

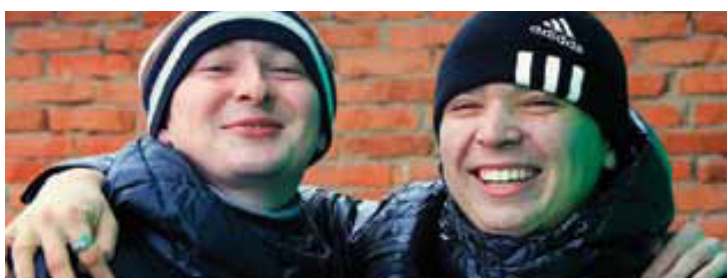
IT'S EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS:

RAISING THE ROOF'S PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

Amanda NOBLE & Lola OSENI

What do you need to know?

Solutions to homelessness are often considered to be the responsibility of NGOs, government, and the individuals experiencing homelessness. Yet as homelessness affects everyone in society, it can be argued that solutions require action across all sectors. In short, homelessness is everybody's business. Raising the Roof, a national Canadian charity, has embarked on a multi-year Private Sector Project, aimed at engaging a sector that has traditionally been left out of discussions of solutions to homelessness: the private sector.



What did the researchers do?

Eight community programs currently working in partnership with the private sector to train and/or employ homeless or at-risk youth were selected to partner with Raising the Roof for a year-long research study. These agencies were selected to represent a diverse sample geographically (5 different provinces), as well as a di-

versity of program models and type of training/employment opportunity provided (from retail to construction to 'green' jobs). Researchers visited each community agency, and 123 semi-structured interviews were conducted with program staff, some of their private sector partners, and youth participants.

WHAT IS THIS CHAPTER ABOUT?

This research has two goals: To learn more about the ways community programs in Canada are working with the private sector and second, to use the findings from this research as a catalyst for change in attitudes and hiring practices within the private sector, thereby paving the way for new employment opportunities for at-risk and homeless youth. In this chapter, some of the findings from Raising the Roof's Private Sector Engagement research are reviewed. Specific strategies for engaging the private sector are outlined, as well as the major challenges in doing so. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the next steps in the project, as well as how homelessness affects all Canadians and therefore requires action from a cross-section of society.

ARTICLE SOURCE

Noble, A., & Oseni, L. (2013). It's Everybody's Business: Raising the Roof's Private Sector Engagement Project. In Gaetz, S., O'Grady, B., Buccieri, K., Karabanow, J., & Marsolais, A. (Eds.), *Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice* (287-309). Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

What did the researchers find?

Program staff and their private sector participants identified six major strategies for successfully engaging the private sector: 1) promoting the agency's employment program in the community and utilizing 'corporate champions' when possible 2) building relationships based on honesty and reciprocity 3) being strategic in selecting appropriate businesses to approach 4) initiating contact in a thoughtful manner 5) pitching the benefits of participation including potential wage subsidies, free HR services and pre-screening, agency support, and pre-employment training

for the youth, which includes obtaining certificates and health and safety training, and 6) keeping the process as simple as possible for private sector partners. Participants reported several challenges in doing this work, including a lack of resources, strong competition from other youth and agencies, a scarcity of quality jobs with adequate pay, the recent economic crisis, difficulty making contact with decision makers, employer fears and stereotypes, and difficulty maintaining relationships if a placement does not work out.

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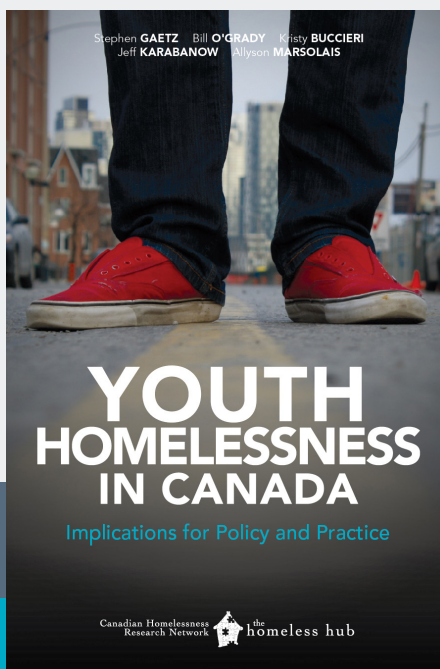
How can you use this research?

This research can be used to provide guidance and support to community agencies currently working to form partnerships with the private sector. It also calls upon members of the private sector to become involved in a social issue that impacts all Canadians by taking a chance on youth whose opportunities in life may have been limited. This chapter points out that in order to work toward solutions to youth homelessness, all sectors of society must work together. This includes all levels of government, community agencies, and the private sector. Employment opportunities will not single-handedly solve homelessness. Instead, a holistic approach that addresses individual concerns (including basic needs such as food and housing), as well as broader structural barriers is needed.

About the researchers

AMANDA NOBLE is the Manager of Research and Community Initiatives at Raising the Roof where she has led national research on employment programs for at-risk and homeless youth. She is a PhD student at York University in the Faculty of Education where she is researching innovative housing models for homeless youth. Amanda has worked as an anti-poverty advocate and a front-line worker for youth, women, and children experiencing homelessness.

LOLA OSENI is on a research team at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto, Ontario that is investigating structural approaches to reducing health disparities in the course of hospital care. Her research interests include mental health, barriers to accessing quality healthcare and the health of women and youth. Lola graduated with her MSc in Nutritional Epidemiology from the University of Toronto, where she studied the complex ways our environment and social structure interact to create health disparities.



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