals.

I hope that this plan will reduce youth homelessness and maybe someday end it.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## PURPOSE

Every day, there are at least two hundred youth in Winnipeg without a place to call home. Homelessness has devastating effects on society, communities, and most importantly, youth themselves. Despite innovative responses, strong research, and a sector that works together through the tragedy of homelessness, we have not had the support, alliances, or shared vision required to end youth homelessness. By setting a common direction, *Here and Now: The Winnipeg Plan to End Youth Homelessness* will guide policy, funding, program development, and collective action priorities, grounded in the principles of reconciliation, towards a city where all youth have a safe place to live and thrive.

## OVERVIEW

<b>Mission</b>	To prevent and end youth homelessness by implementing a community-sanctioned strategy that ensures youth and their families have what they need to thrive
<b>Vision</b>	A city where all youth have a safe place to live and thrive
<b>Teachings</b>	Love • Respect • Courage • Honesty • Wisdom • Humility • Truth
<b>Principles</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Understand youth holistically, as part of families and communities.</li><li>2. Youth have a right to lead the development of their own plans, and to be supported during and after transitions.</li><li>3. Build on what is working.</li><li>4. Youth self-identify what they want and need.</li><li>5. Youth homelessness is not acceptable, and we all have a role in preventing and ending it.</li></ol>
<b>Values</b>	Respect • Inclusion • Choice • Youth-Centred • Youth Voice • Reconciliation • Equity Strength-based • Holistic • Culturally Competent • Evidence and Research Informed

## PROCESS

Guided by the wisdom and expertise of the Steering Committee, the process of developing the plan was designed to:

1. Listen to the voices of youth;
2. Deeply understand the existing system and services for youth experiencing and at risk of homelessness;
3. Identify potential solutions to the causes of youth homelessness and to opportunities to coordinate pathways out of it;
4. Understand the present day relationships between colonialism and youth homelessness and identify decolonizing strategies based in Indigenous world views;
5. Build community consensus on principles and values that are foundational for these solutions to be implemented in Winnipeg; and
6. Begin to mobilize all sectors towards preventing and ending youth homelessness.

The following strategies and objectives are grounded on the principles and values of the plan:

1 ACCESS	2 PREVENTION	3 HOUSING & SUPPORTS	4 SUPPORTS TO THRIVE
<b>Youth have immediate access to the supports needed to prevent, alleviate and respond to homelessness.</b>	<b>Youth and their families struggling with risk factors of homelessness are identified and supported.</b>	<b>Youth have access to a full range of housing, and housing with support options, based on need and choice.</b>	<b>All youth with experience of homelessness have the supports they need to maintain housing and thrive.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish a coordinated access strategy</li><li>• Improve collaboration among stakeholders by promoting communication</li><li>• Remove barriers to access across youth serving agencies, government agencies, and safe spaces</li><li>• Establish a centralized public information resource</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Foster resilience among families and communities</li><li>• Prevent newcomer youth homelessness</li><li>• Adopt and implement school-based prevention strategies</li><li>• Ensure youth in government care do not exit into homelessness</li><li>• Support Indigenous youth migrating to Winnipeg</li><li>• Decolonize systems and approaches to service provision</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Re-envision the emergency response for youth</li><li>• Increase the supply and diversity of transitional housing options</li><li>• Develop a full continuum of permanent housing and supports for youth</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Foster resilience among youth exiting homelessness through holistic and ongoing supports</li><li>• Address systemic barriers to youths' housing stability</li><li>• Enhance the capacity of informal and community-based supports</li><li>• Embed healing into supports and systems for youth</li></ul>

## COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

All of the action strategies are significant and required if we are to end youth homelessness in Winnipeg. We also need to start on the most impactful activities to begin preventing and reducing youth homelessness immediately. Based on input from youth and community stakeholders the following four action strategies have been prioritized for the first steps of implementation:

1. **Access Priority:** Develop a network of regional hubs open 24/7 by increasing the capacity of existing youth-serving agencies.
2. **Prevention Priority:** Create an interdepartmental “Zero Discharge into Homelessness” strategy, starting with a coordinated provincial policy direction, that supports youth transitioning from any type of provincial government or government funded care.
3. **Housing Priority:** Develop increased supply of transitional housing programs for youth.
4. **Supports to Thrive Priority:** Encourage Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) to increase the stability of income supports for youth.”



# BACKGROUND

## DEFINING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

### YOUTH

Defining 'youth' is a difficult task because there is no consistent legal or social standard. According to the United Nations

“‘youth’ is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group.”<sup>1</sup>

While we accept the fluidity of the definition of 'youth', for the purposes of this strategy a 'youth' is defined as any person between the ages of 15 and 29 years old. In recognition of the barriers to access that can occur from implementing a fixed age category, this plan advocates for better integration of adult and youth services.

However, we also recognize that **age matters**. There is a notable difference between the needs, circumstances, and development of a 15 year old compared to an 18 or 27 year old. Further, some youth may also experience developmental delays.<sup>2</sup> In order to be successful, program responses must be tailored to the specific developmental and cognitive needs of youth within this broad age-range.

### HOMELESSNESS

Consistent with a youth-centred and holistic approach, the *Winnipeg Plan to End Youth Homelessness* advocates for a comprehensive definition of homelessness. Borrowing from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, we adhere to a three-dimensional human rights definition: 1) homelessness as the absence of a home; 2) homelessness as social exclusion; and 3) youth experiencing homelessness as holders of human rights.

#### Homelessness as the Absence of a Home

According to the Canadian Definition of Homelessness, the homelessness typology includes experiences of being:

1. **Unsheltered**, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation;
2. **Emergency Sheltered**, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence;
3. **Provisionally Accommodated**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure; and
4. **At Risk of Homelessness**, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.<sup>3</sup>

Further, research suggests that youth more commonly experience hidden homelessness. This means being 'provisionally accommodated' on friends' couches and with family members never knowing if they will be kicked out the next day.<sup>4</sup>

It is critical to note that youth move from these different categorizations of homelessness to precarious housing, and even stable housing, then back to homeless situations, sometimes in relatively short periods of time. This is evident through point-in-time counts, as well as trajectories youth described in the System Pathways into Youth Homelessness research.<sup>5</sup> As with fixed age-group definitions, rigid categories of homelessness cannot be applied to exclude young people who are struggling.

#### Homelessness as Social Exclusion

Importantly, homelessness is not only the lack of adequate housing but is also defined by social exclusion.<sup>6</sup> Social exclusion references the stigmatization and marginalization that subjects youth experiencing homelessness to multiple forms of social discrimination.

#### Homeless Youth as Right Holders

Youth with experiences of homelessness are equal members of our society. They are resilient as they struggle for survival and dignity. Youth experiencing homelessness are central agents and active participants of the social transformation needed for the implementation of responses to youth homelessness.

## DEFINITION OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

For the purposes of this document “Youth Homelessness” refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 15 and 29 who are living independently of caregivers and do not have, or have the immediate means/ability to acquire, stable, safe or consistent residence.

## YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN WINNIPEG

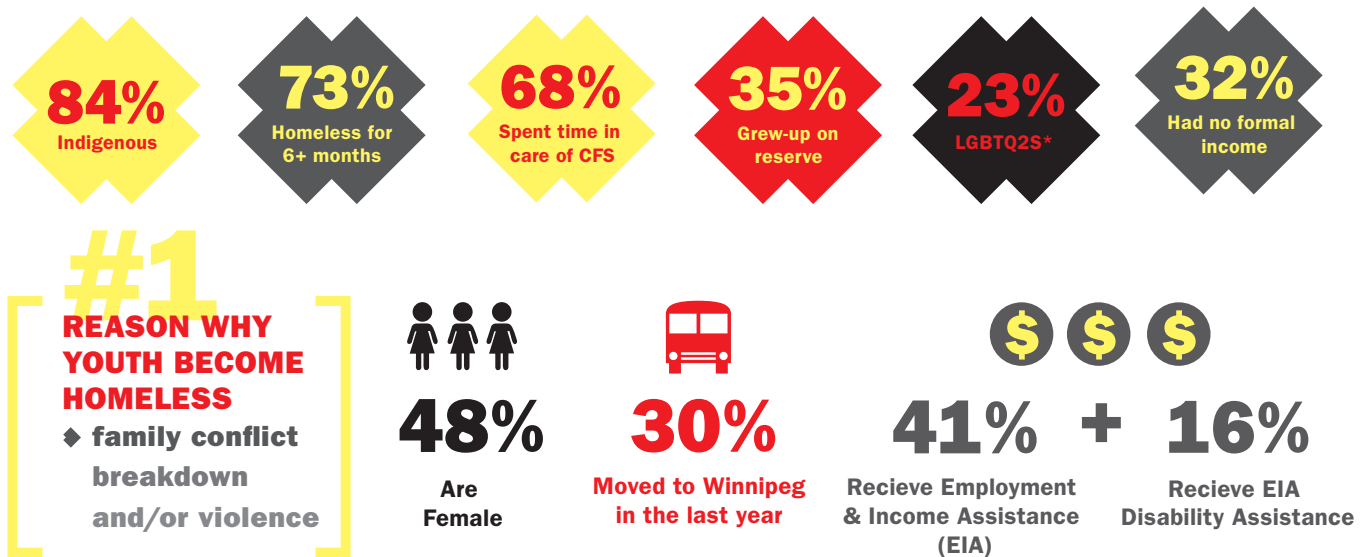
The Government of Canada estimates that homelessness affects 150,000 Canadians every year, including 65,000 youth. Youth are considered to be the fastest growing segment of the homeless population in Canada.<sup>7</sup>

The following infographic presents data regarding youth from the Winnipeg Street Census 2015.<sup>8</sup> The research project is a ‘moment in time’ study intended to gather information about the extent and nature of homelessness in Winnipeg. Despite its methodological limitations, it provides us with important demographic information to improve decision-making and inform strategies.

The Winnipeg Street Census points to the need for preventative approaches to ending homelessness.

18 years old was the most common age that individuals first became homeless; 70% of those experiencing long-term (10+ years) homelessness first became homeless as a youth.

On one in October, 2015, 26.5% of all people experiencing homelessness were youth, between the ages 16-29. For those respondents:



# PATHWAYS TO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

In this study, we were informed by an ecological perspective, which emphasizes how poverty and homelessness are influenced by the interaction between persons and their physical and social environments.<sup>9</sup> The following section describes how structural, systemic, family and individual factors shape the pathways by which youth become homelessness. These nested structures interact with one another to create the conditions for youth homelessness.

## STRUCTURAL FACTORS

### Colonialism

It is impossible to discuss youth homelessness in Winnipeg without addressing the historical and contemporary processes of colonization. Colonization refers to the complex set of discriminatory and oppressive practices that originated from the Western expansion into North America.<sup>10</sup> These practices established unequal power relations with Indigenous peoples that continued through the development of the modern state of Canada, including the creation of reserves, relocation to remote areas, and the establishment of residential schools.<sup>11</sup> The introduction of systems of education, justice, health, and child welfare have resulted in a cycle of deprivation, poverty and unemployment for Indigenous peoples in Canada.<sup>12</sup>

The suffering, poverty, and systems breakdown described below and experienced by Indigenous peoples stem from the profoundly destructive legacy of colonization. Effective decolonization of the structures of our society requires reconciliation.

“I wasn’t taught about my culture, that would have been a huge help.” —Youth

“[We need] more cultural awareness groups: drum groups, traditional medicine teachings to have more of a sense of community, so that you don’t feel alone in the struggle.” —Youth

### Discrimination

- Discrimination on the basis of sex, age, sexual orientation, race, and gender identity is intricately linked with inequity, poverty and the social exclusion that places youth at risk of homelessness. According to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘discrimination may cause poverty, just as poverty may cause discrimination’.<sup>14</sup>

### Poverty

- The income gap in Manitoba is widening. Over the last twenty years, the average annual incomes of the wealthiest Manitoba families have increased by \$51,929, while the lowest income families have gained only \$4,937 (in constant year dollars).<sup>15</sup>
- Indigenous peoples in Winnipeg have almost double the poverty rate than the general population (17 versus 10 percent). Further, unemployment rates are almost three times higher.
- Indigenous migrants to Winnipeg are particularly vulnerable, since their incomes remain below \$10,000 per year 15 months after arrival in the city.<sup>16</sup>

### Housing Affordability

- Homelessness has its roots in housing market dynamics, and particularly in the difficulty in obtaining affordable housing.<sup>17</sup>
- Nearly one in five households in Winnipeg pay over 30% of their income on shelter costs, meeting the definition of core housing need (22%).
- Renter households are at increased risk, 37% of them paid more than 30% of their income in rent in 2011 (34,191 households).

“To the [Truth and Reconciliation] Commission, “reconciliation” is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. For that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgment of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour.<sup>13</sup>”

## SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Systems intended to support the healthy development of children and youth tend to operate from a universal approach. This limits their ability to be flexible when responding to youth with complex experiences such as trauma, mental health or cognitive challenges, or an absence of supportive adults to assist in navigating these systems. Youth with these experiences are also more likely to be connected with multiple systems, which face difficulties coordinating with each other. Homelessness often occurs as youth transition from or between these systems without the means, skills, or supports needed for success.

### Child and Family Services (CFS)

**68.2% of youth experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg spent time in the care of CFS<sup>18</sup>**

- Manitoba has one of the highest rates of children in state care. There are 10,501 children in care in Manitoba.<sup>19</sup>
- Indigenous children (First Nations, Metis and Inuit) in care account for close to 87% of all children in care.<sup>20</sup> For a vast majority of youth, and particularly Indigenous youth, child welfare involvement is a profoundly negative experience.<sup>21</sup> Many youth experience housing instability while in care, including running away and placement breakdowns.<sup>22</sup>
- An estimated 500 youth leave the care of Manitoba Child and Family Service (CFS) every year.<sup>23</sup> Youth exit CFS care largely unprepared for life as an adult; they leave care without a high-school education, employment experience, or the essential life skills required for independent living.<sup>24</sup>

**“I aged out of CFS, they gave me 400 dollars, paid one month of my rent and said ‘have a nice life’. You go from having emotional and community support, like checking up on you and caring about you, to nothing.”  
—Youth**

### Justice

**Over half of youth experiencing homelessness have been in jail, a youth detention centre, or prison<sup>25</sup>**

- Individuals leaving prisons are at an increased risk of homelessness, while simultaneously, those experiencing homelessness are at an increased risk of incarceration.<sup>26 27</sup>

### Health, Mental Health and Addictions

**Almost 60% of youth experiencing absolute homelessness spend a night in a hospital in a given year<sup>28</sup>**

- A study from London, Ontario found that 167 of 1,588 (10.5%) individuals were discharged from psychiatric wards with no fixed address within a single year.<sup>29</sup>
- The Winnipeg Street Health Report found 50% of youth experiencing absolute homelessness in Winnipeg were diagnosed with a mental illness.<sup>30</sup>

### Education

**Between 63-90% of homeless youth have not graduated high-school despite being of age to have done so<sup>31</sup>**

- Low school performance, low educational attainment and school adjustment problems are predictive of homelessness.<sup>32 33</sup>
- While Manitoba’s student tracked high school graduation rate for 2014 was 87%, Indigenous students had a graduation rate of 54.5%.<sup>34</sup>

### Employment and Income Assistance

**46.7% of youth who are homeless in Winnipeg receive their income from EIA, general or disability assistance. However, 32% have no formal source of income<sup>35</sup>**

- Youth over the age of 18 can be eligible for EIA if they are unable to work or find work. However, income assistance was described by youth to be one of the most difficult systems to navigate.<sup>36</sup>
- Further, when receiving income supports youth are often unable to comply with the requirements including: completing forms, attending appointments, meeting deadlines and more. Without intervention from advocates, many fail to comply, are cut-off from assistance, evicted, and return to homelessness.<sup>37</sup>

## FAMILY & INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

Family and individual factors leading to homelessness are intricately connected to structural and systemic factors. The relationship between family conflict and youth homelessness is well documented.<sup>38 39</sup>

Family conflict, breakdown or violence was the most frequently cited reason for individuals' first experience of homelessness in Winnipeg, this is consistent with findings across Canada and internationally.<sup>40</sup>

Difficult family situations associated with youth homelessness include:

- **Abuse.** Youth may leave home to escape abusive family situations, including sexual, physical, or emotional abuse. Young women and girls are more likely to have been victims of sexual abuse.<sup>41</sup>
- **Neglect.** Other family related factors may include neglect, continuous arguments, and parental control issues.<sup>42</sup>
- **Exposure to domestic violence.**<sup>43</sup>
- **Parental substance use.**<sup>44</sup>
- **Rejection of Gender and Sexual orientation.** Importantly, many youth leave home due to family conflict over their gender and/or sexual orientation. Hence, LGBTQ2S+ youth are overrepresented in the homeless youth population.<sup>45</sup>

- **Teen Pregnancy.** Teen mothers are more likely to become homeless as a result of family conflict.<sup>46 47</sup>

Children who experience trauma, chronic fear and abuse, suffer from long-term developmental and emotional consequences that prevent them from forming positive attachments and social networks.<sup>48</sup>

However, youth homelessness is not merely the result of failure on the part of the youth or their parents, but rather it is the breakdown of the parent-child relationship, which is often the result of complex social factors such as economic stress, peer influences, and community violence. Indeed, while numerous programs preventing and reducing neglect and maltreatment, often in the form of parenting programs, some research suggests that simply providing families with more income is effective at reducing maltreatment rates.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, while there are numerous programs aimed at reducing family breakdown, often in the form of parenting programs, some research suggests that simply providing families with more income is effective at reducing maltreatment rates.<sup>50</sup>



# INDIGENOUS YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

84% of youth experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg identify as Indigenous. Almost half of First Nations youth grew up in a First Nations community.<sup>51</sup>

Advocates and researchers have declared homelessness among Indigenous youth to be a rapidly growing national emergency. However, Indigenous youth are not a homogeneous population. They are a group with a multitude of unique cultural backgrounds, legal status, experiences, strengths, skills and perspectives. As such, they experience varied levels of need. Nonetheless, many are survivors of extreme poverty, racism, or mental health issues in families and communities, disconnection from birth families, violence, sexual abuse and/or neglect all of which can be traced to the shared and continued history of colonialism.

Importantly, Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness frequently move between Winnipeg and First Nations communities. A study of 123 Indigenous youth in Manitoba experiencing hidden homelessness revealed that participants had moved more than four times in an eighteen month period.<sup>52</sup> One third of those moves involved transitioning from or to a reserve.<sup>53</sup> Youth leave First Nation communities due to family conflict, lack of opportunities (including education and employment), and the condition or absence of housing. When they arrive in Winnipeg, they often lack the social supports and means to find stable housing, leading to homelessness. Sometimes they return to their home communities and begin the cycle again.

Indigenous youth have described experiencing not only physical homelessness but also spiritual homelessness, a “crisis of personal identity wherein a person’s understanding or knowledge of how they relate to country, family, and Aboriginal identity systems is confused or lacking.”<sup>54</sup>

Compared to homeless peers, Indigenous youth experience more deprivation, discrimination and harassment. An organizational evaluation of 180 youth at Resource Assistance for Youth (RaY)<sup>55</sup> in Winnipeg, found that Indigenous youth:

- **Slept outdoors more often**
- **Were more likely to engage in panhandling, squeegeeing, and flagging for their main income**
- **Were more likely to report having been harassed by police or cadets**
- **Were more likely to report having been harassed by the public**
- **Were more likely to report having been ticketed for vagrancy or trespassing**

Responses to Indigenous youth homelessness must necessarily be rooted in a comprehensive understanding of the effects of colonization. They must also be rooted in an understanding that Indigenous peoples hold rights under the Canadian constitution, including the right to self-determination and self-government, and the right to practice one’s own culture and customs including language and religion.

**“The system has created [youth homelessness], and it isn’t working. It has never worked. Indigenous people need to restore our place in caring for our young people.”**

**—Indigenous Leader Discussion**

# WHY WE NEED A YOUTH PLAN

## YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IS NOT ADULT HOMELESSNESS

The causes, conditions and consequences of homelessness for young people are distinct from those of adults, which means we need a tailored response.<sup>1</sup>

- Youth are at a unique stage of physical, cognitive, social and identity development
- Youth have little to no experience living independently, less work experience and fewer life skills than adults
- Many youth come from environments where they were exposed to family conflict, including physical, sexual and emotional abuse, disruptions to school, neglect and poverty
- Youth are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and criminal victimization
- Youth under the age of 18 have distinct legal entitlements and restrictions
- Youth are often served by unique infrastructures within the justice, health, education and child welfare systems

Because of these distinctions youth access services differently. Many do not trust impersonal government systems and adult services, using them only as a last resort.<sup>2</sup>

Youth also have unique strengths.

- Youth experiencing homelessness have more friends and higher frequency of contact with family and friends than homeless adults.<sup>3</sup>
- Youth are more resilient.<sup>4</sup> Generally speaking, youth experiencing homelessness have hope for their future, dreams that motivate them and a greater capacity for change. By changing their environment and capitalizing on healthy relationships we can end the cycle of homelessness for good.

These are all important themes that emerged during consultations for the strategy. Youth told us that homelessness forces them into the responsibilities of adulthood early without the social supports and the skills they need to thrive.

“There should be more support after things go ok.” —Youth

Youth need a different approach. This is why it is important to adopt a Positive Youth Development framework which takes the developmental needs and strengths of youth into account. Change can occur by promoting **the Five C’s: competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring**.<sup>5</sup> This development of these requires that programs include: (1) positive and sustained adult-youth relationships, (2) youth skill-building activities, and (3) opportunities for youth participation and leadership in community based activities.<sup>6</sup>

“In that program they already had a place for you to move in. It had furniture and everything you need. But I’d rather have learned how to do that myself, so I know how to. I want someone to sit with me and teach me how to get a place.” —Youth

Positive Youth Development approaches are consistent with Indigenous philosophies of child development such as The Circle of Courage, which describes what “thriving” means in the context of this plan.

## **GENEROSITY**

is intended to provide children with opportunities to demonstrate altruism and helping behaviors. Children learn to understand the value of giving back to the community and make a meaningful contribution to someone else.

# **CIRCLE OF COURAGE**

## **INDEPENDENCE**

focuses on providing children with experiences to develop autonomy and essential life skills. Children and youth learn to accept responsibility. They are empowered to understand how their choices affect their destiny.

Independence



## **BELONGING**

emphasizes the importance of individuals having a sense of connectedness to someone or something – families, clubs, church groups, etc. A positive sense of belonging nurtures self-esteem, self-worth, and ultimately equips children with the ability to develop healthy relationships with others.

Belongings

## **MASTERY**

Refers to the importance of children and youth developing skills that help them produce and exercise competence, achievement, and control over self. Children gain mastery by learning new skills through daily life and enrichment activities in which their environment provides them with multiple opportunities to tap personal talents.



## SHIFTING THE RESPONSE

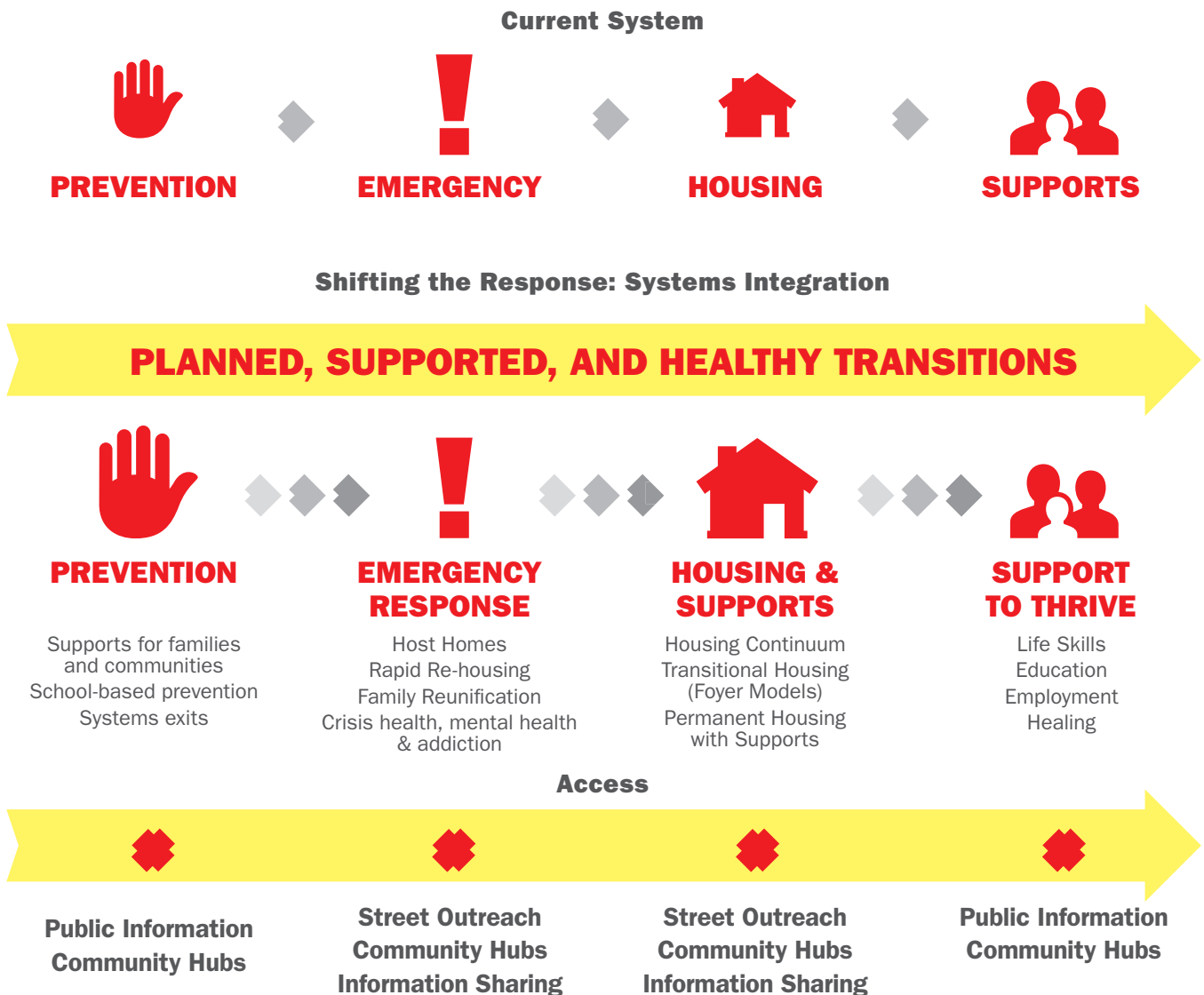
As with the rest of Canada, Winnipeg’s response to youth homelessness has largely focused on reactive emergency and crisis response systems. While emergency responses are necessary, by definition emergency systems alone cannot reduce or end youth homelessness.

To reduce and end youth homelessness, **we must shift our collective response** to focus on prevention and early intervention.<sup>7</sup>

With this recognition, community members, service providers, and funders developed this plan to inform a way forward for the sector.

## Current Responses to Homelessness in Winnipeg

While resources dedicated to youth homelessness are relatively few compared to the resources dedicated to adult homelessness, existing responses in the city are focused on crisis and emergency responses. Resources dedicated to youth homelessness are relatively few compared to the resources dedicated to adult homelessness, and existing responses in the city are crisis-oriented. Sometimes emergency shelter/crisis response leads to longer term housing, but not consistently. Prevention efforts are small in scale and disconnected from emergency services, housing, and long-term supports. Long-term supports are not available across all housing programs. And supports for healing, education, and employment are often inaccessible to youth who are homeless.



The strategies presented in this plan focus on developing a coordinated and seamless response that builds upon existing services, while shifting emphasis towards prevention and early intervention. By developing a common agenda and through constant communication, community activities can mutually reinforce each other.

## WHY INVEST IN YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Youth homelessness is a serious concern in Winnipeg affecting the lives of youth, our social services, and interfering with youth's ability to exercise their human rights. Above all, youth homelessness is preventable.

### Issues Connected to Youth Homelessness in Winnipeg:

- Gangs
- Missing and murdered Indigenous women
- Youth suicide
- Child poverty
- Migration from Northern, remote, rural, and First Nations communities
- Youth sexual exploitation

### YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ARE VULNERABLE

Experiencing homelessness has immediate and enduring detrimental effects to the health and life-trajectories of youth. The longer a youth spends without a safe place to call home, the worse their circumstances.<sup>63 64</sup> Without a coordinated and effective response to homelessness youth on the streets face:

#### 1. Increased mental health issues and substance abuse

Alcohol and drug dependency as well as mental health conditions are significantly higher for youth experiencing homelessness.<sup>65</sup> While mental health and substance abuse may preempt homelessness in some cases,<sup>66</sup> homelessness is associated with a deterioration of youths' mental health and increased or more risky substance abuse.<sup>67</sup>

#### 2. Sexual exploitation and sexual violence

Youth on the streets are coerced by economic circumstances or exploitative individuals to exchange sex for money, shelter, drugs, food, and other basic needs. Research suggests that between 25 to 27.5 percent of youth in shelters report being exploited in the sex trade.<sup>68</sup> Further, homeless youth, particularly women and girls, commonly report being raped and sexually assaulted and fear being sexually victimized.<sup>69 70</sup>

#### 3. Worsening physical health

Youth experiencing homelessness have higher rates of pregnancy, Hepatitis C, B and HIV infection than their peers.<sup>71</sup> Importantly, a longitudinal study of youth with past experiences of homelessness found that the health effects of homelessness are enduring, even 8 years after gaining housing.<sup>72</sup>

#### 4. Criminal victimization

Youth on the streets are more likely to be the victims of crime than housed youth.<sup>73</sup> They are also more likely to witness and experience violence and violent crimes.<sup>74 75</sup>

#### 5. Involvement in the criminal justice system

Homelessness and prolonged homelessness in particular has been associated with increases in criminal activity.<sup>76</sup> Involvement is also associated to the criminalization of homelessness through the enforcement of laws that restrict the use of public spaces and participation in the informal economy such as squeegeeing and panhandling.<sup>77</sup> These responses fail to address the underlying causes of homelessness and contribute to the cycle of incarceration and homelessness.

#### 6. Increased mortality<sup>78</sup>

According to a study of street-entrenched youth in Montreal, youth on the streets are 11.4 times more likely to perish than other youth in the same age group.<sup>79</sup> This increased mortality is largely the result of drug overdoses and suicide.<sup>80</sup>

### YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IS COSTLY

The human and financial cost of youth homelessness is large because the victimization, criminalization and poor health associated with homelessness lead to an increase in service utilization.<sup>81</sup>

In Australia, the costs to the health and justice system services due to young people experiencing homelessness was estimated at \$17,868 per youth per year, with a total cost of \$773 million to the Australian economy every year.<sup>82</sup>

While no equivalent research exists in Canada, the study demonstrates the high cost of youth homelessness in a comparable nation. This research highlights the importance of prevention and early intervention to offset the costs of a lifetime of homelessness.

**By shifting our response towards prevention and rapid intervention, and focusing on youth, we can increase the effectiveness and efficiency of public resources.**



## **YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE**

Lack of access to adequate housing has been recognized as a global human rights crisis.<sup>83</sup> Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) recognizes the right to housing:

**Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.**

Further, The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples No.169 reaffirms the right to housing and an adequate standard of living, adding that Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determine their economic, social and cultural development.<sup>84</sup>

Youth homelessness has a severe impact on youths' ability to satisfy other protected rights such as<sup>85</sup>:

- The right to enjoy the highest possible standard of health
- The right to personal safety
- The right to an education
- The right to work
- The right to non-discrimination
- The right to social security
- The right to freedom from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

The right to adequate housing is an integral component of the right to an adequate standard of living.<sup>86</sup> As a signatory, Canada is under legal and moral obligation to promote and protect the human rights of all people.

Homelessness impacts the ability of youth to enjoy their human rights, as such all Canadian citizens have a responsibility to respond because *human rights belong to everyone*.

## **WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?**

**“Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.”**

**—Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights<sup>87</sup>**

# DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Winnipeg's system of youth-serving organizations has been developed in a crisis-oriented environment, responding to changing needs and adapting to trends in funding and political priorities. These are often informed by high-profile incidents, commonly the tragic deaths of vulnerable children.

As a community, despite innovative responses, strong research, and a sector that works together through this tragedy, we have not had the support, alliances, or shared vision required to end youth homelessness.

Community-based organizations have a strong history of working through coalitions and networks to tackle difficult issues related to youth. The Gang Action Interagency Network, the Addictions Agencies Network, the Sexually Exploited Youth Coalition, Community Led Organizations United Together (CLOUT), Youth Agencies Alliance, and other grassroots groups have pursued holistic strategies that recognize the interconnection of challenges affecting young Winnipeggers.

In 2010, a partnership of residential care providers, community-based organizations, and the University of Winnipeg organized a summit focused on the relationship between homelessness and CFS care.

This led to a community-based research project on the pathways into homelessness for youth, and potential policy levers available to prevent and end youth homelessness. *System Pathways into Youth Homelessness* (2014) found that systems with various responsibilities to care for youth, including CFS, Justice, EIA, and Health and Mental Health, were missing opportunities to prevent and end homelessness. A second summit on CFS and Youth Homelessness was held to examine the results of the research and further refine recommendations related to stability and preparation in, and transitions out of, CFS care.

Throughout this time, the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council of the United Way initiated and facilitated a task force on a Plan to End Homelessness. The Mental Health Commission's At Home/Chez Soi Housing First research project was ending and there was no system or framework in place to retain and coordinate Housing First services. During the sixteen-month process of developing the long-term plan, the youth-sector raised important considerations about the distinctness of youth.

In 2014, the Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) shifted its funding approach. A portion of 2014/15 funding was dedicated towards Housing First readiness pilot projects to begin the transition.



Beyond the requirement that 65% of funds be marked for Housing First, there was no multi-sectoral plan for the homelessness and Housing First system that was based on Winnipeg's population or existing system of supports. Two of Winnipeg's major youth serving agencies, RaY and Macdonald Youth Services (MYS), faced major funding cuts and had to reduce services substantially. Mere months after Tina Fontaine's body was pulled from the Red River, drop-in resources for youth, which had been close to achieving 24/7 access, had to lay off staff and close their doors more and more often. The need for a youth plan had never been more obvious.

RaY convened a meeting with leaders from youth-serving organizations who would later form the Steering Committee for the plan. Based on wisdom gained through national relationships with the Mobilizing Local Capacity program of Eva's Initiatives, they developed a proposal for a youth-centred, community-driven, and value-based Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Winnipeg. At the Canadian House and Renewal Association (CHRA) Congress in April, 2015, funding to embark on the plan development process was confirmed from the Manitoba Government. Shortly afterward, the Winnipeg Foundation committed funding to provide resources needed to genuinely engage community stakeholders, in particular youth, in the planning process.

## THE PLANNING PROCESS

A Steering Committee of partners was formalized to oversee and guide the development of the plan. Steering Committee members were invited to represent their organizations, based on their experience working with youth who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. Representatives from Manitoba Housing, the Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation, and End Homelessness Winnipeg participated in the Steering Committee to support alignment and coordination across jurisdictions and sectors.

The process is **grounded in the voices of youth** with experiences of homelessness in Winnipeg, **substantiated by the experience of practitioners**, and **informed by research**.

Extensive youth engagement, community engagement, and research were all part of the planning process. The engagements were designed to deepen understanding of existing supports for youth experiencing homelessness, discuss the gaps in the support system, and build momentum/commitment towards

ending youth homelessness across sectors based on shared principles. Research informed all of the engagement sessions, so participants understood youth homelessness and discussed potential solutions based on their own experiences as well as solid evidence.

### Youth Engagement

Youth engagement prioritized a **diversity of voices, continuous engagement**, and was **grounded in social justice** with accessible, participatory approaches so youth currently struggling with homelessness could provide meaningful feedback. Youth who had experienced homelessness were a part of almost every consultation, including most Steering Committee meetings, the visioning summit, most of the roundtables, and the open house. Details on the youth engagement process is in Appendix A.

**Overall, at least 100 youth who experienced homelessness participated in the development of this plan.**

### Community Engagement

Community engagement was designed to **build on existing knowledge and capacity**, recognize the **expertise of practitioners**, and be **open and transparent** with all stakeholders. Details on the community engagement process are in Appendix B.

**Overall, at least 200 community and government stakeholders representing 70 different agencies, departments, or associations participated in the development of this plan.**

### Research

Research and analysis of existing data on youth homelessness has been ongoing throughout the planning process. It began with secondary analysis of data from the Winnipeg Street Census, which allowed us to understand the extent and nature of youth homelessness. This was followed by a review of existing Canadian strategies and plans to end youth homelessness. A scoping review was conducted on the causes and promising interventions of youth homelessness internationally, nationally, and locally. Research included continuous service and system mapping, and analysis of local data. Research findings were substantiated by the experience of the Planning Team and the Steering Committee.

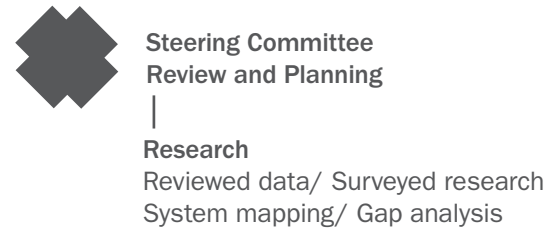
# THE PLANNING PROCESS

The process is grounded in the voices of youth with experiences of homelessness in Winnipeg, substantiated by the experience of practitioners, and informed by research.

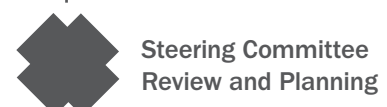
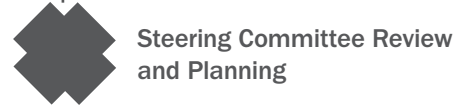
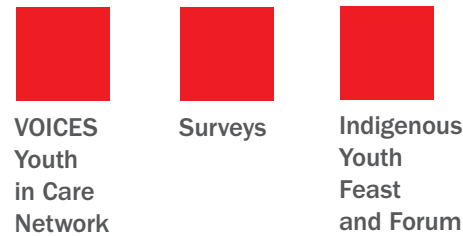
**WHO PARTICIPATED?**

- Over 100 youth with experiences of homelessness
- 200 community and government stakeholders
- 70 different agencies, departments or associations

## STARTING VISION



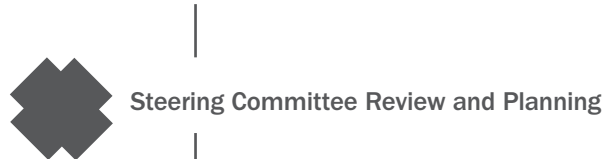
## YOUTH PRIORITIES



## INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES' PRIORITIES



## STAKEHOLDER PRIORITIES

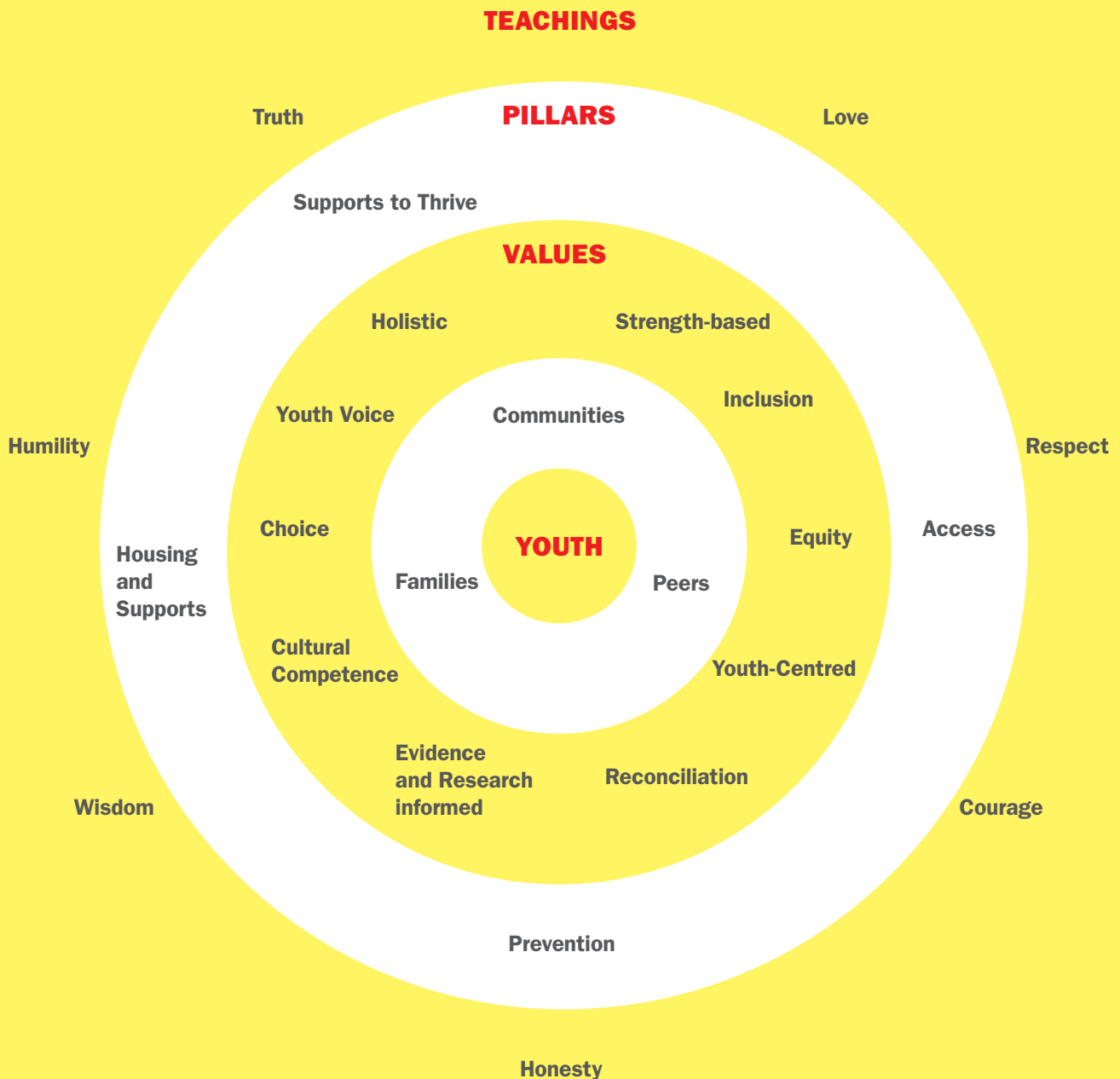


## REVIEW AND IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING



# STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The strategic framework includes the vision, mission, values, pillars, objectives, and action strategies of the plan. The framework can be visually represented through a circle, with youth in the centre. None of the action strategies should be seen in isolation from the framework: the values are like the laces of a hand drum, in order for the drum to make the right sound, all of the laces in the back end need to be interwoven and tied together in the right way. This framework recognizes the interdependence that exists between those who experience, care about, and respond to youth homelessness, and empowers us to act together as a community.





## Teachings

Love, Respect, Courage, Honesty, Wisdom, Humility, Truth

## Principles and Values

1. Understand youth **holistically**, as members of families and communities.
  - We need to be **holistic** in our approaches
  - Services and supports should respond to the uniqueness of neighbourhoods, communities, and youth
2. Youth have the right to lead the development of their own plans, and to be supported during and after transitions.
  - Transitions should not lead to homelessness
  - There needs to be shared accountability during transitions
  - Ending youth homelessness requires a planned transition into healthy adulthood and interdependence
3. Build on what is working.
  - All youth have **strengths**
  - **Evidence and research** should inform our approaches
  - Local service providers have existing capacity, profound understanding of the issues, and trusting relationships with youth; build on them
4. Youth self-identify what they want and need.
  - Start with **youth at the centre**
  - We need to expand **choices** for youth and listen to them
  - Culture is central to who people are; we must be **culturally competent**
5. Youth homelessness is not acceptable, and we all have a role in preventing and ending it.
  - **Reconciliation** is about all of us and necessitates transforming how we work together
  - All stakeholders, including families, communities, Indigenous peoples, community-based organizations, governments, and funders need to be **included** and have a responsibility to collaborate and align in the best interests of youth
  - Decision-making processes must recognize power dynamics and promote self-determination of youth
  - **Equitable** practices support fair outcomes for oppressed individuals and groups



# 1

## STRATEGY ONE: ACCESS

Consultations with diverse groups of youth and stakeholders suggest that current service provision is fragmented and uncoordinated, preventing youth from accessing the services they need quickly.

The vision for Strategy One is to have a coordinated system of resources where all youth have immediate and ongoing access to the supports needed to prevent, alleviate and respond to homelessness.

“System integration can be defined broadly as the provision of services with high levels of coordination, communication, trust, and respect among service agencies so that they are better able to work together to achieve common objectives.”<sup>88</sup>

### What We've Heard:

- Youth, advocates, and agency and system staff, lack knowledge about the full range of resources, services, and programs available.
- When youth attempt to access services they often encounter barriers such as: strict age mandates, no-pet policies, short opening hours, requirements for identification, sobriety and more.
- Information sharing and collaboration among agencies is complicated by privacy concerns, lack of common information management systems and shared spaces for communication.
- By diversifying access points for key resources and information we assist youth that are unfamiliar and disconnected from services to quickly access the resources they need.
- It is essential that all access points adopt a **No Wrong Door Approach** that allows youth to be connected to services that meet their needs.

“Lots of programs will refer you to other programs and you're always sent somewhere else. Or when you're in the programs they put you through hoops or make it impossible for you to do things to accomplish what they want you to do.” —Youth

## OBJECTIVE 1.1

### Establish a coordinated access strategy

- **Develop a network of regional hubs open 24/7 by increasing the capacity of existing youth-serving agencies.**

These hubs would be a safe space for youth to hang out and access basic needs, housing services, system navigators, and meet with system representatives. The hubs would be responsive to the needs of their communities and the populations they serve.

All hubs will be connected through a common communication and information management strategy. See Objective 1.2.

“Have more community centres open during the week and weekends for [youth] to have more opportunity to find somewhere to stay.” —Youth

- **Establish a comprehensive and robust network of regional street outreach teams active 24/7.**

Street outreach teams provide services to the most vulnerable youth. These teams would develop trusting relationships with youth on the streets and also have the ability to support immediate intakes and referrals to a range of services.

They will be connected to each other through the Winnipeg Outreach Network and to hubs through a common communications and information management strategy see Objective 1.2.

“Everybody loves street outreach! Staff actually care.” —Youth

- **Ensure that emergency systems, such as shelters, become direct access points to long-term housing supports.**

See Objective 3.1.

### Promising Practices in Winnipeg

- **Winnipeg Outreach Network** coordinates city-wide street outreach among various service providers in Winnipeg.
- A **No Wrong Door Policy** was implemented by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) for all health services. Recognizing that patients have difficulty navigating the health system, all WRHA departments play a role in connecting patients to the right services. They have developed a Health Outreach and Community Support Team (HOCS) to assist with system navigation if department staff struggle with finding the right services for complex cases.

- 24/7 Safe Spaces through Spence Neighbourhood Association in the West End, Rossbrook House in Centennial, and Ndinawe in the North End are drop-in centres that respond to community/neighbourhood demographics offer safe and easy to access overnight services.

#### *Promising Responses*

- The Department of Homeless Services Street in New York City provides outreach 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. Outreach teams are connected to service providers in each borough. By quickly connecting adults and youth on the streets with housing choices, they have been able to move 4,100 individuals off the streets and into housing since their inception. Further, their team is connected to a 311 service, whereby members of the public can call if they see an individual who appears homeless and in need of services.<sup>89</sup>

### **OBJECTIVE 1.2**

#### **Improve collaboration among stakeholders by promoting communication**

- **Identify existing community and system access points for youth experiencing homelessness and develop coordinated intake and referral protocols that best meet the needs of youth.**

Any protocols or assessment tools used should align with the core principles and values.

*“I don’t want to waste my breath talking to someone who won’t be in my life.” —Youth*

- **Develop consistent and compatible policies for consent to information sharing with the support of Privacy Officers.**
- **Create a common database that facilitates information sharing.**

The database development needs to follow the principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession.

- **Organize regular networking events for service providers to communicate changes in programs and processes, participate in shared trainings, and develop effective practices specific to the needs of youth.**

Include staff training on all aspects of LGBTQ2S\* and Indigenous cultural competency.

#### *Promising Practices in Winnipeg*

- **The Building Futures program** for youth aging out of care is a partnership between four agencies and two funding bodies. No matter where youth first ask for support, they can be connected to the

range of services available: employment assistance, counseling, service navigation, financial management, and/or mentorship.

#### *Promising Responses:*

- **Multiple location decentralized intake.** Alameda County Housing Resource Centres in California offer decentralized access points through eight Housing Resource Centres (HRC). At these centres, individuals are assessed, provided with a score based on financial information and strengths, and connected to services they need at the multi-service centres. Coordination among the centres is through a common assessment tool and data collection methods.

### **OBJECTIVE 1.3**

#### **Remove barriers to access across youth serving agencies, government agencies, and safe spaces**

- **Define, adopt and implement common core principles and values for working with youth.**

This includes harm-reduction, non-judgmental barrier free, culturally appropriate, and strengths-based services.

- **Promote barrier free safe spaces.**

This includes: child-friendly, pet-friendly, waitlist-free, appointment-free, non-judgmental, with flexible hours, and with broad age mandates.

- **Increase the availability and responsiveness of crisis stabilization and detox services.**

*“A lot of places won’t help because you’re either too young or too old. One agency said I was too young (age 19 – under 21), another that I was too old (over 18). One place you have to be 21 another under 18. If you’re between those ages, no one wants to help you.”—Youth*

#### *Promising Practices in Winnipeg*

- **Youth Agencies Alliance (YAA)** consists of 18 youth-serving agency members who meet monthly. They have developed collective values including:

- Collaboration
- Relationships
- Best practices
- Safe, inclusive and meaningful programs

- **Resource Assistance for Youth, Inc.** provides barrier free drop-in services:

- Harm-reduction model
- Pet-friendly atmosphere

- Broad age mandate, child-friendly (0-29 years)
- No need for identification to access primary health

“You can bring a dog or another pet here at RaY. My dog doesn’t have to stay outside in the middle of winter and freeze or get stolen.” —Youth

#### Promising Responses

- **The Homeless Youth Collaborative on Developmental Evaluation**<sup>90</sup> in Twin Cities, Minnesota is a collaborative of six homeless youth service agencies that participated in a research study to identify and define nine evidence based principles for working with their population. The following principles were adopted by the agencies in 2013:

- Journey-Oriented
- Trauma-Informed
- Non-Judgmental
- Harm Reduction
- Trusting Youth-Adult Relationships
- Strengths-Based
- Positive Youth Development
- Holistic
- Collaboration

- **The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness Opening Doors Plan**, Washington, DC, is a federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. Their foundational values include:

- Homelessness is unacceptable
- There are no homeless people, but rather people who have lost their homes who deserve to be treated with dignity and respect
- Homelessness is expensive; it is better to invest in solutions
- Homelessness is solvable; we have learned a lot about what works
- Homelessness can be prevented
- There is strength in collaboration

## OBJECTIVE 1.4

### Establish a centralized public information resource

- **Create a single, comprehensive and updated website, mobile app, and pocket resource guide with resources for youth experiencing, or at risk of homelessness.**

Include particular content for Indigenous youth migrating from First Nations, youth from rural and remote communities, LGBTQ2S\* youth and other populations with unique needs.

“Youth may not have phones but they still go on the internet, so web-based information or even the ability to make appointments online could improve accessibility.” —Roundtable participant

- **Develop a 24/7 telephone hotline for youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness.**
- **Partner with northern, remote, and First Nations Communities to develop a communication and resource access strategy for youth migrating to Winnipeg.**

#### Promising Practices in Winnipeg

- **The Gang Action Interagency Network (GAIN)** is developing a youth-friendly app with resources and services for youth, identifying locations that do not have barriers for those who have been involved in gangs.
- **Manitoba’s Contact Guide**, a community services directory is currently being re-developed in partnership with the United Way’s 211 initiative.

#### Promising Responses

- **Youth Services and Supports in Toronto** is a service directory for youth 16-29 and their supports created by the City of Toronto. The guide is developed with youth in mind and can be found online.<sup>91</sup>



### What do you want service providers to hear?

- Open your doors
- More opportunities for our voices to be heard, like today
- Lots more promotions and advertising of services. “This is not a secret service” better promotion like: flyers at the schools, billboards, television and cable ads
- 1-800 number for easy phone access to services
- I only found these services through a family connection [these] should be more available than that. [They] should be more available than that.

### Youth at the Indigenous Youth Forum

## Decolonization and Access

• **Improve Equitable Access.** Efforts to reduce barriers and increase communication in the youth homelessness sector will improve equitable access to social services which is an essential component of the decolonization of systems. During the Indigenous Youth Forum, youth were asked what culturally-appropriate services looked like, they described places that **make people feel at home** because they are:

- Respectful
- Genuine
- Honest
- Empathetic
- Promote a sense of belonging- especially important if we don't have families
- Supportive
- Connect to resources
- Non-judgmental
- Loyal
- Persistent
- Silly and with a sense of humour
- In core area
- Non-institutional because "Security at the front is intimidating"

• **Cultural Competency Training.** In particular, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action the cultural competency training of lawyers, health practitioners, and public servants. In the spirit of this recommendation we call for the continued training of youth service providers in the homelessness sector so that they may provide culturally-safe and appropriate services.

• **Involve Indigenous peoples** at all levels of service provision, including hiring Indigenous staff, recruiting Indigenous Board Members, and building partnerships with Indigenous-led organizations for programming.

• **Bridge the gaps in resources with First Nations Communities.** Through the collaborative development of outreach strategies for Indigenous youth and their communities, we are recognizing the mobility of Indigenous youth in remote areas and the opportunities for resource sharing.

# 2

## STRATEGY TWO: PREVENTION

Prevention means doing what we can to address the structural, systemic, family, and individual factors leading to youth homelessness so that it never happens. When this is not possible, it means responding quickly so that homelessness is a short experience that does not lead to street-entrenchment and long-term homelessness. The following section describes objectives that were designed to prevent youth homelessness based on the pathways into youth homelessness in Winnipeg. This strategy combines different types of prevention: primary prevention (reducing risk-factors), secondary prevention (early intervention), and tertiary prevention (reducing impacts of long-term homelessness).<sup>92</sup>

The vision for Strategy Two is that youth and their families struggling with risk factors of homelessness are identified and supported.

**"A lot of programs attack problems, but you guys need to attack the roots of the problems. Not an overnight thing, the review process takes time. EIA, Justice, CFS, Addictions etc., they all play a role in homelessness. Every problem in the city interconnects with one another." —Youth**

### What We've Heard:

• **Families and communities are important.** The number one cause of people's first experience of homelessness is family breakdown, conflict, or violence; we need to build strengthen families instead of creating divisions.

**"We don't have a proactive approach, there needs to be a focus on the family unit." —Youth**

• **Schools matter.** All youth experiencing homelessness were connected to a school at one point. Yet, graduation rates are low preventing youth from gaining employment and transitioning into adulthood.

**"If you don't have a place you won't be able to concentrate because of staying up all night. That's what prevented me from going back to school. Lack of rest." —Youth**

**System Exits.** There are opportunities to prevent homelessness when youth leave residential government systems, including justice, CFS, health, mental health, and addictions treatment.

“Make an extension to all children in CFS to 25 not 21. It would provide financial and emotional stability, less youth homelessness.” —Youth

- **Migration from First Nations Communities.** We need to both prevent homelessness within Northern, rural, and First Nations communities, and provide safety nets when youth first arrive in Winnipeg.

“Provide funding and adequate support services to youth on the reserves.” —Youth

## OBJECTIVE 2.1

### Foster resilience among families and communities

- **Support poverty reduction strategies that promote access to basic income and affordable housing for families living in poverty.**
- **Provide parents with access to effective, affordable, anti-oppressive, culturally-appropriate, and community-based parenting supports. These should be available, in particular, to young parents and before families are in crisis or connected with the CFS system.**
- **Encourage the CFS System to focus on prevention and the promotion of healthy kinship supports by reducing apprehension rates, with appropriate resources to achieve this.**
- **Encourage the transformation of the CFS System so youth who are in care have what they need to thrive. This includes consistent, stable, quality homes; stable support to develop and keep healthy family, peer, and community relationships, and; opportunities to explore a range of employment and educational paths.**
- **Support family-centred and accessible mental health and addiction strategies. Base these on evidence and evaluate them regularly through both research and community consultations.**

#### *Promising Practices in Winnipeg*

- **Metis Child and Family Services Living in Family Enhancement (L.I.F.E.)** program offers a unique alternative to the apprehension and removal of children from their family. Families in the program reside with a trained foster parent who acts as a role

model and will support, guide and mentor the parents in order to restore the strength, health, and well-being of all family members and to strengthen the care provided to the children within the circle of their family.

- **The Aboriginal Health & Wellness Centre of Winnipeg Inc. Head Start Program** promotes healthy child development through an evidence-based parenting program to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children, who are 3 and 4 years old. The program follows six important components: nutrition, parental involvement, social support, culture and language, health promotion, and education.
- **General Child and Family Services Authority, Family Enhancement Pilot Projects** aim to provide low-to-medium risk families with intensive services including household support services, support and mentoring to a child and/or parent and supportive counseling. During the first 90 days of service 54% of families receive visits once a week or more, 38% of families are visited two to three times a month and in 8% of cases visits occur less than twice a month.

#### *Promising Responses*

- **In Home Family Supports, Ben Calf Robe Society in Edmonton.** Ketotayminawok (“All my Relations”), provides culturally-sensitive intervention and support services to Aboriginal families with the aim of strengthening and preserving youth, children and their families. These home-based and family-centered services are designed to promote the protection and wellbeing of children in their homes, prevent unnecessary long-term out-of-home placements, and respond immediately to the family at the point of crisis.
- **The Ottawa Inuit Children’s Centre (OICC or the Centre).** The Centre offers a variety of children’s programs, including Aboriginal Head Start, daycare, full-day kindergarten, and after-school activities, as well as cultural, language, literacy, and support programs for families. The Centre was created in 2005 by parents of children attending the Aboriginal Head Start program, and all subsequent children’s programs were designed using the same holistic components and central objectives, namely:
  - Early childhood education to support school readiness
  - Promotion of healthy nutrition
  - Encouragement of parent involvement in the program and child development
  - Celebration of Aboriginal language and culture
  - Health promotion generally
  - Reinforcement of social support networks for families with young children.

- **Safe in the City** was an innovative response to youth homelessness launched in 1988 in the United Kingdom. It consisted of an ‘early intervention’ targeted at youth that were identified to be at-risk of homelessness. The intervention components included: personal development, family support and skills and employability. Participants who engaged in all elements reported that the family support piece was most important to them. Further, those who participated in personal development and skills and employability without family support had limited outcomes, suggesting that family support is an essential piece of early intervention efforts to prevent homelessness.<sup>93</sup>

## OBJECTIVE 2.2

### Prevent newcomer youth homelessness

- **Work with settlement sector, schools, and the Immigration Partnership Winnipeg to investigate the prevalence and experience of youth homelessness among newcomers to develop effective responses.**

#### *Promising Practices*

- **Hidden in Our Midst: Homeless Newcomer Youth in Toronto.** In 2014, the Children's Aid Society in Toronto and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health conducted a comprehensive study to understand the specific circumstances of newcomer youth experiencing homelessness as they tend to be hidden from view.<sup>94</sup> Their objectives were: 1) explore the experiences of and pathways into homelessness among a sample of newcomer youth in Toronto; 2) identify service needs and investigate what newcomer youth believe to be critical components of interventions aimed at reducing and preventing homelessness; 3) assess current service system capacities for responding to homelessness among newcomer youth; 4) identify service gaps and possible promising practices among both traditional service agencies and ethno-cultural agencies that currently or could in future address those gaps. This has allowed them to plan for better programs and services that meet the needs of this population. To prevent homelessness they recommended:
  - Wider availability of newcomer youth peer support networks
  - Agency staff that advocate for their housing needs
  - Intensive case management and follow-up when youth first arrive to Canada
  - Targeted services
  - Opportunities for “self-care”

## OBJECTIVE 2.3

### Adopt and implement school-based prevention strategies

- **Work with schools to identify youth experiencing conflict within their families and connect youth and their families to supports early.**
- **Work with schools to integrate life skills and Indigenous teachings that address the specific risk factors for youth homelessness into their curriculums.**
- **Integrate community-based resources into schools. This includes resources such as Elders, resource workers, and peer mentors to address family conflict and acceptance of gender diversity for LGBTQ2S\* youth.**
- **Work with schools and CFS to identify youth who are disconnected from the education system and provide appropriate supports to address the barriers they face in completing school.**



### VOICES Youth in Care Network participants agreed the following would make schools better:

- **Solidarity against bullying**
- **Mental health supports**
- **Preparation for life after high school**
- **Skilled teachers**
- **Equity and equality**
- **Less institutional and a greater focus on investing in people**

#### *Promising Practices in Winnipeg*

- Most schools in Manitoba teach some aspects of life skills and include Indigenous teachings in their curriculums. There is an opportunity to integrate specific life skills that relate to homelessness, including conflict resolution, systems navigation, housing applications, and tenant rights and responsibilities into existing programs.
- Wayfinders and CEDA's Pathways program are school-based supports for youth. They provide assistance with transitions between schools, homework, career



and education planning, life skills, family conflict, and other needs identified by the youth.

#### *Promising Responses*

- **RAFT Supporting Canada’s Youth.** Schools and community partners in the Niagara Region refer at-risk youth to a case manager who develops a community-based plan of action based on individual needs.
- **Alone in London.** Workshops and awareness raising initiatives about the causes and consequences of homelessness delivered to youth in London schools. The program includes modules on conflict resolution and communication, bullying, confidence and self-esteem. Post-workshop, 96% of students report knowing where to go for help if they become homeless.
- **The Reconnect Program** aims to identify students ‘at-risk’ of homelessness and respond quickly to help stabilize their living situation, and improve engagement with family, work, and education in the community. The program has been extensively evaluated with positive outcomes and has been culturally adapted to serve Indigenous youth in Australia.
- **The Geelong Project.** In this Australian intervention, risk is evaluated for every student through a risk and assets assessment tool Student Needs Survey (SNS) which also includes information from teachers and counselors. Those deemed at risk have a screening interview. Then, they are allocated a range of services, their intensity will depend on the needs of the individual. There are three tiers:
  1. low-intensity monitoring and referrals to supports,
  2. case work support and monitoring,
  3. wrap-around case management for complex cases, involving numerous agencies.

Case management is both youth-centered and family-centered.

## **OBJECTIVE 2.4**

**Ensure that youth in government care do not exit into homelessness**

**Homelessness is a “fusion” policy issue, and must necessarily involve health, corrections and justice, housing, education and child welfare, for instance.”**

**—Stephen Gaetz, 2014, p.434**

- **Create an interdepartmental “Zero Discharge into Homelessness” strategy, starting with a coordinated provincial policy direction, that supports youth transitioning from any type of Provincial government or government funded care.**

Provincial government care includes CFS, Justice/ Corrections, Health Care, Mental Health and Crisis Stabilization, and Addictions Treatment. Consider the applicability of a similar strategy for movement from First Nations’ Communities and transitions out of Federal Corrections.

- **Develop and enforce regulations to ensure consistent and early exit planning for youth in governmental care.**

Every effort should be made so when they exit, youth have the resources and skills to be safely housed and thrive – including culturally-appropriate programming, ability to navigate systems, practical life skills training, and a high school education. Develop a standardized checklist that can be used across systems.

**“Greater planning, choice, and options while being in care not just suddenly when aging out at 18 years old”**  
**—Youth**

- **Provide all youth who have been in the care of CFS with the choice to receive ongoing supports funded by CFS until the age of 25 regardless of legal status.**

This includes income, education and training, system navigation, health and mental health care, and mentorship supports available to youth as a right.

- **Incorporate family and community reunification in the development of transition plans.**

*“I was unnecessarily struggling for four years until I connected with them [my family]. They’re really patient with me, that’s what I need.” —Youth*

#### *Promising Practices in Winnipeg*

- **The Manitoba Foster Family Network** has developed a targeted training program for Foster Families including how to provide measured skill development for youth in their care.
- **CLOUT Program** is a partnership between nine community agencies who provide short term licensed foster homes and intensive support for birth families working toward reunification (22 beds).

#### *Promising Responses*

- **Eva’s Initiatives, Family Reconnect Program.** In recognition that youth experiencing homelessness mainly due to family breakdown and with the belief that the role of family is essential for youth transitioning into adulthood, this program works to rebuild reconciliation when it is safe to do so in Toronto.<sup>95</sup>
- **Department for Communities and Local Development.** In August of 2012, *Making every contact count, a joint approach to preventing homelessness* was published by the Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness in the United Kingdom. They set out a number of recommendations in the hope that “We can build a future where mistakes and difficulties in youth or discharge from prisons, hospitals and care do not lead to homelessness in the way they too often do now.” One of the key policy commitments of this document includes:
  - The Government will: “help prevent prisoners from becoming homeless on release from custody by keeping in payment the housing element of the new Universal Credit from October 2013 to those serving sentences of six months or less, allowing them to maintain their tenancies. Under current rules Housing Benefit payments cease if a person imprisoned longer than three months.”(p.21)<sup>96</sup>

## **OBJECTIVE 2.5**

### **Support Indigenous youth moving to Winnipeg**

- **Create a coordinated and collaborative strategy with Indigenous communities to support youth migrating to Winnipeg.**

This should include: actions to support youth to stay in their home communities if they choose and working with CFS to provide the support youth need to maintain the connections they have to their home communities if they are removed.

- **Provide outreach services and resources (toolkits) to youth in First Nation communities, at contact points for youth migrating across Manitoba, and at arrival points in Winnipeg.**
- **Develop a non-stigmatizing and non-judgmental network of care to identify and support recent migrants to the city.**
- **Connect youth from First Nation communities to Indigenous social supports (family or community) in the city, including host homes.**

*“Provide more opportunities to prevent homelessness for those migrating to the cities.” —Youth*

#### *Promising Practices in Winnipeg*

- **The Eagle Urban Transition Centre.** Since 2005 they have served as a hub of information and central location for clients seeking transitional support while living in and/or relocating to Winnipeg.
- **Peguis First Nation Post-secondary Indigenous Transition Program,** hosted by the Canadian Mennonite University (CMU). The program includes life skills training, an Indigenous cultural awareness component, and accredited university courses through CMU. It is intended to support youth’s transition to Winnipeg and post-secondary education.

#### *Promising Responses*

- **New in Town Aboriginal Welcome Centre** in Edmonton provides holistic assistance for individuals transitioning from provides holistic assistance for individuals transitioning from First Nations communities into the city that are without the social and economic supports they need. Services are coordinated, mobile, culturally-driven and accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. They include referrals to employment, housing, elders, cultural and education programs.



## OBJECTIVE 2.6

### Decolonize systems and approaches to service provision

- **Work with Manitoba Child and Family Services, Manitoba Education and Training, and Manitoba Justice to understand implications of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and develop strategies to operationalize the Calls to Action.**
- **Teach a respectful and truthful account of history in the educational system and to those working with youth. “De-taboo” talking about colonization.**
- **Educate staff and volunteers at community-based organizations and government agencies on the histories of Indigenous peoples as called for in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to include skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.**
- **Ensure programs, services, and other resources developed through this Plan integrate the Seven Sacred Teachings and the values of the Plan into their approaches and processes.**

#### *Decolonization and Prevention*

- **Systems Level-Change.** Effective prevention efforts are necessarily decolonizing because they are addressing the systems which were created under colonialism. Through recommendations that call for systems to focus on strengthening healthy family and community supports this strategy is addressing the ongoing legacies of colonialism and it is in alignment with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Calls to Action<sup>97</sup> which include:
  - 1.ii. Providing adequate resources to enable Aboriginal communities and child-welfare organizations to keep Aboriginal families together where it is safe to do so, and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments, regardless of where they reside (p.1)
  - 10.iii. Developing culturally-appropriate curricula. (p.2)
  - 12. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families. (p.2)

# 3

## STRATEGY 3: HOUSING & SUPPORTS

The defining feature of homelessness is a lack of adequate housing; the solution to homelessness must therefore always include housing. Though housing and support are often viewed, and developed, as two distinct continuums, they must be coordinated if we are to end youth homelessness. Diversity between program models can allow for a greater range of options, however, in practice there is inconsistency in the type of support youth can expect. As programs are planned, evaluated, and funded, the principles and values should permeate new and existing housing and supports to better align with our collective vision.

The vision for Strategy Three is a full continuum of housing supply and supports for youth based on need and choice.

#### **What We Heard:**

- The limited supply of safe and affordable rental housing makes transitions to permanent housing challenging for youth across all housing and support programs.
- Transitional and permanent housing programs need to provide life skills programming and ongoing supports after program completion
- Poor housing conditions and fragmented supports lead to years of housing instability and episodic homelessness.
- All housing should be integrated into community and non-institutional in nature.
- Youth need the ability to choose whether or not to have roommates, live in congregated or scattered site housing, and the level and type of support they receive. They also need the choice to change their minds.
- Housing First cannot be housing only. Follow-up supports, mentorship, and connections to other holistic services are necessary.

**Supports for housing available for youth in Winnipeg**



**SUPPORTS WITH HOUSING**

**INFORMATION AND REFERRAL**

Resource centres, drop-in centres, food programs, and many other agencies provide this. It ranges from giving a list of housing resources to building the trust needed to make appropriate referrals.

**RAPID REHOUSING**

Homeless outreach mentors, emergency shelters, and some information and referral locations provide support specifically to get into housing quickly.

**FAMILY RECONNECT**

A number of information and referral locations, specifically programs for youth leaving the care of CFS, actively support youth with building healthy family relationships.

**CASE MANAGEMENT**

Most transitional housing and independent living programs have case management models.

**INTENSIVE CASE MANAGEMENT (ICM)**

Housing First Programs operate on an ICM model, which generally has lower case loads than traditional case management. There are 3 ICM teams specifically for youth, with 60 spots in total.

**Winnipeg’s existing housing continuum for youth**, based on Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation housing continuum.

24/7 safe spaces (Rossbrook House, Ndinawe, West End 24/7)	Transitional housing (RaY REST program, Ma Mawi Yellow Shawl Housing, Pan Am Place, Siloam Mission Exit-Up)	Supportive permanent housing (youth under 21 and in care of CFS may transition to permanent adult supports if they have a permanent and severe disability)	Subsidized housing (Manitoba Housing, not-for-profit housing)	Market rental housing (includes rooming houses)
Youth emergency shelters (Ndinawe, 16 beds up to age 21; MYS 8 beds generally ages 12-17)	Independent living programs (6 programs for youth aging out of care, up to age 21)		Rent supplements (HPS temporarily then Manitoba Housing for Housing First)	
Adult emergency shelters, family shelter, and domestic violence shelter				

- Youth want choice over their neighbourhoods. Most would prefer inner-city locations where services are accessible, and friends and family are close.

“[Living in] richer areas...people stared at us, that’s why we returned and are still living in the North End.”  
—Youth

### OBJECTIVE 3.1

#### Re-envision the emergency response for youth

- **Adopt a “no wrong door” policy so youth can be referred to immediate, safe places to stay through multiple avenues.**

Emergency shelters for youth require more flexibility; any immediate, temporary housing for youth should be in home-like environments and youth-centred spaces.

- **Create direct and effective linkages between emergency housing service providers and housing support resources.**
- **Foster emergency housing responses that focus on meeting the needs of youth who tend to be underserved through existing services: youth ages 18-24, those with substance use issues, and LGBTQ2S\* youth**

“We end up standing in lineups outside in the cold for hours waiting to be accommodated” —Youth

*Promising responses in Winnipeg*

- **Rossbrook House** has been open 24/7 for youth in Winnipeg since 1976. While they provide a safe space for youth to spend the night if necessary, they also connect youth with safe, appropriate family, friends, and community members overnight if their home



environment is unsafe for a short time. Over the summer of 2016, Winnipeg’s three 24/7 youth safe spaces (Rossbrook House, Spence Neighbourhood Association, and Ndinawe) coordinated to provide overnight stays for a number of youth experiencing homelessness and quickly connect them to appropriate housing.

*Promising Responses*

- **The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness** suggests emergency systems’ roles in ending homelessness include:

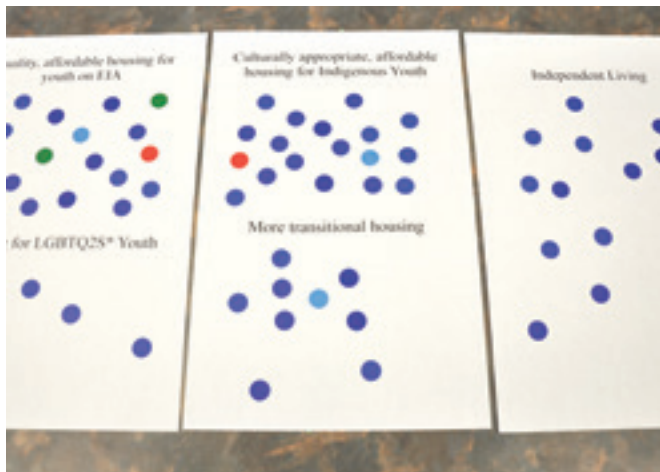
- Ensure that all people who come into contact with the homelessness sector are assessed and provided with supports to either return home or move into housing as quickly as possible.
- Adopt a client-centered case management approach for individuals and families that enter the system, and ensure they are tracked as they navigate their way out of the system.
- Fund and reward service providers for focusing on prevention and rapid rehousing as a service priority, and make the goal of emergency services a shorter experience of homelessness.
- Integrate ‘Housing First’ and/or transitional housing supports when working with chronic and long-term homeless clients.
- Develop a strong outreach focus to bring people into the service who have historically not been connected, and make rapid rehousing a priority for them.
- Invest in smaller and dispersed shelter environments that provide individual rooms with locked doors.<sup>98</sup>
- **Bridging the Gap** in Halton provides a Host Homes program for short-term stays (up to 4 months) for youth ages 16-24. Host Homes are screened and expected to provide some meals and a private living space for youth for a per diem rate.

### OBJECTIVE 3.2

#### Increase the supply and diversity of transitional housing options

- **Develop increased supply of transitional housing options for youth.**

In the range of transitional options, include a harm-reduction model for youth actively using substances and both congregated and scattered site options. Transitional housing should always align with the principles and values of the Plan, including being community-based (non-institutional), low barrier, and



have flexible timelines based on the youth’s goals rather than a program model.

- **Make appropriate supports available within all transitional housing models, including CFS independent living programs.**

Supports should respond to youth choice and need, and provide youth opportunities to learn independent living skills. The transition into more permanent housing should be supported. If the transitional housing cannot meet the needs of a youth, support should not be dropped without a transition to more appropriate housing and support.

- **Create targeted housing options for youth who are excluded from integrated models, or want specialized supports. This includes LGBTQ2S\* specific housing options.**

Specialized housing needs to be small scale, non-stigmatizing, and integrated into the community.

“There should be less push for foster kids to go out on their own. Maybe a home where there is a family and a shared house, with supportive people there. Because we’ve all been moving around and felt like we’re on our own, but we need that support.” —Youth

“I’d like a place like a host-home, where friends coming off reserves could stay instead of hotels.” —Youth

#### *Promising Practices in Winnipeg*

- **RaY’s REST program** provides immediate access to independent Manitoba Housing units for youth with ongoing supports. The scattered site units connects youth to permanent affordable housing after they no longer need transitional supports.
- **Ma Mawi’s Yellow Shawl Housing** supports youth through community-based housing with live-in mentors.
- **Pan Am Place** is a structured transitional housing program for young men. It has short wait times (about

1 week) and encourages youth to participate in volunteering, exercise, and a healthy lifestyle.

- **Siloam Mission’s Exit-Up program** provides transitional housing for youth aging out of the care of CFS. It starts with congregated transitional housing with onsite supports in a neighbourhood setting. Youth then transition into permanent affordable housing with outreach supports. These are gradually reduced based on the youths’ wants and needs.

#### *Promising Responses*

- Reviews of promising practices for independent living programs suggest making a shift towards goals of interdependence, measured life skill development, and an “adult permanency resource” (e.g. mentor, family member, teacher, or other ongoing resource).<sup>99</sup>
- **Foyer Model.** Transitional housing through the Foyer model has been promoted by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness as part of the ‘system of care’ for youth experiencing homelessness. Foyer housing is generally guided by shared principles, rather than strict rules, and focus on successful transitions to adulthood rather than simply independence.<sup>100</sup> Evaluations of Foyers in the UK and Australia demonstrate positive outcomes for youth. Young people are able to enhance their education, social relationships and engagement, and have better employment and housing outcomes. Further, this model has been endorsed by the Egale Canadian Human Rights Trust as a promising practice for **LGBTQ2S youth in Canada.**<sup>101</sup>

### **OBJECTIVE 3.3**

#### **Develop a full continuum of permanent housing with appropriate supports for youth**

The division between ‘permanent housing’ compared with ‘transitional’ housing for youth is not a strict one. Transitional housing should never transition into homelessness, and permanent housing is relative given that high mobility rates are common for all Winnipeg youth.<sup>102</sup> For the purposes of this plan, ‘permanent’ housing is housing where youth have protection of tenancy rights and can stay as long as they choose. Housing support providers in Winnipeg have found success in holding master leases on units for a period of time until youth are able to take over tenancy responsibilities. Such staging is not about ‘readiness’ in a patronizing sense, but rather about bridging supports for youth so they are not set up for failure.

- **Ensure that all housing programs provide long-term, continuous supports for permanent housing placement and maintenance**

Capacity and funding are required for follow-up to provide ongoing support, as needed, even after youth transition out of a program.

- **Expand the capacity of Housing First programs to meet the specific needs of youth.**

Prior to expanding Housing First programming for youth, there is a clear need to define its role within a housing and support system. This includes the development of shared agreement regarding the principles of youth-focused Housing First programs. The capacity of existing programs require coordination of rent supplements, and partnerships that facilitate access to affordable housing.

- **Create and strengthen partnerships between youth-serving agencies and housing providers.**

Partnerships would increase access to permanent housing and prevent eviction. This includes training for private and not-for-profit landlords and increased support to youth at risk of eviction.

- **Develop increased supply of housing, including shared housing for youth.**

Housing should be based on youth's choice, community-based and low barrier; there should be options to have live-in mentors or 'house parents.'

- **Ensure supports are available within shared housing models, including rooming houses.**

Rooming houses currently serve as 'shared housing' for many youth. Enhancing supports in these houses, while improving their quality, will support housing stability. To the greatest extent possible, these supports should include building community connections and long-term mentorship/peer support.

“...staff to check on us, managing everything building related, but not someone around every day telling us what to do” —Youth

#### *Promising Practices in Winnipeg*

- **Indigenous-led, youth-serving organizations** have been successful in accessing HPS funding for Housing First programming. Aboriginal HPS funding can only be received by Indigenous-led organizations meeting the following criteria:

1. They have a majority of Board members who identify as Aboriginal
2. They have a majority of staff who identify as Aboriginal
3. They serve a majority of participants/clients who identify as Aboriginal
4. They are recognized by the Aboriginal community as an Aboriginal organization

- **Manitoba's Rent Assist program** provides participants with 75% of median-market rent regardless of EIA eligibility. This has dramatically increased the amount of social assistance available to single individuals in particular.

#### *Promising Responses*

- **Housing Subsidies.** Evidence for housing subsidies as a very effective prevention activity is well documented.<sup>103 104 105</sup> Evidence from simulations indicates that subsidizing housing costs for extremely low-income people has the strongest effect on lowering homelessness rates compared to several other interventions tested.<sup>106</sup> Thus when used as secondary and tertiary prevention, housing subsidies help 80–85 percent of families or single adults experiencing chronic homelessness to achieve housing stability.<sup>107</sup>

#### **Decolonization and Housing and Supports**

- **Self-determination.** Article 23 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.”<sup>108</sup> Funding programs for housing for Indigenous youth need to be increased, and developed in proper consultation with Indigenous peoples. Imposed outcomes for various housing and support programs must not undermine the values of this plan. It is important to question whether the values of achieving ‘independent permanent housing’ that many funders are currently looking for align with the hopes and dreams of youth.

- **Connection to First Nations communities.** Supports should continue if youth move between Winnipeg and home communities. Though this plan is Winnipeg-based, we recognize that the condition and supply of housing in First Nations communities needs urgent action.

- **Healing from trauma is critical**, and may take precedence over participation in full-time employment or education. Transitional housing expectations must be developed through an equity lens.

“Direct special attention to homelessness amongst Indigenous peoples caused by displacement from land and resources and the destruction of cultural identity” —United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing<sup>109</sup>

“Our people do not fit into boxes. When there are boxes, they have been used to exclude us, always. In Indigenous culture, you don't fit into boxes, you just are.” —Indigenous leader discussion

# 4

## STRATEGY 4: SUPPORTS TO THRIVE

**The vision for Strategy Four is that all youth with experience of homelessness have the supports they need to maintain housing and thrive.**

**Q: What does it mean to thrive?**

Autonomous, with the dignity of choice

Interdependent

Happy

Healthy

Learning new things, ongoing growth

Confident, mastery / purpose

Healing of trauma

Sustainability

Emotional supports, community

Stability, safety, space to achieve/ fulfill goals

Success

### Youth Survey Responses:

“To do something better for you and others”

“Surviving the struggle”

### What we Heard:

- Agencies with employment, training, education, housing, and life skills programming all in-house can provide holistic supports, but when they are separated, there are often challenges coordinating between agencies or sectors.
- Youth who have experienced homelessness face unique barriers accessing mainstream services and/or take more time to build trust and relationships.
- Funders are increasingly demanding outcome-based reporting for support services, but set those outcomes themselves (e.g. graduation rates, full-time employment retention rates). These outcomes may not align with the goals of youth.

“Administrative burdens keep getting heavier but there is not more administrative funding. We want to measure success, but don’t have staff to do it.”

—Roundtable Participant

### OBJECTIVE 4.1

#### Foster resilience among youth exiting homelessness through holistic and ongoing supports

Holistic and ongoing supports with life skills, education and training, employment, and healing require staff with specialized skills. One case manager cannot provide all these supports on their own. There is a need for



appropriate collaboration and partnership between programs and services so youth have one holistic plan to achieve their goals.

- **Connect housing support workers with skilled employment, training, and education workers to support youth's goal achievement.**

Opportunities for employment, training, and education should be part of youth's holistic plans, and coordinated through hubs.

- **Coordinate existing life skills training programs to increase consistency and effective resource sharing.**

All youth who have experienced homelessness need access to quality life skills training, with a range of teaching methods to suit diverse needs.

#### *Promising Practices in Winnipeg*

- Many of Winnipeg's youth-serving agencies have developed a range of employment and training programs that youth can access based on their own personal goals. These include a range of odd jobs for those who want to earn some money for just one day, social enterprises where they can learn basic skills, and support getting access to formal training and traditional employment

#### *Promising Responses*

- **ACCESS Bladerunners** in Vancouver support homeless or at-risk youth, ages 15-30 to create pathways to jobs in the construction industry with embedded Indigenous cultural teachings.
- **The Doorway** in Calgary provides support in 13 life categories including housing, employment, education, finances, drug/alcohol, legal, personal problem solving, planning, identification, volunteering, leadership, and "other." Participants create their own plan in different stages and then discuss it with a volunteer or staff member. Each planned step becomes their contract and the youth are paid a \$15 incentive for each completed contract. The program has achieved a consistent average of 7 out of 10 participants leaving the street environment by reaching their personal goals.

### **OBJECTIVE 4.2**

#### **Address System barriers to youths' housing stability**

- **Ensure ongoing support from the CFS system includes transitional income for youth, available regardless of participation in education and training.**

The income support should allow youth to explore educational and employment options, address trauma, and gain independent living skills without fear of losing housing.

- **Encourage EIA to increase the stability of income supports for youth.**

Consider policy and procedure changes to provide smoother transitions between youth and adulthood, EIA and employment/education/training, into and out of government care, and other transition points where youth are at risk of experiencing a sudden loss of income and therefore homelessness.

- **Support strategies to improve youth-focused service provision and responsiveness within governmental systems.**
- **Improve access to community-based primary health and mental health supports.**

*"We're watching this kid deteriorate before our eyes. He's addicted to crystal meth, he's not connecting to us. We need mental health resources; we need help from addictions programs. The solution is not just getting him into housing."*

*—Steering Committee member*

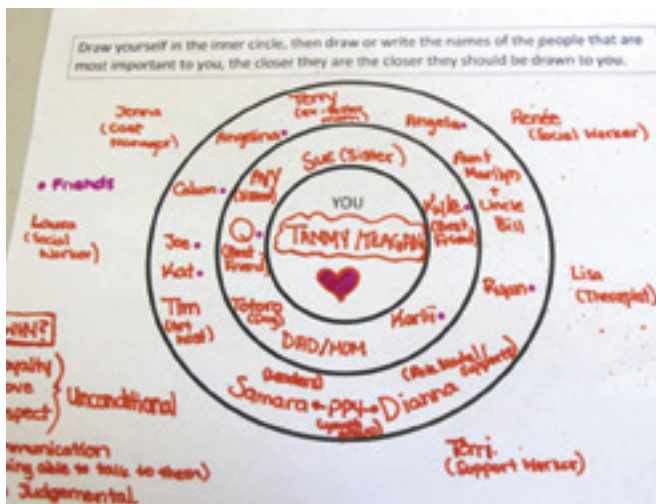
**Youth said creating more stability in income supports was a priority. They said: "It's like you have to plan and prepare just to get off EIA." You can only earn so much while receiving EIA, yet employment may not cover basic needs. Once youth stop receiving EIA, getting back on is very challenging and takes 4-6 weeks; this delay and gap in income has led to housing loss.**

### **OBJECTIVE 4.3**

#### **Enhance the capacity of informal and community-based supports**

In a number of engagement sessions with youth, they were asked to draw or write the people who were closest to them, and who provided good support to them when needed. For a majority of youth, the people in those circles were not staff at community or government agencies; they were family, friends, and community members. Formal mentorship programs have demonstrated results for youth at-risk of homelessness, while youth and community members in Winnipeg reinforced the importance of informal mentoring through caring communities. This is particularly true for Indigenous communities. Participating in peace walks, community events, community kitchens, recreation activities, and volunteering are all part of thriving.

*"Ma Mawi and Ndinawe here in the North End are not just programs. They are a community of support, they are family for generations of people" —Indigenous Leaders*



- **Increase the number and capacity of mentoring programs targeted to youth who have experienced homelessness.**

Mentors may require specialized training and support from the program to be a healthy, stable person in the youth's life.

- **Include ongoing, community and informal supports such as peers, family, recreation programs, or volunteer opportunities, in housing support plans with youth.**
- **Support grassroots Indigenous community initiatives responding to immediate needs and developing anti-colonial strategies of support.**

#### Promising Practices in Winnipeg

- **Action Therapy** connects youth “at-risk” with trained mentors who are supervised by a highly-experienced clinician. The wrap around support provided 24/7 is grounded in Indigenous teachings. Lateral empathy, whereby youth participate in helping others in need in the community, and participation in community events build a ‘therapeutic community.’
- **Canadian Mental Health Association’s Housing and Support** program employs peer outreach workers who have experience of homelessness, mental illness, or other challenges participants share. Their roles include building supportive relationships with participants and connecting them with community activities.

## OBJECTIVE 4.4

### Embed healing into supports and systems for youth

Trauma is both a cause and an outcome of homelessness; healing from this trauma is an ongoing

journey for many youth. All supports and systems that touch the lives of youth who have experienced homelessness need a trauma-informed lens, and recovery-oriented practices. Colonialism is the cause of trauma for Indigenous peoples and communities, and many youth have found that cultural connections, supports, and spiritual practices are central to their healing.

“Everyone says ‘this is going to be difficult, it’s stressful’ but no one says ‘hey, you can do this.’ That’s what we need to hear.” —Youth

“Healing is not about talk therapy or medication. It’s about art, culture, recreation, relationships. Community-based agencies are good at that. But sometimes we need a little help from clinicians when significant mental illness is there.” —Roundtable participant

- **Work with a cross-sectoral table of youth service providers and system representatives to establish close and ongoing relationships between hubs, outreach, and housing support staff with health and mental health practitioners.**
- **Encourage all health, mental health, and addictions treatment professionals working with youth who have been homeless to be educated in trauma-informed care and support them to apply it in practice.**
- **Resource Indigenous-led agencies to be available for any youth seeking cultural connections and culturally appropriate supports, and collaborate with non-Indigenous agencies to ensure all youth have access.**

#### Decolonization and Supports to Thrive

- **Culture is a way of being.** Holding a program or class for cultural connections and healing is not sufficient. Culture is part of who we are and a way of being, every day, all day. For youth to be connected or reconnected to Indigenous culture, Indigenous-led organizations and grassroots initiatives need long-term, sustainable support in terms of funding, self-determination, and recognition.
- **Cultural humility is required of everyone working with youth.** Cultural competence is the starting point for all service providers. Humility goes beyond that, requiring a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique, a desire to fix power imbalances, and aspiring to develop partnerships with those who advocate for others.<sup>110</sup>
- **Healing from trauma is critical,** and may take precedence over participation in full-time employment or education. Outcome goals need to be based on youth’s goals and programs must be flexible in order to be equitable.



# IMPLEMENTATION

## PLAN/FRAMWORK

### IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

#### Collaborate

- **Coordinate Implementation** through hiring staff and formalizing an oversight body
- **Communicate** the goals, priorities, and next steps
- **Engage** youth, Indigenous leaders, and national partners in ongoing ways. Engage key stakeholders through cross-sectoral tables developed through the action plan. Engage funders through an ongoing Funders' Table to support the implementation of the strategy.
- **Align** with all existing activities that may be relevant to the strategic priorities identified in the plan. In particular, develop alignment with the Winnipeg Plan to End Homelessness (End Homelessness Winnipeg), ALL Aboard Poverty Reduction strategies, the HPS Community Plan, and provincial initiatives to end homelessness.

#### Plan

- **Create** business plan and 5 year action plan with milestones and responsibilities

#### Act

- **Fund Development**
- **Develop shared resources** prioritized in the plan
- **Fund key service/system gaps** that cannot be resourced through existing funding bodies
- **Educate and advocate** for systemic changes called upon in the plan

#### Monitor & Evaluate

- **Develop** an evaluation and information management strategy that identifies outcome indicators and supports meaningful data collection and analysis
- **Create** an accountability framework that includes feedback from youth with past or ongoing experiences of homelessness in a meaningful way, regular meetings, and annual reporting.
- **Establish** ongoing research priorities that meet the local information/research needs of the strategy



## FIRST STEPS

### Collaborate

#### Year 1

- Develop an ongoing Youth Homelessness Secretariat within the Department of Families responsible for policy development and horizontal integration between CFS, EIA, and Housing
- Develop agreement between Steering Committee and End Homelessness Winnipeg regarding governance and administrative framework for implementation
- Develop job descriptions for plan implementation staff and seek funding for positions
- Create and begin implementation of a dissemination strategy for key sectors and stakeholders
- Recruit youth with experiences of homelessness to participate in ongoing implementation, including action planning meetings, governance structures, and education/advocacy activities
- Hold meetings with funders and relevant stakeholders to develop agreement on alignment processes
- Hold an annual networking meeting among staff from youth-serving organizations to promote collaboration and training

### Plan

#### Year 1

- Develop a business plan and a 5-year action plan including milestones and responsibilities
- Begin to develop a funding stream for plan implementation and seek support from key funding bodies
- Assess funding gaps as they relate to action priorities to target fund development

### Act

#### Year 1

- Influence development of shared resources already being considered so they meet youth and community priorities (e.g. resource guides, outreach network, affordable housing units)
- Develop 'speakers bureau' with Steering Committee members and youth to support dissemination strategy
- Begin action related to the first four plan priorities of:
  - Create an interdepartmental "Zero Discharge into Homelessness" strategy, starting with a coordinated provincial policy direction, that supports youth transitioning from any type of Provincial government or government funded care.
  - Develop a network of neighbourhood Hubs open 24/7 by increasing the capacity of existing youth-serving agencies.
  - Develop increased supply of transitional housing programs for youth.
  - Encourage Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) to increase the stability of income supports for youth.

### Monitor and Evaluate

#### Year 1

- Include a data and evaluation framework in the 5-year action plan
- Develop shared indicators
- Hold an annual Feast and Forum with youth experiencing homelessness to gather feedback on the plan implementation and emerging issues for youth
- Report on progress of plan objectives annually

## ROLES IN IMPLEMENTATION

### Role of Government (Including Government Agencies and Authorities)

- Establish a shared vision, long-term priorities and policy directions amongst all departments and levels of government.
- Support the provision of coordinated and integrated supports and services at the community level.
- Provide the legislative and policy framework and funding support to address youth homelessness.
- Support opportunities to share knowledge between policy-makers, academics and service providers.
- Support existing best and promising practices and programming.
- Implement the “Calls to Action” from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission across departments and agencies.
- Ensure healthy transitions across and outside the system of care for youth.

### Role of Community-Based Organizations

- Deliver front-line services and supports in alignment with the principles and values of the plan.
- Share promising practices, evaluate community-wide outcomes, and help to identify emerging trends.
- Work with government and other funding providers to identify and address needs, issues and strategic directions.
- Inform and influence government priorities.
- Inform and influence community change.

- Implement the “Calls to Action” from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission across agencies, starting with training all staff in cultural competency.

### Role of the Private Sector

- Provide leadership and modeling for a broad range of private sector champions.
- Collaborate with community-based organizations and communities to provide skills training and employment opportunities.
- Support the development of affordable housing options.
- Engage and support employees in building healthy relationships.
- Provide effective charitable and philanthropic giving that aligns with the directions, values, and principles of this plan.
- Support employees to be engaged on the issue.

### Role of Individuals (Youth, Families, Friends, Neighbours)

- Become engaged citizens to prevent and reduce youth homelessness in Manitoba.
- Learn how to identify youth at-risk of homelessness and what can be done about it.
- Provide effective charitable and philanthropic giving that aligns with the directions, values and principles of the plan
- Volunteer time and skills to play a role in building safe, healthy, and inclusive communities for youth.

## CONCLUSION

The place is here and the time is now. Money and lives have been spent waiting for solutions that are within our reach. Here and Now is connected to a broader movement in Winnipeg. An action plan, through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, provides a clear roadmap for Canadians working towards reconciliation. The youth-serving, not-for-profit sector has strong leadership, and works together to meaningfully address challenging issues for youth. Leaders in government understand that people in these agencies are collaterals, and often knowledge-holders, and are working together on creative solutions. They, too, are challenging themselves, their colleagues, and the agencies they work with to collaborate and align. Funders and philanthropic leaders are looking to align to achieve community-wide results rather than programmatic outputs. And youth themselves are calling on all sectors to work together and be solution-oriented; they are ready to hold us all accountable to this plan. With commitment to respond, through shifting the way we do things, the vision of a city where all youth have a safe place to live and thrive can be a reality.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Youth engagement started with a group of youth who had previous experiences of homelessness and were currently leaders in various initiatives. This group reviewed plans and strategies from other jurisdictions, discussed their priorities for what a plan to end youth homelessness should achieve, and commented on the proposed youth engagement plan. Their input led to five focus groups with youth who were currently experiencing homelessness. The 42 youth who participated in the focus groups provided high-level feedback on strategies they wanted to see included in the plan. The information formed the basis of the mission and vision, and guided the questions and target stakeholders for future engagements.

As the strategic framework for the plan was being drafted, meetings were organized to hear youth perspectives on some of the principal issues. These included attending the VOICES: Manitoba Youth in Care Network retreat to discuss healthy supports, transitions from care, and educational outcomes; and hosting an Indigenous Youth Feast and Forum focused on support during transitions from systems, and culturally competent services. Additionally, surveys were conducted with eleven youth who were connected to Steering Committee member organizations.

Once the strategic framework and objectives had been developed, discussion groups were held with youth at RaY, Eagle Urban Transition Centre, and the Youth Agencies Alliance Youth Leaders Council. The draft of the plan was presented and additional feedback gathered. A public open house, part of it designed specifically for youth experiencing homelessness, was held before finalizing the action strategies. A majority of youth attending these review sessions had been part of the initial focus groups and/or targeted meetings so could comment on how the summarized plan reflected the initial priorities they had discussed.

## APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS AND PARTICIPANTS

Community engagement formally began with a visioning summit. The summit provided participants a ‘youth homelessness in Winnipeg 101’, introduced the Steering Committee, suggested a framework for the Plan, and sought broad input on the vision to end youth homelessness.

Building off this summit, youth engagement, and research, a series of fact sheets were developed to frame six roundtable consultations. Each roundtable – prevention, access, housing supply, housing and support, supports to thrive, and system integration – began with a presentation of the research, and a general discussion of values and principles. Smaller groups then had more focused input into what the goals and action strategies would include.

The roundtable information was compiled and utilized during a planning day with the Steering Committee, who created a draft strategic framework with pillars, objectives, goals, and an implementation framework. An Indigenous Leaders Discussion was held with Indigenous youth, Elders, and community leaders to discuss this draft and consider the strategy through a lens of decolonization. Discussion centred around the principles and values and emphasized their importance to all that we do to address youth homelessness. Advice and guidance was provided on integrating Indigenous rights and reconciliation throughout the plan.

An open house provided a range of stakeholders and youth with the draft strategic framework for another round of feedback. Attendees also rated the action strategies based on what would make the biggest impact on ending youth homelessness in Winnipeg.

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