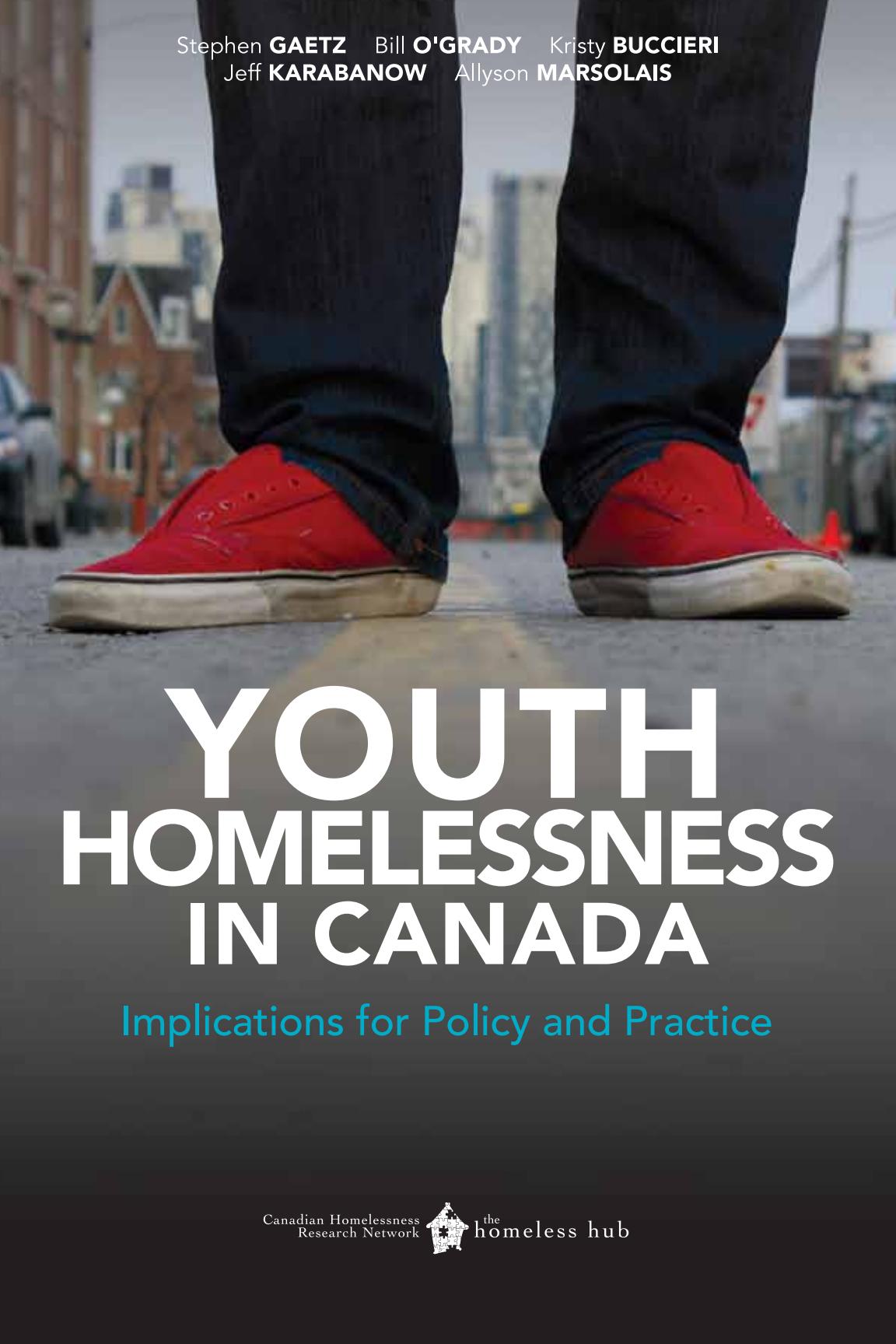


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YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA

Implications for Policy and Practice

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1 Introduction

Stephen Gaetz, Bill O’Grady, Kristy Buccieri,
Jeff Karabanow, Allyson Marsolais

How can you tell if a young person is homeless? Is it the clothes they wear? The way they stand or sit? Where they hang out? Over the past fifteen years, Canadians have become increasingly aware of the existence of youth homelessness in communities large and small. This awareness is shaped by different factors. Some of us will know young people who have become homeless, or we may have personally experienced it ourselves. In other cases, it is our direct encounters that shape our experiences – when we see street youth in parks or other public places, or when a young person sitting on the sidewalk asks us for change.

But for many of us, our understanding of youth homelessness does not come from such direct encounters or experiences at all. In fact, more often we will learn about youth homelessness from secondary sources; through media reports or stories that our friends tell us. Unfortunately, news reports about homeless youth do not provide a comprehensive portrait – we often hear stories of crimes committed by youth, their drug use or involvement in prostitution, or the ‘nuisance’ of panhandling or squeegeeing, for instance.

All of these factors shape how we *think* about youth homelessness; the ways in which we consider the causes, and potentially, the solutions to youth homelessness. We may, for instance, view such youth as victims; their homelessness is the outcome of histories of childhood abuse, or of extreme poverty. This more charitable perspective often underlies our efforts to provide temporary refuge, such

as emergency shelters and day programs. Indeed, over the past twenty years we have seen a steady expansion of government and more often than not, non-profit and community-based emergency services for homeless youth, including shelters, day programs and in some centres specialized health and legal services.

For others, street youth are seen as scary, dangerous and delinquent; as, for instance, petty criminals who threaten pedestrians and car drivers in downtown Toronto, and who chase away tourists. This perspective on youth homelessness can be traced to popular notions of delinquent street urchins from the 19th century, and underlies a view that such youth are bad (or more generously, ‘troubled’), leave home for fairly insignificant reasons, and get involved in delinquent activities once on the street, thereby putting public health and safety at risk. The problem with this perspective is that it often leads to ‘get tough’ solutions, and the use of law enforcement for what is essentially a social and economic problem.

Others still may see homeless youth as ‘bratty kids’ who don’t like the rules at home, and who are attracted by the lights and the freedom of the city. In this sense, youth homelessness is often explained in terms of broader attitudes we may hold about adolescents – they are moody, make poor decisions, and are rebellious, for example. In other words, their homelessness is more a result of attitudinal and behavioural problems than more serious issues.

These different perspectives are worth considering, since how we think about youth homelessness impacts the way we address the situation. And whether through the development of charitable emergency services or through the heavy handed use of law enforcement, one thing is clear: youth homelessness continues to be a problem that demands solutions.

And, if we are going to solve youth homelessness in a meaningful way, we need to develop approaches that are informed by research. This book has been written with this in mind. In this volume, leading Canadian scholars present key findings from their research on youth homelessness. In an effort to make this research accessible, as well as relevant to decision-makers and practitioners, contributing authors have been asked to address the ‘so whatness’ of their research; what are the policy and practice implications of this research and what can it tell those who are working to address youth homelessness?

As we move forward, we need to develop more effective solutions, so that young people who are homeless (or at risk of homelessness) are provided with the kinds of supports and opportunities that any young person needs; supports that are nurturing, respectful and provide them with the building blocks to live healthy, fulfilling and productive lives. To this end, research has a role to play.

About Youth Homelessness

One of the main goals of this volume is to enhance our understanding of youth homelessness. Let's start with a few questions: do we really need a separate category of 'homelessness' for young people? Isn't the experience of homelessness, whether you are an adult or a young person, about the same set of issues – a lack of housing and appropriate supports? While there are some aspects of homelessness that are common to all who experience it, there are significant differences that need to be taken into account, both from a research perspective, and in terms of how we respond to the issue. A key distinction that frames our understanding of youth homelessness is that young people generally are fleeing from – or kicked out of – households where they have been dependent upon adult caregivers. So, youth homelessness is experienced not only as the loss of housing, but also entails ruptured relations with family, and potentially the loss of friends, other supportive adults, and community. It can mean premature withdrawal from school and an early rush towards independence at a time when these youth may be suffering from the trauma of such losses.

This means that while many, if not most, adults who are homeless will have had some experience with independent living this is not the case for most homeless youth. Few leave home with knowledge of how to rent and maintain an apartment, find a job (especially one that isn't a dead-end, minimum wage job), stay in school, buy and prepare food, pay bills and even arrange medical appointments. On top of all this, many if not most young people who become homeless are working through the challenges of adolescent development, including physical, cognitive and identity development. This includes efforts to develop meaningful relationships, engage in fulfilling activities and figure out exactly what they want to do with their lives. We understand that for most young people this can be a slow and arduous process, lasting years. For those who become homeless, however, there is usually no time or the necessary supports in place to allow this development to occur in a safe and supported way. Many of us cannot fathom the idea of being on the street at such a young age without any supports to guide their way into safe and supportive environments. So, our understanding of youth homelessness must necessarily be framed in terms of the challenges of adolescence and young adulthood.

If we step back a bit, it is also important to note that the causes of youth homelessness are also somewhat distinct from those that produce adult homelessness. The key causes of youth homelessness are as follows:

a) Individual/Relational Factors

We know well from research that difficult and challenging family situations and

relationships underlie most youth homelessness (Karabanow, 2004; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Braitstein et al., 2003; Caputo et al., 1996; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Janus et al., 1995). More significantly, there is extensive research in Canada and the United States that demonstrates that a significant percentage of homeless youth – between 60 and 70 percent – leave family environments where they have experienced interpersonal violence, including physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse (Ballon et al., 2001; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Karabanow, 2004; Tyler & Bersani, 2008; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999; Van den Bree et al., 2009). Additionally, parental neglect and exposure to domestic violence (not directly involving the youth), as well as parental psychiatric disorders (Andres-Lemay et al., 2005) and addictions (McMorris et al., 2002) can also be factors.

In these cases, the problems young people experience are a direct result of the context they are in, rather than a result of their own personal challenges. However, in some cases the strains within the family may also stem from the challenges young people themselves are facing, including their own substance use, depression, sexual orientation, learning disabilities, etc. These factors, in some cases combined with a challenging family environment and structural context may produce secondary factors that increase strain, including educational failure or disengagement, or involvement with crime (Karabanow, 2004). The individual and relational causes of youth homelessness, then, are often very difficult to disentangle, and reflect the challenges that many families face in coping with such stress (Mallet et al., 2005).

b) Structural Factors

Here we are not so much referring to individual or family problems, but rather broader systemic, social and economic factors that may lead to homelessness. Poverty, lack of food and inadequate housing may lead young people to leave home, either of their own choice or because their families can no longer support them. A lack of affordable housing and shifts in the economy mean that many young people who do leave home will not be able to generate sufficient income to obtain and maintain housing, and in a competitive housing market, may face age-based discrimination. A lack of access to adequate education – and in some cases necessary supports for those with disabilities, inadequate nutrition, etc. may undermine school success and lead to educational disengagement.

Discrimination is an additional structural factor that contributes to youth homelessness. Racism restricts people's opportunities, can impact on schooling and makes the transition to independent living that much more difficult. We know from Canadian research that Aboriginal and black youth are over-represented in the youth homeless population. Homophobia is also implicated in youth homelessness, demonstrated by the fact that young people who are sexual minorities

are clearly overrepresented in the street youth population (Cochran et al., 2002; Gattis, 2009; Abramovich, this volume). The experience of discrimination (exacerbated when combined with poverty) can contribute to school disengagement and failure, drug misuse, mental health issues, criminality and gang involvement.

c) Institutional and Systems Failures

One factor that most clearly defines the experience of youth homelessness is the failure of other systems of care and support, including child protection, health, mental health care and corrections. Inadequate supports for young people in child protection – including effective supports for transitions from care – mean that many young people are essentially discharged into homelessness (Nichols, this volume; Dworsky & Courtney, 2009; Goldstein et al., 2012; Serge et al., 2002). Several Canadian studies demonstrate that between 40 and 50 percent of homeless youth have a history of foster care or group homes involvement that has been described as exploitative, uncaring, unsupportive and even abusive (Nichols, this volume; Karabanow, 2004; Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; Gaetz, 2002; Gaetz et al., 2010; Lemon Osterling et al., 2006; Raising the Roof, 2009; Serge et al., 2002). Discharge from corrections without adequate planning and post-release support also contributes to youth homelessness. We know that more than half of Canadian young people who are homeless have been in jail, a youth detention centre, or prison (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). Finally, one needs to consider that in many communities – large and small – there are inadequate supports for young people experiencing mental health problems. The Canadian Mental Health Association estimates that between 10-20% of young people are affected by a mental illness or disorder¹, with some particularly challenging mental health issues, such as schizophrenia, often first appearing during the teen years. Mental health problems are even more acute amongst the homeless youth population (Kidd, this volume; McCay, this volume). In some cases young people are discharged from health care facilities, without adequate follow up supports, or even a home to go to. Once on the streets, the lack of support is often worse because young people lack family support, financial support and the knowledge to navigate systems.

When thinking about youth homelessness, including the causes discussed above, it is also important to consider the diversity within the population. This diversity is understood in terms of age differences and levels of maturity, gender and sexual orientation, the experience of racism, family connectedness and prior experiences of abuse. For instance, developmentally, there is a huge difference between the needs and capabilities of a 14 year old versus someone in their early twenties. A considerable body of research on youth homelessness in Canada

1. www.cmha.ca/media/fast-facts-about-mental-illness/

shows that there are typically two males on the streets for every female (O’Grady & Gaetz, 2004; 2009). This means that gender must be considered as a pathway to the streets, but also in terms of how homelessness is experienced. In addition, some ethno-racial populations tend to be overrepresented – most significantly, Aboriginal (Baskin, this volume) and black youth (Springer et al., 2006; Springer, this volume). A significant percentage of homeless youth report being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (Abramovich, this volume; Cochran et al., 2002; Gattis, 2009), which again points to the degree to which homophobia contributes to homelessness, and may continue once young people are on the streets. The diverse background experiences of young people must also be taken into account. Research in Canada and elsewhere highlights that young people with significant backgrounds of abuse and violence are not only more likely to become homeless, but also face more challenges in moving off the streets (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; Rew, 2002; Whitbeck et al., 1999). Some homeless youth experience mental health problems and/or addictions, while others do not.

The causes and conditions of youth homelessness, then, are quite diverse and complex. The reality is that each young person’s story is different, and will involve a range of factors, some of which are structural, some which may be the result of systems failures, and some which stem from family problems and conflicts. There is more to youth homelessness than the popular but misguided view that young people leave home because they are simply rebellious teens who don’t like doing the dishes. For young people who leave home for more frivolous reasons, a few weeks spent on the streets going hungry, lacking sleep, feeling unsafe, and wearing the same pair of socks, will likely make home look a lot more attractive. The vast majority of homeless youth have left traumatic environments and are searching for belonging and acceptance (Karabanow et al., 2010).

The point of all of this, then, is that youth homelessness is different from adult homelessness. The causes of homelessness are unique, as are the experiences of young people once on the streets. All of this suggests that solutions and pathways off the streets must also reflect a clear understanding of the unique conditions and circumstances of youth homelessness. What is significant to remember is that we should view this population first and foremost as young people who are trying to survive without the supports that many of us take for granted.

A Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness

The distinctiveness of youth homelessness also suggests the need for a definition that more clearly frames exactly who we are talking about. Recently, the Canadian Homelessness Research Network, with endorsements from researchers and communities across the country, established a broad, pan-Canadian definition of

homelessness (CDH). This definition does not attempt to characterize specific sub-populations, but more generally helps define the experience of homelessness:

Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing (Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2012:1).

The CDH also lays out a typology that describes different degrees of homelessness and housing insecurity, including:

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 finally, 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 (Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2012:1).

Because, as we have argued, the experience of homelessness amongst youth is distinct from adults, there is also the need for a more specific, youth-focused definition. In a forthcoming Homeless Hub Report: *Coming of Age – Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*, youth homelessness is defined as including:

youth aged 13 to 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers and importantly lack many of the social supports that we typically deem necessary for the transition from childhood to adulthood. In such circumstances, young people do not have a stable or consistent source of income or place of residence, nor do they necessarily have adequate access to support networks to foster a safe and nurturing transition into the responsibilities of adulthood (Gaetz, forthcoming).

In addition to this definition, it is worth considering a typology that helps us make sense of some key differences within the population. A typology developed by the National Alliance to End Homelessness² addresses diversity in

2. The National Alliance to End Homelessness typology draws from considerable research on frequency and duration of homelessness (see Kuhn & Culhane, 1998), and more recently, a review of typologies of youth homelessness put forward by Toro et al., 2011.

terms of the causes and experiences of homelessness, and also helps us to map the duration and frequency of homelessness amongst youth. This is important from the perspective of interventions, because it helps us identify levels of need, existing informal supports, and risk of becoming chronically homeless. The typology, drawn from the *Coming of Age* report, includes three categories:

Temporarily Disconnected – *For the vast majority of young people who become homeless, it is a short-term experience. Toro et al., (2011) identify this population as generally younger, and having more stable or redeemable relations with family members, and are more likely to remain in school. For this population, there is a strong need for prevention and early intervention to divert young people from the homelessness system.*

Unstably Connected – *This population of homeless youth has a more complicated housing history, and is likely to have longer and repeated episodes of homelessness. They are more likely to be disengaged from school, and will have challenges obtaining and maintaining employment. Most will have retained some level of connection with family members, and are less likely to experience serious mental health or addictions issues compared to chronically homeless youth.*

Chronically Disconnected – *In terms of numbers, this will be the smallest group of homeless youth, but at the same time the group with the most complex needs, and the users of the most resources in the youth homelessness sector. This group of young people will experience long term homelessness, repeated episodes, and will more likely have mental health and/or addictions issues. They will have the most unstable relations with their families, and in some cases there will be no connections at all (Gaetz, forthcoming).*

This typology can become a useful tool for communities seeking to understand, define and enumerate the shape and scope of the youth homelessness problem. It can also provide some insight into the kinds of interventions needed to address youth homelessness, as one size definitely does not fit all.

About This Book

This volume is intended to highlight the best of Canadian research on youth homelessness. The book is organized in a thematic way, so that there are separate sections relating to: 1) pathways in and out of homelessness; 2) housing; 3) health; 4) mental health and addictions; 5) employment, education

and training; 6) legal and justice issues; and 7) diversity and subpopulations. Each chapter is accompanied by a short, plain language summary that captures the key themes. In addition, some sections include ‘promising practice’ summaries of effective program responses from communities across Canada. Below is a brief overview of the chapters included in this book.

The first section of the book explores pathways in and out of homelessness, which, as we have argued in this introduction, are somewhat unique for youth. Chapters in this section focus on family relations in the lives of young people and the potential for reconnecting with family and community (Winland, this volume), the strategies that young people engage in, and the challenges they face in transitioning off the streets and in obtaining stability (Karabanow & Naylor, this volume), an in-depth exploration of the multiple childhood stresses faced by young people who become homeless in a rural area in southern Ontario (Baker Collins, this volume), and how child welfare policy, practice, and legislation shape young people’s experiences of homelessness and efforts to secure housing, make money, finish school, and engage in relationships with others (Nichols, this volume).

Section two includes several chapters that focus on accommodation and supports for young people. The first chapter presents preliminary findings from an important study on Housing First and youth homelessness that focuses on which models of accommodation and supports work best for young people with mental health and addictions problems (Forchuk et al., this volume) and is followed by a chapter that describes a supportive housing model for young mothers in Nova Scotia (Karabanow & Hughes, this volume).

Homelessness of course involves more than a lack of housing. Health issues are central to the experience of homelessness. Chapters in this section focus on nutritional vulnerability and community food assistance programs for youth (Dachner & Tarasuk, this volume), how experiences of sexual exploitation impact on the health and well-being of homeless youth (Saewyc et al., this volume), and strategies for promoting health for homeless and street involved youth (Worthington & MacLaurin, this volume). Because mental health and addictions issues are a central concern for many of those who work directly with street youth, we have included a number of chapters that deal with these issues. Such chapters focus on the need for harm reduction approaches for youth with substance use and mental health problems (Kirst & Erickson, this volume), an exploration of substance use and a determination of when such use becomes harmful (Buccieri, this volume), a critical review of mental health and youth homelessness (Kidd, this volume), and the need for early mental health intervention to strengthen resilience in street-involved youth (McCay & Aiello, this volume).

In making a successful transition to adulthood, one of the key challenges for all young people is navigating the road from education to employment. In answering the question, “why don’t street youth just get a job?” the factors that enhance – and undermine employability – are explored (Gaetz & O’Grady, this volume). Other chapters examine the factors that promote school attendance amongst homeless youth (Liljedahl et al., this volume) and the role of private sector engagement in enhancing the employment opportunities of homeless youth (Noble & Oseni, this volume). This section concludes with two promising practice case studies of innovative training and employment programs, including Bladerunners (Vancouver, BC) and Train for Trades (St. John’s, Newfoundland).

Young people who are homeless are often framed as criminals, even though there is considerable research that attests to the fact that they are more likely to be victims of crime (O’Grady et al., this volume). Chapters in this section focus on the criminalization and policing of youth homelessness (O’Grady et al., this volume), why street youth become involved in crime (Baron, this volume) and the legal, social and moral regulation of homeless youth (Sommers, this volume).

One cannot truly understand youth homelessness without a consideration of diversity. Several chapters of this book focus on sub-populations, including the complex needs of LGBTQ youth (Abramovich, this volume), the ongoing homelessness crisis within Indigenous populations in Toronto and their past and present involvement with the child welfare system (Baskin, this volume), the role of space, place, and gender in the lives of ten homeless youth (Buccieri, this volume), and the racialized dimensions of youth homelessness in Toronto, particularly among Caribbean youth (Springer et al., this volume).

The book concludes by reviewing a framework for ending youth homelessness in Canada (Gaetz, this volume). Pulling together what has been learned about the conditions of youth homelessness and key interventions, this chapter lays out a way to address homelessness that shifts the focus from an emergency response (shelters, day programs and policing) to one that emphasizes prevention, on one hand, and accommodation and supports, on the other. This paradigm shift is accomplished through a strategic planning framework that focuses on the needs of adolescents and young adults, and builds a ‘system of care’ to ensure young people receive the supports they need while spending as little time in emergency shelters as possible.

We *can* solve youth homelessness. To get there, we need to apply what we know and what we have learned. Research can and should play a vital role in generating and informing solutions to homelessness by addressing key

questions and providing solid evidence for policy makers and practitioners. This volume is intended to help us develop and move forward with real and sustainable solutions to youth homelessness.

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PATHWAYS IN & OUT OF HOMELESSNESS

2 Reconnecting with Family and Community: Pathways Out of Youth Homelessness

Daphne Winland

Central to our concept of adolescent development is the idea that the movement from childhood to adulthood is a gradual process, one that is guided by the intensive involvement of supportive adults, and family members in particular. Few young people live wholly independently. Most rely on family members – not just parents, but also siblings and other adults (grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins) – for a variety of their needs, and to help with the task of growing into adulthood. While we know that relations between young people and the adults in their lives are rarely without some degree of tension and conflict, there is a strong belief that given time, young people will move into adulthood with positive family relations intact (Sherrod, 1996; Fasick, 1984; Nash et al., 2005).

When analyzing young people who are homeless, though, the focus on family shifts. Young people become homeless for many reasons, but the most significant is family conflict. For many young people, the streets become a refuge after fleeing households where they have experienced physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The fact that two thirds of street youth leave homes characterized by violence and abuse should make one reconsider whether reuniting these youth with their families is desirable, or even possible. Our understanding of youth homelessness is very much based on the idea of the family as a ‘problem’ – that family abuse and conflict are at the core of the young person’s experience of homelessness. We have identified “problems within families” as a key cause of youth homelessness, but we must be careful how we generalize this knowledge and apply it to practice. We need to further explore the nature and meaning of family relations for street youth and to deepen our understanding of the roles, meaning and composition of families. Just as the use of ‘runaway’ and ‘street kid’ obscures

the complexity and diversity of pathways to homelessness, so the use of terms such as “family dysfunction”, “family conflict” or “abusive home” oversimplifies the issue by assuming that all family members contribute to the tensions that exist between young people who become homeless, and their caregivers or other family members. The result is that family is framed as a problem, and often dismissed as potential partners in working towards solutions to youth homelessness.

What do we know about the dynamics of family relations and how they may differ for street youth compared to other young people? Are *all* relations within the families of homeless youth – parents, siblings, extended family – problematic? Are all broken relations irreparable? Does – and should – homelessness mean an end to the role of the family in these young people’s lives? If, as will be argued, there is a chance for reconciliation, what are the potential benefits to young people, to their families and to their communities? Key to the process of reconciliation is a rethinking of the assumptions upon which existing programs and services are based - specifically the focus on self-sufficiency.

It is a common mistake to assume that self-sufficiency means independence from family. Central to the goal of self-sufficiency is the importance of establishing important relationships and relying on the guidance of others while moving forward in life (Allen et al., 1994; Allen et al., 1996; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). People flourish most when they have supports, and these may potentially include family. Many street youth services, though, assume that because young people are fleeing damaged family situations, in order to move forward with their lives, they must leave that world behind, permanently. Most services and interventions for street youth largely ignore the potential role of family members in helping young people make the transition to adulthood. However, we profoundly limit our understanding of youth homelessness, and how we respond to it, if family (defined narrowly) is seen only in terms of dysfunction and if we assume that broken family relations cannot be reconciled, even partially. The key is learning how to build healthy relationships and how to deal with and/or resolve conflicts with family, where possible.

Developing programs for family reconnection can be seen as a central component of a systems-based¹, preventive approach to youth homelessness. Working with young people and their families before homelessness occurs, or intervening to mediate family conflicts (where possible) once young people

1. Sometimes referred to a ‘system of care’ approach (which originated in children’s mental health), this means that programs, services and service delivery systems are organized at every level to increase client access, and ensure that individual needs are met by mainstream and specialized services (Gaetz, forthcoming). Prevention is best addressed through such integrated systems, where young people and families who are in crisis access the services they need in a timely and seamless fashion.

leave home, offers them the opportunity to effectively improve or resolve family conflicts so they can return home and/or move into independent living in a safe and supported manner. For many, if not most street youth, family *does* matter in some way, and addressing family issues can help young people potentially move out of homelessness and into adulthood in a healthier way.

Prevention is Key

One of the main arguments framing the research profiled here is the need to rethink existing approaches to youth homelessness by placing a stronger emphasis on prevention. In characterizing the Canadian response to homelessness, it is important to note that most of our effort and investment goes into emergency responses rather than prevention. Evidence on the introduction of preventive approaches to youth homelessness in Australia and the United Kingdom (discussed below), points to the success of prevention and intervention strategies either before a youth leaves home or when a young person becomes homeless. Interventions focus on family mediation and attempt to repair damaged relationships so that young people can remain at home, or if that is not possible or wise (particularly in cases of abuse), that young people can move into the community with proper supports, in a safe and planned way.

The findings explored in this chapter are based on research conducted with the Family Reconnect Program, part of Eva's Initiatives in Toronto (Winland, et al., 2011). The program offers youth (between the ages of 16 and 24) at risk of leaving home or who are homeless and living in youth shelters, opportunities to rebuild relationships with family through participation in individual and/or family therapy. The research methodology consisted of three components. First, we conducted interviews with staff of Eva's Family Reconnect program (hereafter referred to as FRP). This included all counseling staff, plus the Clinical Consultant who provides direction and support for the Family Reconnect team. Interviews were conducted as a group and individually on several occasions. Second, in order to best assess the impacts of FRP on those who participated, the research team conducted a series of interviews with program clients – both youth and family members.² The third

2. Participants were approached by FRP staff about their willingness to be interviewed. This resulted in a total of seven youth clients and eight family clients volunteering to be interviewed for the project. Family members interviewed included parents, aunts and uncles and grandparents. The clients and family members identified for this study were not related to each other. The age range of youth clients (four males and three females) was 19-26, with an average age of 20. Four of the youth are still street involved and staying at the shelter and the rest have since left the shelter system and either live at home or on their own. Four of the clients were people of colour and all except one, who does not have legal status in Canada, are either permanent residents or Canadian citizens. The socioeconomic profiles of the families of these youth range from low income to wealthy professionals with postgraduate education, pointing to the fact that homeless youth come from diverse backgrounds.

research method used was to analyze the data that Eva's Initiatives collects on its clients. Over the past five years, Eva's has been recording information about clients who participate in the program. Our research with this program, and on similar programs in the United Kingdom and Australia, reveals key gaps in our understanding of the relationship between family breakdown or conflict, and youth homelessness. Most significantly, it strongly suggests that not all young people who are homeless are permanently alienated from all of their family members; many young people who are homeless continue to maintain ties with family members, friends and the communities they left.

Eva's Family Reconnect program was established with a mandate to assist young people aged 16-24 interested in addressing and potentially reconciling differences with their families. Working with young people who are interested in developing healthier relationships with their families, staff offer individual and family counseling, referrals to other agencies and services, psychiatric assessments, psychological assessments for learning disabilities, as well as accompaniment and advocacy assistance. Young people and families come into contact with Family Reconnect through a number of channels. For most clients, the first point of contact is through staff working at Eva's Place shelter. In fact, the Family Reconnect staff rely heavily on referrals by front line shelter staff, who will inform the FRP team of cases in which a youth might be interested in and/or can potentially benefit from youth and/or family counseling. In these cases, youth are not obliged to consult with the Family Reconnect Program staff but are made aware of the resource.

In some cases, parents and/or other family members may directly contact the FRP before a young person becomes homeless. They may request the involvement or intervention of the FRP staff, however, counseling may only proceed with a youth's explicit consent. This kind of preventive work often involves young people under the age of 16. There is no single or set outcome expected from the work with the Family Reconnect Program. Young people may improve their relationships with family members to the point of being able to return home. For others, moving back home is not possible or advisable, but moving back to the community with the support of family members may be a realistic goal. For others still, there may be no significant improvement in relations with family, but young people may be helped to reconcile themselves to this fact, allowing them to move forward in their lives in a meaningful way.

The program offers an important example of how the principles of family reconnection can be applied at the program level. This is done by addressing damaged family relations through individual counseling and support, counseling and mediation with family members, as well as and group counseling that help

young people learn from their peers. The Family Reconnect program highlights the importance of support for young people – and their families – in dealing with mental health issues and learning disabilities. These challenges often underlie problematic family relations, and a better understanding of youth's mental health issues and learning disabilities – usually assisted by clinical assessment and treatment of these issues – often helps young people and their families figure out how to move forward from what seemed to be an impossible situation.

At the end of the day, a better understanding of what leads to family conflict and youth homelessness – whether or not young people are eventually able to move home – helps them to move forward with their lives. Most important here is consideration of the safety and wellbeing of the young person. With the help and support of Family Intervention counselors, youth, and potentially family members, work on the root causes of their struggles, including family breakdown, conflict, difficulties at school and lack of adequate learning assessment or mental health resources, drug and alcohol abuse, as well as life and parenting skills. By focusing on building positive family relationships where possible, the program helps young people and their families develop skills and tools, learn to access necessary supports and work towards long lasting, healthy and supportive relationships.

What the Research Tells Us

The pathways into homelessness are complex and shaped by a variety of individual and structural factors that result in unique circumstances for different individuals. While the stresses and strains discussed above (family conflict, mental health issues, etc.) are experienced by a large number of young people, not all of them will become or remain homeless. Often it is a significant event triggering a crisis that leads a young person to run away or to be kicked out of the home (Janus et al., 2005). Such events can range from conflicts with parents and/or violent encounters, to school failure and involvement with institutional authorities such as the police (O'Grady et al., 2011). Some research suggests that many teenagers leave home under difficult circumstances, but a large number will eventually return home (Andres-Lemay et al., 2005; Teare et al., 1992).

The large body of research on youth homelessness that has emerged over the past few decades focuses primarily on the processes that lead to the street and the risk factors associated with homelessness. It consistently identifies difficult family situations and conflict as being the key underlying factors in youth homelessness. Between 60% and 70% of young people flee households where they have experienced physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse (Ballon et al., 2002; Braitstein et al., 2003; Caputo et al., 1997; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Janus

et al., 1987; Karabanow, 2004; Poirer et al., 1999; Tyler et al., 2004; Whitbeck, 1999; O'Grady & Gaetz, 2009; Karabanow, 2004; Tyler & Bersani, 2008; Tyler et al., 2001; Van den Bree et al., 2009; Andres-Lemay et al., 2005). There are clear consequences to such early exposure to violence and abuse, including low self-esteem, higher rates of depression and suicide attempts, increased risky sexual behaviour, substance abuse, difficulty forming attachments (bonding) to caregivers and other significant people, and running away or being kicked out of the home. More specifically, research in Canada and the United States points to the fact that the majority of street youth come from homes where there were high levels of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, interpersonal violence and assault, parental neglect and exposure to domestic violence, etc., (Gaetz, 2009; Karabanow, 2004; 2009; Tyler & Bersani, 2008; Tyler et al., 2001; Whitbeck & Simons, 1993; Whitbeck & Hoyt 1999; Van den Bree et al., 2009).

In addition to the above, other strains on the family may stem from the challenges young people themselves are facing. Substance use, mental health problems, learning disabilities, struggles with the education system and dropping out, criminal behaviour and involvement in the justice system are key factors. The causes of such behaviours, however, are complex and may include some of the stresses associated with parental behaviour such as alcohol or drug use (Mallet et al., 2005). In some cases, parental psychiatric disorders are also a factor (Andres-Lemay et al., 2005). Furthermore, parental substance abuse predicts not only youth homelessness, but also youth substance abuse (McMorris et al., 2002). Conflict with parents can result from a number of different stressors, and the inability of children and/or their parents to adequately cope with the challenges they are facing. Structural factors such as poverty, low income and unemployment also play a role (Clatts & Rees, 1999). Cutbacks to financial and social supports for low income and otherwise marginalized families in Canada contribute to stress that may create some of the situations that lead to youth homelessness. Discrimination based on ethno-cultural, racial, religious and other forms of difference, is also a factor that contributes to homelessness. The combination of racism and poverty can also lead to school disengagement and failure, as well as to criminal behaviour (Springer, 2006).

Finally, homophobia is strongly involved in youth homelessness. Young people who are sexual minorities are greatly overrepresented in the street youth population (Gattis, 2009; Higgit et al., 2003). Several studies reveal that 20-40% of street youth identify as gay, lesbian or transgendered, a rate much higher than in the general population. Homophobic responses to the 'coming out' process have the potential to create or worsen tensions between the young person and their family, friends and/or community (Rew et al., 2002). The ensuing conflicts with parents and community members can often lead to homelessness.

Most scholars also acknowledge that for youth, the path to the streets is rarely the result of a single event, but rather is typically part of a longer process that may involve repeated episodes of leaving home (Milburn et al., 2005). Street youth who are chronically homeless typically have a history marked by repeated episodes of leaving home; they may run away (or be kicked out) but will return home, only to leave again. For many young people, the path to becoming homeless does not take the form of a straight line, but involves a series of conflicts and crises, in some cases beginning in early childhood. For most street youth, then, homelessness is not merely an event or episode, but rather a process that will, without intervention, result in a degree of social exclusion – manifested in a lack of recognition and acceptance leading to social and economic vulnerability – that makes the transition to adulthood highly challenging and problematic. Street youth, unlike homeless adults, leave homes defined by relationships in which they are typically dependent (socially and financially) on their adult caregivers. Becoming homeless does not just mean a loss of stable housing, but rather, it means leaving home: an interruption and potential break in social relations with parents and caregivers, family members, friends, neighbours and community. An additional factor to consider when thinking about youth homelessness is that the home they are fleeing – or have been kicked out of – is rarely one for which they were responsible or in control of.

The experience of homelessness thrusts young people into a new world, which, on the one hand, may feel liberating for a time, as they discover the freedom of being away from the conflicts and tensions that led to homelessness, but in the end becomes very limiting. We know that the longer young people remain homeless, the greater the negative outcomes. Homelessness inevitably leads to health problems (Boivan et al., 2001; Ensign & Bell, 2004; Rew, 2002). Young people who are homeless lack proper nutrition during a crucial time of physical growth and development. Unfortunately, whether homeless youth get their food from money they earn or from homeless charitable services, they are unable to consistently obtain enough nutritious food (Tarasuk et al., 2009). In addition, mental health and addictions become more challenging the longer one remains homeless. Young people also become more depressed and are more likely to think about or attempt suicide. The relationships that young people develop with other homeless youth are often described in terms of being a ‘street family’; a caring substitute for a real family. Unfortunately, however, these relations are not always based on trust, and in the end become problematic, because while the knowledge and connections that street youth have may be useful for surviving on the streets, they are of limited value in helping young people develop long-term, trusting, and healthy relationships.

Canadian research has been useful in helping us understand pathways into youth homelessness. But although it confirms what we know about the causes of homelessness, the tendency to generalize family conflict and the experience of abuse in particular leads to assumptions about abuse being the sole cause of youth homelessness. Little attention has been paid to the analysis of young people who do not identify abuse as a significant factor in their homelessness. Where there is no abuse, however, there may still be conflict.

Despite all we know then, there is a significant gap in the literature on connections to or relations with family. Most of the scholarly attention is on the (often risky) behaviour of homeless youth themselves. There is very little research, for example, that compares the outcomes for young people who return home after a period of homelessness, with those who do not. Furthermore, many, if not most young people exist in a web of close and/or extended family relations, some of which may be problematic and others which may not. The research that does exist on family reunification shows that young people who reunite with their families have more positive outcomes than those who do not. A study by Thompson, Pollio and Bitner found that those who returned home after a shelter stay reported “more positive outcomes in school, employment, self-esteem, criminal behaviour and family relationships than adolescents discharged to other locations” (2000:83). Other research shows that those who fail to reunite are more likely to have longer shelter stays, an increased sense of hopelessness, pessimistic tendencies and more suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Teare et al., 1992; Teare et al., 1994). For some homeless youth who are particularly independent and/or who have no desire to reconnect to their families, or who come from abusive homes that are unlikely to change, reunification may not be a realistic goal. A more appropriate intervention would be to provide young people with information on the services and supports in the communities from which they came, or the communities they have adopted. The key is to provide youth with support options.

What Do We Mean by “Family”?

In reframing our understanding of the families of street youth, we need to add complexity to our understanding of family. Family units defined as problematic are complex and diverse in composition. Among young people who become homeless, some come from two-parent homes. Some live with birth parents, step parents and/or adoptive parents. Others are raised by single parents, grandparents, older siblings, aunts, uncles, or other caregivers. Households may include siblings, extended family members, and others who are not directly related to the individual, but who nevertheless may play a key role in a young person’s life. Family composition – and relations – may also change over

time. Personal histories of homeless youth, from the research conducted with Eva's Family Reconnect Program, reveal that the youth move through different family situations throughout their lives – from originally living with birth parent(s), to living with relatives such as grandparents, or in foster care. They may be recent immigrants or refugees, in which case their family situations may be unstable or in flux. The point is that there is no single version of the family, and that complex social and cultural family arrangements mean that young people will have different kinds of relations with different family members.

A person may experience conflict (even violence) with one or more members of their family, but may have positive relations with others. Findings from research conducted with Eva's Family Reconnect program also revealed that even when young people are homeless, the majority (69%) continue to have some kind of active involvement with family. One of the key successes of the program is that 62% of participants became more actively involved with family members during their involvement in the program, and 14.5% reconciled a damaged relationship with a family member. These improved relations may have been a result of either individual counseling, where young people were encouraged and supported in their efforts to engage family members, or through family counseling. They also reported having developed a better understanding and appreciation of the conditions that forced them to leave. Family conflict does not necessarily mean that young people have difficult relationships with all family members, all of the time. Even if a young person comes from a household where there is abuse, there may potentially be positive relationships with some family members, for instance, aunts, uncles, cousins and/or grandparents who either live outside the home or were not involved in the abuse. It is also important to consider that for street youth, serious family conflict and/or abuse may not be the cause of their leaving home. For these youth, in particular, families may represent potential supports for reducing and preventing youth homelessness.

Finally, an important point to consider is that relationships characterized by conflict are not always irreconcilable. It goes without saying that human relations often involve conflict of one kind or another, and this is especially true of family relations. When conflicts become more serious, there may be opportunities to improve things. In some cases, situations resolve themselves as individuals grow, mature and/or adapt. In other cases, people learn to tolerate a certain level of conflict. Sometimes people in conflict situations require the chance to live temporarily apart, to cool off or to think things through. Where conflict becomes chronic, there may, in the end, be a need for outside interventions such as individual and family therapy, or mediation. For many youth who find themselves on the streets, the conflict that resulted in their homelessness can be at least partially resolved through proper interventions and sup-

ports. For example, undiagnosed mental health issues or learning disabilities may underlie family conflict and contribute to the young person's pathways to the streets. For many parents, the diagnosis of mental health issues and learning disabilities may lead to a shift in how they think about and respond to their child. For example, according to a Family Intervention counselor: "We have a case of a young man from the African continent with mental health problems that were very challenging, because of the difficulties his family had in accepting this. His mom was a highly educated woman who believed that he had demons and could not understand that his problems were psychiatric."

An important thing to consider regarding the outcomes of this type of program is that physically reuniting with family may not be desirable or possible. Coming to terms with this may be important in helping young people – and their families – move forward with their lives. For example, those interviewed during the course of research, for whom family reconciliation was not an option, spoke of learning to accept that living with family was impossible, although they could maintain relationships or contact with siblings, parents, or extended family. One youth we interviewed stated: "I know I can never live with [my family] again, but I have a close relationship with my sisters now and I speak to my mom once a week and that's cool." Another stated that "the staff here helped me deal with my anger and resentment of [my family] and now I can move on and have a better attitude in my relationships in the future. I'm learning to be patient with people." While moving back home, either temporarily or permanently, is not possible for all youth, an improved understanding of the situations that forced them to leave home may allow them to move forward with their lives. And, for those who come from abusive backgrounds, it is important to remember that while some relationships hold little hope for reconciliation, the potential for positive relations with at least some family members exists. The streets and shelter system should never be the only options.

An effective response to youth homelessness would balance prevention, emergency responses, and transitional supports to rapidly move people out of homelessness. Preventive strategies range from working with families, schools and the community to either help keep young people at home by resolving or helping them cope with family problems, or alternatively, providing young people with the supports they need to live productive lives. Prevention also means that other institutions – including corrections, mental health and health care, and child welfare services – work effectively to ensure that young people leaving care have necessary supports in place (including housing) and do not end up homeless. A truly preventive approach requires coordination of services, the ability to identify when young people may be at risk of becoming homeless, and a commitment to intervene when young people are at risk of homelessness.

The Canadian Response

The ‘emergency services’ model that characterizes the street youth sector in Canada in many ways copies the adult homelessness sector. Across Canada, there are a range of services and programs for homeless youth, including shelters, drop-ins, employment programs and health services intended to help young people meet their needs once they become homeless. Typically these programs are operated by NGOs, and are community based. While this has resulted in the development of a number of excellent community-based programs across the country, these agencies and programs are not integrated into a broader strategic response that works to keep people off the streets in the first place, or to intervene quickly to either get them back home or obtain the supports they need to live independently. There are complex reasons for this, including an historical emphasis on community-based services rather than an integrated systems approach, and the belief of politicians (and arguably, much of the general public) that the fragmented web of street youth services takes care of the problem.

Sector-wide, preventive approaches that might highlight family mediation and connection are absent. Within the youth homelessness services sector, services are not coordinated, information systems are not in place to support information sharing (for example, to avoid replication and for tracking purposes to maximize effective and seamless service delivery), and sector-wide intake (including shelters and counseling) and referral systems are not available. Emergency services are for the most part funded to provide support for people *while* they are homeless, and this shapes the orientation of the services themselves. In addition to meeting immediate needs and providing a level of care, the key program goals of most street youth serving agencies (if they have a program beyond meeting immediate needs) is to provide practical support for individuals to develop the capacity to become independent, and move towards economic self-sufficiency³.

One example of the need for an integrated approach is reflected in the high percentage of homeless youth who report previous involvement with child welfare and protection services, including young people who have become wards of the State and live in foster care or group homes (Eberle et al., 2001; Fitzgerald, 1995; Flynn & Biro, 1998; Minty, 1999; Novac et al., 2002; Raychaba, 1988). In many areas, gaps in the child welfare system mean that young people 16 and older may have great difficulty accessing services and supports. System failures in child welfare – including the fact that young people can ‘opt out’ of care but not back in, and that young people can age out of care – means that many

3. A 2006 study conducted in Ottawa identified this as a key characteristic of street youth serving agencies (Klodowsky, Aubry & Farrell, 2006).

young people transition from child welfare support not to self-sufficiency, but to homelessness (see Nichols, this volume).

What Needs to be Done?

In the face of an increasing demand for solutions to homelessness, it is crucial to know what works, why it works and for whom it works. While there are many programs across Canada that have developed innovative approaches to youth homelessness, few focus specifically on reconnecting homeless youth with family, or attempt to mediate and resolve underlying family conflict. That said it is important to acknowledge that family reconnection is no cure-all, as there will always be many situations in which family reconciliation is impossible.

The research on situations that produce youth homelessness consistently identifies difficult family situations and conflict as being the key underlying factor. While this is the reality for many young people who are homeless, the potential role of the family as part of the solution is largely ignored. Family is considered to be part of the past. Emergency services thus focus on providing refuge for young people, and helping them reach self-sufficiency and independence (without the support, where possible, of family members). This is perhaps not surprising, nor entirely unreasonable, given the high percentage of young people who are fleeing abuse. However, research also identifies a sizeable percentage of street youth who experience family conflict but who do *not* come from abusive family backgrounds, making the argument for family reconnection more of a priority.

The effectiveness and underlying logic of the Family Reconnect program suggests that the basic principles of the program can be applied more broadly at a ‘systems level’. That is, in contrast to developing an agency-based program or response, it is possible to approach the issue from a more integrated systems level, bringing together a range of services and approaches that work *across* the street youth sector, and ideally, engage with programs, services and institutions ‘upstream’ (that is, before the young person becomes homeless). Increasing family reunification programming can thus be seen as a key approach to preventing youth homelessness.

There are several key features to an integrated, systems level approach to family reconnection. To be effective, such an approach requires strong institutional support by all levels of government, ensuring that family reconnection programming is widely available across the country and is not dependent on support from individual organizations that consider these programs necessary or appropriate. In other words, young people should have access to such interventions wherever they live. A systems response also requires that programming work across institutional and jurisdictional boundaries. An effective family re-

connection program requires collaboration between education, child welfare services, the mental health sector, housing, settlement and corrections. In many ways, youth homelessness (and by extension, family reconnection) is a ‘fusion policy’ issue that suggests the need for an integrated local approach with strong communication between government departments and community agencies, so that appropriate and timely interventions can take place. Most importantly, an intervention program such as Family Reconnect must be widely available – and in some ways targeted – to young people who are *below* the age of 16. Examples of effective and integrated systems-level, preventive approaches that focus on family mediation/reconnection are found in the United Kingdom and Australia. Their integrated approaches not only help improve the lives of young people and their families, and the communities they live in, but they also make economic sense, as prevention is much less costly than emergency services.

i) **Australia: ‘Reconnect Program’ for Young People At Risk of Homelessness**

Australia’s “Reconnect Program” is operated by the Australian government’s Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and has been in operation since 1999. The program is a national early intervention initiative designed to reduce youth homelessness by reconnecting both homeless youth and youth who are at risk of becoming homeless with their families, schools, and communities. The program is a classic example of a systems level approach in that it is widely available across the country, and it works across institutional boundaries to provide young people who become – or are at risk of becoming – homeless with the supports they need to stay at home, or find alternative supportive living arrangements. There are over 100 Reconnect programs, and some specialize in supporting sub-populations such as Aboriginal youth, refugees and new immigrants, and lesbian, gay and bisexual youth. While funded by the central government, it nevertheless operates through a network of community-based early intervention services, with the goal of assisting youth in stabilizing their current living situations, as well as improving their level of engagement and attachments within their community (Australian Government, 2009). The Reconnect Program targets young people aged 12-18 (and their families) who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness.

The service delivery model of Australia’s Reconnect program includes “a focus on responding quickly when a young person or family is referred; a ‘toolbox’ of approaches that includes counseling, mediation and practical support; and collaboration with other service providers. As well as providing assistance to individual young people and their families, Reconnect services also provide group programs, undertake community development projects and work with other agencies to in-

crease the broader service system's capacity to intervene early in youth homelessness." (Australian Government report, 2003:8) The Reconnect program emphasizes accessibility, a client-centered orientation, and a holistic approach to service delivery. The success of the program requires working collaboratively with key agencies and institutions. They stress good links with service providers as crucial. Like Canada, the Australian population is diverse, and includes a large Aboriginal population. The Reconnect program therefore stresses the importance of equitable and culturally appropriate service delivery. As part of this strategy, they strive to employ staff from backgrounds representing the populations they serve in order to more easily engage with the diversity of Reconnect clients.

A key feature and strength of the Australian model is how the concept of 'reconnection' is conceived. In striving to help young people stabilize their living situation, the goal is to not simply work on family relationships in isolation, but rather, to improve the young person's level of engagement with training, school and the local community. In fact, whereas in Canada the response to homelessness largely ignores education as significant in the lives of homeless youth (Winland et al., 2011), in Australia, it is central. While they do recognize that many homeless youth have negative school experiences, they also see schools as key to the identification of young people who are at risk, and thus have an important role to play in keeping young people connected to their community and in helping them successfully move into adulthood. They argue that: "An integrated national strategy for early intervention for early childhood, middle childhood and youth would draw attention to the inter-relationship of schools with family and community rather than regarding schools purely as vehicles for pedagogy" (Australian Government report, 2003:8).

Several years ago the Australian government began an extensive evaluation to assess and analyze program strategies and outcomes in order to determine whether the Reconnect programs were effective in accomplishing what they were designed to accomplish.⁴ Importantly, they wanted to find out whether positive outcomes were sustained over time. They were also interested in understanding whether – and how – the program strengthened the community's ability to deliver early intervention to at-risk youth. Finally, they evaluated the effectiveness of the program's management (Australian Government report, 2003; RPR Consulting, 2003). The evaluation identified positive and sustainable outcomes for young people and their families, including improvements in:

- The stability of young people's living situations

4. For more details, go to the Reconnect program website: www.facs.gov.au

- Young people's reported ability to manage family conflict (this improvement was sustained over time)
- Parents' capacity to manage conflict
- Communication within families
- Young people's attitudes towards school
- Young people's engagement with education and employment
- Young people's engagement with community (e.g. involvement in organized activities, volunteering, etc.)

The evaluation also pointed to the success of the program in building community capacity for early intervention in youth homelessness. The program design allows for flexibility, and as a result, Reconnect programs vary by area and focus. Furthermore, community characteristics and local infrastructure can have an impact on the ability of Reconnect services to build community capacity. The factors that underlie the most successful Reconnect programs appear to be: "a clear understanding of and commitment to the Reconnect model; teamwork; and leadership" (Australian Government report, 2003:11).

Key conclusions were that Reconnect services:

- are highly effective, relative to their small size, in increasing community services infrastructure for early intervention;
- build capacity with family, schools and community organizations, through collaborative approaches and by strengthening service networks;
- build capacity by helping other organizations to focus on effective early intervention;
- build capacity over time, where adequate resources and stable management are available;
- can be highly effective models for achieving participation by Indigenous communities in approaches that support early intervention.

The Australian Reconnect program is an excellent example of a systems approach to family reconnection and youth homelessness prevention. The Reconnect program begins with an understanding that youth's personal and family problems are not separate from each other, nor are they isolated and disconnected from all other aspects of their lives. In turn, the program aims to break the cycle of homelessness by applying a holistic approach, providing many services including counseling, group work, mediation and practical support such as the identification and procurement of services to the whole family. It also targets services, including

ethno-culturally sensitive programs and mental health services, to the individual needs of clients (Australian Government report, 2009). Finally, the program is based on a commitment to a systems level response where community capacity (accessibility to appropriate services and supports) must be built so that homelessness prevention becomes the work of a broad range of institutions, services and programs, and not simply the responsibility of the homelessness sector.

Innovations around the idea of family reconnection for homeless youth or those at risk are also found in the United Kingdom.

ii) United Kingdom: Prevention and Family Mediation

In the UK, the response to homelessness is significantly different than Canada's in that it is a strategic and integrated approach, and designed to work as a system rather than as a collection of independent community-based responses. Following a national policy push in 2003, the number of homeless youth in the UK fell by 40% in two and a half years. This reduction was not traced to rising employment or expanded affordable housing, but rather, to the effectiveness of prevention and early intervention strategies (Pawson et al., 2007). For homeless youth, perhaps the most notable development has been the establishment of the National Youth Homelessness Scheme, first announced in 2006 as a national strategy to 'tackle and prevent homelessness'. The overall goal was to have the national government, local governments and community-based service providers work with young people and their families to prevent homelessness and help youth transition to adulthood in a sustainable, safe way. The key here again is the focus on ***prevention***, and there is much we can learn from this orientation (Pawson, 2007). The UK approach to preventing youth homelessness begins with the recognition that remaining at home may not be an option for all young people, particularly for those who experience abuse. However, for most youth, their life chances generally improve the longer they stay with their families, and the more 'planned' their transition is to independent living. The key to a preventive approach is that young people and their families "need to be able make informed decisions about whether to live apart and, if they need it, to have access to appropriate resources and skilled support if homelessness is to be prevented" (NYHS website: www.communities.gov.uk). "Key elements of 'what works' include flexible and client-centered provision, close liaison with key agencies, and building in support from other agencies when necessary. The need for timely intervention was also highlighted, as was the need for active promotion of the availability of the service and early contact with clients on referral" (Pawson et al., 2007:14). Again, reflecting the 'partnership' approach of the UK strategy, local governments are expected to develop interventions to be delivered in collaboration with key partners including Children's Services, the youth service, the not-for-profit sector, and importantly,

schools. This collaborative, cross-sector approach is seen as necessary in supporting young people and their families and in preventing homelessness.

The core aspects of this preventive strategy include:

A) *Advice, Assessment and Early Intervention*: Providing timely information and supports to young people and their families is crucial. This includes services to develop resilience (the ability to cope with and overcome problems), raise young people's awareness of their rights and provide advice and direction about where to get help. The UK has pioneered a "Single Point Access Information and Assessment" for young people, who can access the service either in person or via the phone or Internet. As a system, it relies on a good assessment method (such as the Common Assessment Framework, described below), and a strong organization linked to services both within and outside the homelessness sector. Being both a 'triage' service and a single point access service ensures reliable assessment, more coordinated efforts, and a more effective evaluation of the appropriateness of services. Once a young person becomes homeless, or is identified as being at risk of homelessness, they are not simply unleashed into the emergency services sector. Rather, an intervention process is initiated, the youth's needs are assessed, risks are identified, and plans are put into place. This type of intervention is a strong case management approach to working with young people, in order to get them the supports they need either in the homelessness sector or in mainstream services. This integrated approach means that youth become not so much 'clients' of agencies, but of the sector. They are therefore supported from the moment they are identified, right through to the solution stage, and then after they have either returned home, or moved into a place of their own. The intervention is intended to help young people and their families move quickly to some sort of effective solution, rather than spending long periods of time in emergency services.

Central to this approach is the use of the "Common Assessment Framework" (CAF), a shared assessment system promoted by governments in the UK. The goal of the framework is to "help practitioners working with children, young people and families to assess children and young people's additional needs for earlier, and more effective services, and develop a common understanding of those needs and how to work together to meet them" (CWDC, 2009:6). The idea is that everyone who works with young people should know about the CAF and how to deliver it. The CAF builds upon a larger government policy document called "Every Child Matters – Children and Young People's Plan," and consists of:

- A pre-assessment checklist to help decide which specific assessment is appropriate

- A process to enable child and youth workers to use a common assessment and then act on the result rather than a haphazard (and often replicated) assortment of assessments from diverse agencies.
- A standard form to record the assessment
- A service delivery plan and review form

Assessment services may be developed and delivered by local governments, but there is an understanding that partnerships with not-for-profit services are often the best route, as they likely have the expertise, legitimacy and hence the best track record with youth. Organizations that have experience and credibility in their work with young people who are homeless, and that have strong knowledge and relationships with other local providers, are therefore recommended.

That being said, there are challenges with the CAF, as in some jurisdictions, organizations have been reluctant to take a lead role because of capacity and resource issues (Smith & Duckett, 2010:16). On the other hand, evaluations of the CAF demonstrate positive service outcomes, including an improvement in “multi agency working, information sharing and (a reduction in) referral rates to local authorities” (Smith & Duckett, 2010:17).

B) *“Respite” or “time out” housing:* An interesting innovation in the early intervention strategy in the UK is the use of “respite” or “time out” housing. Respite housing is understood as temporary accommodation for young people who, because of a conflict or crisis, are suddenly homeless. But rather than have them move into homeless shelters, they are provided temporary accommodation with intensive intervention supports, including family mediation where appropriate. It is, in a sense, a ‘time out’ or ‘cooling off’ space, where young people and their families can work on repairing relations to enable them to return home. If returning is not an option, they are provided with accommodation while they work out longer term housing support. This strategy is considered most appropriate for 16 or 17 years old.

C) *Working in Schools:* As is the case in Australia, much of the preventive work in the UK occurs in schools. This is an important consideration, because this is where young people spend much of their time. This is also where one can access young people under the age of 16 who may be at risk. Schools exist in virtually all communities and in many cases are important community hubs with high levels of parental involvement. Work in schools is often delivered by not-for-profit agencies in collaboration with teachers and social service workers in the school system. These are usually the same agencies that deliver family mediation services. The rationale for this is, “if we can make a difference to young people’s attitudes and circumstances at a young age, there is a greater

chance of them not becoming homeless" (NYHS website: www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness/prevention/schools/). There are several aspects to this work. First is the focus on education, with the intention of increasing young people's understanding of homelessness, to help them identify and address situations where they may be at risk of homelessness, and provide them with information about services and supports for when they are in crisis. Second, supports in schools empower youth through personal development. This means helping them develop more effective problem solving and conflict resolution skills. In some cases, the programs also provide support for families and parenting skills. Third, the presence of agencies in schools helps them become key points of contact for young people and/or teachers who suspect that something may be wrong. In their review of prevention programs in the UK, Quilgars et al., (2008) demonstrated how such programs provide a means to:

- "increase young people's awareness of the 'harsh realities' of homelessness and dispel myths about the availability of social housing;" that is the readily available supply of social housing;
- "challenge stereotypes about homeless people, particularly regarding their culpability" for their circumstances;
- "educate young people about the range of housing options available to them after leaving home and raise awareness of help available;"
- "emphasize young people's responsibilities with regard to housing", specifically how to manage and take care of a home;
- "teach conflict resolution skills that may be applied within and beyond the home and school" (Quilgars et al., 2008:68).

Furthermore, the authors argue that programs that have a peer-educator component are well received and highly effective.

The Economic Case for Family Reconnection

There is no doubt about the effectiveness of the Family Reconnect program model. While it is acknowledged that for many homeless youth reconciliation with family is not desirable, nor possible, helping young people to understand and come to terms with this can be part of the work itself. For others, reconciliation of some kind is in fact possible. There is also a strong case to be made for the cost effectiveness of this program. *Preventing* youth homelessness on the one hand, and on the other, helping those who are homeless move quickly into housing (either at home or independent living), leads to both short term and long term savings. An integrated approach not only helps improve the lives of young people and their families, and the communities they live in, but it also makes economic sense.

In Toronto for example, it costs more than \$20,000 to keep a young person in a homeless shelter for a year, and this is not taking into account the added costs of health care, mental health and addiction supports, and corrections that are a direct result of the experience of being homeless (Shapcott, 2007). There is certainly plenty of evidence from across Canada that keeping people who are homeless in emergency services (i.e. shelter system) is expensive, and that it is much cheaper to prevent homelessness and/or provide people with the opportunity to move out of homelessness through supportive and affordable housing⁵ (Laird, 2007; Eberle, 2001; Halifax, 2006; Shapcott, 2007; Pomeroy, 2006; 2007; 2008). As Pomeroy has argued, the cost of homelessness does not only come from emergency shelters and drop-ins. When people become homeless they are more likely to use expensive health services due to poor health, addictions and mental health challenges. They are also more likely to end up in jail, one of the most expensive forms of accommodation in society. Toronto's Family Reconnect Program (FRP) operates on a yearly budget of \$228,888. In 2010, the FRP supported the return home or move to independent or supportive housing (with family support) of 25 youth, and in addition prevented seven youth from becoming homeless. One can only imagine the cost savings if the Family Reconnect program expanded into a systems-wide program.

Conclusions

While the reasons a youth leaves home vary widely, a key finding of this research is that they often want to establish or re-establish some kind of connection with some or all of their family members. This may involve occasional and limited contact, reuniting with family and moving back home, or simply coming to terms with why they left and moving forward with their lives. Another finding indicates that families, too, who have children living on the streets, often do not know how to reconnect with their children, to better understand and support them, and to access appropriate resources, not just for their children, but for themselves when experiencing, for example, poverty, family breakdown, illness or abuse. The analysis of youth homelessness should begin, though, with an understanding of the significance to youth of the home that is left behind, because for young people the meaning of home is different from that of adults. For youth, home is a safe place where young people expect to find adult support and guidance. In helping prevent youth homelessness, and/or support homeless youth in moving forward in their lives, we need to do more to resolve the family conflicts at the root of youth homelessness.

A strategy that supports youth to move towards self-sufficiency must necessarily start with a focus on the needs and protection of the young person in

5. See Gaetz, S. (2012) "The Real Cost of Homelessness: can we save money by doing the right thing?" <http://www.homelesshub.ca/costofhomelessness>

question, but at the same time need not ignore the potential significance of family relations. All healthy, self-sufficient adolescents (and adults) depend on others, including friends, co-workers, other adults and community members. For many, links with family are part of this network of support, and self-sufficiency can be achieved by reconnecting with relatives. However, there is a common reluctance on the part of many who work with homeless youth to acknowledge the importance of family in young people's lives. Family conflict, abuse or breakdown, often described as a main cause of youth homelessness, is used as justification for breaking ties with family and aiming to become completely self-sufficient without family support. To some degree, this is understandable, as many homeless young people are indeed fleeing family violence. It perhaps goes without saying that many youth are in a state of distress when they enter the shelter system, and reconnecting with family may not seem realistic or desirable at the time. This may mean that neither young people nor agency staff place priority on exploring the potential for reconnecting with family. Nevertheless, it is in fact when youth have just become homeless that opportunities to reconnect with family are greatest, and the full range of street youth serving agencies must be part of an effective referral system to services that support family reconciliation. Programs such as Family Reconnect should be essential features of a response to youth homelessness that focuses on prevention.

The Family Reconnect program's acknowledgement of the importance of family will appeal to all individuals along the political spectrum. Preventing youth from entering the shelter system is both a socially responsible and an economically sensible response to youth homelessness. While there are no 'happily ever after' stories, there is enough evidence of healing, greater understanding and reconciliation to make a very strong case for the vital importance of programs like Family Reconnect.

Recommendations

1. Government of Canada

- 1.1 The Government of Canada, as part of its Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), must adopt a strategy to end youth homelessness.

2. Provincial Government(s)

- 2.1 All provinces must develop a strategy to end youth homelessness that includes a focus on prevention and family reconnection.
- 2.2 The Child and Family Services Act should be amended to enable young people to continue their involvement with Children's Aid Societies up until such a point as they are determined (through

- a comprehensive assessment strategy) to be ready to move forward with their lives in a productive and healthy manner.
- 2.3 Provinces should establish an inter-ministerial committee to develop an effective intervention strategy to reduce the number of young people between the ages of 12 and 17 who become homeless.

3. Municipal Government(s)

- 3.1 Municipal governments, where they are creating a strategy to end youth homelessness, should incorporate family reconnection as a central principle.
- 3.2 Municipalities should focus attention on developing and or expanding Family Reconnect programs where they exist.
- 3.3 Municipal governments should require that all street youth serving agencies adopt a family reconnection orientation as part of a preventive strategy.
- 3.4 Municipal governments should adopt a rapid re-housing strategy for young people who are new to the street.
- 3.5 Municipal governments should offer ‘time out’ or respite shelter that is separate from the regular shelter system.

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3 Pathways Towards Stability: Young People's Transitions Off of the Streets

Jeff Karabanow, Ted Naylor

The majority of studies on homeless youth focus on pathways into homelessness, and street culture (day-to-day life on the streets). Such a focus has revealed a great deal about the causes and consequences of life on the street, and includes multiple well-known causes of youth homelessness, including a troubled family life, abuse and trauma, poverty, addictions and mental health issues and involvement in the child welfare system. Too often, however, the picture of life on the street remains incomplete, with little understanding of how some of these young people manage to move *off* the street and build/rebuild an identity that does not include “homeless” or “street engaged” (Karabanow et al., 2005; Mayock, et al., 2011). In other words, we know a lot about pathways onto the streets for kids, but little about the ways in which they get off the street and enter back into what we might call ‘mainstream’ society.

The focus of this study was to talk to youth, many of whom were no longer living on the street and some of whom were still engaged in street life, about the ways in which they have attempted to get off the street (for a complete discussion of methodology, see Karabanow et al., 2005; Karabanow, 2008¹). The voices of 128 young people (90 males, 38 females) and 50 service providers in six Canadian cities (Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Calgary, Ottawa and Vancouver), reveal several connected themes related to the street exiting process, including contemplation (thinking about getting off the street),

1. This article is an abbreviated and revised version of earlier work - Karabanow, J. (2008). Getting off the Street: Exploring young people's street exits. *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 51(6), 772-788.

motivation to change, getting help, transitioning from the street, changing daily routine, and redefining one's sense of self (see Table 1). Alongside these exiting factors, the formal connections to groups, supports and services that street youth interact with every day, from drop-in centres to homeless shelters, were also found to play significant roles in supporting young people's possible exit from street life.

Table 1

Location of interview	Females			Males		
	N	Age Range	Mean Age	N	Age Range	Mean Age
Halifax	12	18-25	21	21	16-27	21.3
Toronto	8	17-27	19.87	17	18-23	20.37
Ottawa	2	17-20	18.5	5	21-26	24.4
Montreal	4	18-25	21.5	15	20-27	22.18
Calgary	2	23	23	18	18-27	23.16
Vancouver	10	17-23	19.3	14	17-23	21
TOTALS	38			90		

Table 2

Service provider participants	
	Number of Participants
Halifax	8
Toronto	11
Montreal	10
Calgary	8
Vancouver	12
Ottawa	1
TOTAL	50

A Portrait of a Street Youth

Simply put, there is no clear definition to describe what makes a young person a 'street youth'. The population is diverse and often temporary, with youth drifting in and out of different circumstances and experiences (Karabanow, 2004a). That said, most of us have a vague sense of who street youth are, but give little thought as to how someone ended up on the street, let alone how they might get off the street.

For this study, homeless street youth are defined as young people (between the ages of 16 and 24) who do not have a permanent place to call home and who, instead, spend a significant amount of time and energy on the street (e.g., in alleyways, parks, storefronts, dumpsters, etc.), in squats (usually located in abandoned buildings), at youth shelters and centres, and/or with friends (typically referred to as "couch surfing") (Karabanow, 2004a).

Pathways to Life on the Street

Exploring how youth enter street life is important when trying to understand how they might get off the street. For instance, according to the majority of

youth we spoke to, family life prior to becoming homeless included physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse; violence and substance abuse within the home; and family instability, including numerous transitions and moves. The causes of such instability include divorce, separation, introduction of stepparents and stepchildren, moving houses, changing cities, and shifting living arrangements. The consequences of such chaos in the lives of youth is an obvious cause for concern, as family lives are often disruptive and inconsistent, with a lack of love, care, interest, and support from caregivers. It was clear from our sample that youth routinely experienced loneliness, boredom, isolation, and neglect (in addition to such traumas as being witnesses and/or victims of violence, abuse, and substance abuse) within their families. Many street youth find their way to the street as a way to free themselves from a very hostile home environment:

That was the whole reason I would never try to live back home: in the last day/night that I slept there, my dad grabbed me by my throat and put me up against the wall 'cause I was thinking about leaving. So that was his answer 'cause my dad's very short tempered and high fused. . . . I would rather stay on the street than move back there. (Lisa, age 24, Halifax)

Another factor that often leads young people to the street is difficult child welfare experiences. Many of the youth we spoke to (over fifty percent) turned to the street after living in a group home or foster care placement. These experiences were most often described as uncaring, abusive, and unstable. It is hard to exaggerate the effect that such experiences have on youth. Moving from group home to group home (or foster home to foster home), and being made to feel “unwanted” or like a “criminal” or “delinquent,” influences how many youth feel about not only themselves but also their life on the street. While perhaps romanticized, the cold, hard reality is that for many youth, life on the streets becomes a better option than staying where they are. Perhaps strangely, the youth we spoke to often did not see themselves as passive victims, but rather accepted the role they played in their negative home experiences. Many youth spoke of their active role in problematic family or child welfare experiences, whereas others saw the street as the only option when home or child welfare settings became unbearable. Others still, thought of street life as a “timeout” period to reflect on their particular situation. In the end, regardless of how an individual ended up as a ‘street youth’, young people play a role in creating their pathways onto and off the street and in building street identities (Karabanow, 2004a; 2006; Visano, 1999).

Where Do I Go From Here – Getting Off the Street

Since we now have a sense of what leads youth to life on the street, the key question is how youth get off the street once they find themselves there. The short

and simple answer is: if street youth keep trying to get off the street, they are likely to be successful over time. In fact, we found that it took on average 6 attempts before successfully getting off the street. Many different internal and external factors were needed to put together a realistic street exit strategy. These factors include: contemplation or reflection (thinking about getting off the street); motivation to change; getting help; transitioning from the street; changing routine; and redefining sense of self. This is important as it makes it clear that exiting street life is complex and consists of a mix of strategies, personal ambitions, structural supports and ultimately, persistence and the desire to get off the street.

Contemplation

In the case of the youth we spoke to, one of the most important factors in getting off the streets was first thinking about it as doable and realistic. In general, street youth often re-thought or looked at their life on the street differently after a traumatic street experience. These stressful experiences, often shocking to those who are unfamiliar with the daily challenges of street youth, included stories of physical and sexual assault, drug and/or alcohol overdoses, involvement with the criminal justice system (i.e. police and/or courts), and being a witness to street violence. For other youth, the motivation to ‘change’ was simpler and involved becoming bored with street culture and/or tired of surviving on the streets.

Then I looked at my life and realized, where am I going? I wasn't happy with how things were so I decided to try and change it. . . . I was like, I can't do this anymore. I can't just do nothing. I'm going to have to make a change. (William, age 20, Toronto)

Ironically, the freedom that initially attracted young people to the streets can grow into aimlessness and boredom. And for young people, the struggle with day-to-day street survival – securing shelter, finding money, seeking food and clothing, and staying safe – can become overwhelming.

I mean, everything gets boring after a while. . . . Just really bored sitting on the street asking for money or trying to shine shoes or read poetry or whatever, you know, I'm just really tired of it, so it's like, I'm going to get a job and get off the streets for a while because it's boring. . . . I'm tired of this, you know? (Roger, age 21, Halifax)

For some youth, heavy drug and alcohol use combined with a growing maturity and exhaustion was enough to make them want a change:

Now, I'm just trying to get the fuck out of this city because it's starting to, like, eat me alive and the drug thing is, like, too much.

(Jordan, age 21, Vancouver)

Although the majority of youth named boredom, fatigue, heavy drug and alcohol use, and aging as reasons for getting off the street, for others it was as simple as feeling “enough is enough.” Very often young people were unable to accurately explain their reasons or strategies for getting off the street. In this sense, it is clear that getting off the street involves obvious, as well as unclear paths and elements. One service provider noted that the simple explanation that many youth use is that they are “finally prepared.”

I have seen some kids, like, it amazes me, they'll be in it for 5 years and then boom, one day [they're off], and then I always ask them what made that difference and they're just like, "I was ready." It's always a simple answer, I was ready. I was just ready. So, I think, a lot of times it has to come deep from within them about being at their breaking point or whatever it is for them then. But yeah, then some people just never hit that and then, like, why is it that there are people that never get to that place? I don't know, that's a question I always ask myself, what makes that difference? (Service provider, Vancouver)

Motivation to Change

One of the key factors involved in the process of getting off the street is personal motivation to change. Life-changing experiences that might include becoming pregnant or having an intimate partner (i.e. a significant boyfriend or girlfriend), or even simply gaining support from family and friends can inspire one to get off the street.

Participants described street life as “exploitative,” “uncaring,” “ruthless,” and “dangerous,” and yet often showed an impressive will and hope for a brighter future. A majority of young people spoke about needing a “desire” to exit street life or having “strong will power” to overcome obstacles such as drug addictions, personal trauma, lack of housing and employment. Speaking of the lack of resources available, one participant noted:

Mostly, the only resource that will get the person off the street is the person themselves. They have to [want] to get off, they have to be wanting something. They want to be able to grasp something. If they don't want to grasp anything or want to move on, they're not going to move on. They have to have the will power to do it. (Randall, age 20, Toronto)

Findings reveal that young people who believed they had support from family or friends or believed there was someone in their lives who cared for them were more likely to be motivated to get off the street. Within street culture, asking for help was a struggle for most participants, but at the same time, an important part of getting off the street:

What didn't work was doing it on my own and relying on my friends that were in the same position because, I mean, it's a cycle and you just get dragged back into it again and again and if you don't have outside help. (Ahmed, age 23, Vancouver)

The impulse for youth to move away from the street was connected to personal factors, as well as factors related to the system that homeless youth navigate. For instance, some of the personal factors identified by youth participants included ‘faults’ or a lack of will or motivation, as well as a bruised sense of self. Some youth were able to, somehow, overcome such obstacles almost entirely on their own. The majority of our participants, however, needed some level of guidance and support to plan an exit strategy and to stick with it long-term. Not surprisingly, youth with strong personal support systems (outside of street culture) had fewer struggles getting off the street. At the same time, young people with a strong desire to get off the street may have been more willing to ask for help. For example, responsibility for a new baby might be the push needed to exit street life. Bruno et al., (2012:550) recently published an article suggesting that for high-risk youth, early conception (of a child) is actually an opportunity to “conform to the conventional societal role of becoming a parent”. Regardless, our study found that without enough support, even once a youth is off the street, it is very likely that their motivations will wane and/or circumstances will change and they will return to the street.

Getting Help

A third dimension of getting off the street for youth, which is connected to their motivation for change, involved getting help during the early stages of leaving the street. This included: the use of available services; searching for formal employment and stable housing; and some form of involvement with formal institutions (such as returning to school, entering supportive housing or starting structured programs, which might include employment and skills training). It is clear that service providers played a significant role in helping young people regain or rebuild a sense of self. Many of the study’s participants used words such as “surrogate families” to describe their feelings toward service providers.

Young people on the street are faced with a number of complex challenges. These challenges include being part of an environment where trauma is an almost daily

occurrence, as is coping with physical, mental, and spiritual health concerns, and a lack of life and employment skills. In addition, we know that street youth have little in terms of “social margin” (Wiseman, 1970) or “social capital” (Karabanow & Naylor, 2010), which includes links and connections to a network of family and peers that can be used to “get ahead”. As a result, services, which can include shelters, drop-in centers, health clinics, and second-stage independent living resources (including mobile care units, and outreach programs), provide basic needs (such as food, clothing, showers, and shelter) and life and employment skills training (such as how to manage a budget, cook, search for employment, and carry out a job interview). In this sense, service providers and programs for youth also act as a support for the everyday challenges youth face, to help them regain confidence and self-esteem within a “culture of hope” (Karabanow, 2004b).

Participants gave credit to service providers for helping them find job opportunities, housing options, and educational opportunities within an environment of care, safety, and learning. Young people saw street youth services as places they felt safe and cared for. Such settings often succeed in creating community environments where youth can begin to regain a sense of self and work out personal dilemmas, while figuring out why they are on the street. The youth may even come to advocate against structural injustices (such as a lack of affordable housing or meaningful employment opportunities for youth) that maintain their homeless status (Karabanow, 2004b). For the majority of participants, not being judged for their homelessness and feeling that someone understood their struggles were key ingredients to feeling satisfied and engaged with the services they received from street youth agencies.

Transitioning From the Street

The process of transitioning away from the street was a complex and difficult stage for street youth. Moving away from the street required leaving the downtown core (i.e. physically leaving the area), while reducing ties with street culture and street friends, and building (or rebuilding) relationships with mainstream society. Further still, leaving the street meant leaving friends, surrogate or replacement families, and the familiar routines and culture associated with the downtown core. For many young people, friends and surrogate families were made as a result of, or during, very stressful survival situations. Friendships made in periods of high stress and self protection tend to be intense and as a result many of these street level friendships can be very tight-knit, making it even more difficult to pull oneself away from the street. Put simply, the longer one spends on the street, the deeper the connection one would have to the street and the harder it would be to disconnect from street culture:

But it kind of compounds itself—the longer you're on the street, the harder it is to get off because you get more entrenched in the culture and you have more of the problems that come with that. (Service provider, Calgary)

Youth also spoke about street life as more than a physical space and associated leaving the street with disconnecting from friends. While we commonly think, “why don’t youth just leave!?” it is obvious that breaking ties with street peers was different for each youth, but was generally seen as a slow, gradual and difficult emotional and physical process. However, speaking to the importance of this transitioning stage to getting off the street, the majority of youth stressed how disconnecting from friends who were seen as a bad influence was a necessary part of the exiting process:

Most of them come by and ask me, “Could you help me for 2 days, like sleep at your house?” I don’t have the choice [but] to say no, because if I help them, they’ll come back and see me and they won’t help themselves, and since I need to help myself first of all, I don’t have a choice either. (Mohamad, age 23, Montreal)

For others, breaking ties with friends and with drugs was linked. Addictions were described as connected with street culture and street networks. Youth who had made it off the streets, into a more stable living environment spoke about the difficulty of dealing with their drug addictions. Youth also claimed that quitting drug and/or alcohol use was a very important step in their transition off the street and helped improve their self-esteem.

Many youth openly expressed the difficulties and challenges of leaving behind street friends. Cutting ties often uncovered feelings of confusion, guilt, abandonment, disloyalty, resentment, and loneliness. For some young people, street friends and street families made them feel secure, accepted, and loved, often for the first time in their young lives. Although participants were clear that breaking ties with street culture and friends was necessary to the transitioning stage, it is also clear from the findings that a majority of young people returned to the streets to visit street friends and street communities, interact with street youth organizations (which are predominantly located in downtown areas), and increase (primarily through panhandling and squeegeeing) their minimum-wage earnings from formal sector employment.

Youth leaving the street clearly experienced a range of emotions and feelings during this phase, including unmistakable feelings of pride, hope, and self-confidence together with loneliness, guilt, and disloyalty. These feelings were not only targeted at street culture and friends, as many youth also expressed

significant feelings for service providers, who were often thought of as surrogate parents. For some youth, moving away from street culture meant breaking ties with services that had supported them through very difficult, and highly emotional, times in their young lives. Others, however, continued to get help from formal services after they left the street, but did so in ways that allowed them to keep a distance from their former lives on the street. For example, youth might drop in on a support centre only when residents were sleeping or out of the establishment. Or they might meet a contact in the downtown core away from the formal organization in order to distance themselves from the street and maintain their newfound and hard-fought stability.

Participants also expressed that it was as difficult to leave the street culture and friends, as it was to re-enter mainstream society and build new relationships. Despite the emotional strains of leaving relationships with people who had helped support them on the street, building new relationships outside of street culture was seen as important for healthy transitioning. New friends and communities were seen by participants as “good influences” in their day-to-day living. At the same time, youth expressed that the transition period between leaving street friends and developing new relationships was difficult. They often spoke of loneliness and uncertainty:

I think it's really hard because I'm, like, in between right now because a lot of my friends still live street lives. They're all about partying and pan-
ning and I'm just not, so I guess it's kind of a lonely time because you're
figuring out yourself and what you want to do. (Heidi, age 19, Halifax)

Changing Routine

A fifth factor in getting off the street involved reorganizing one’s routine in terms of employment, education, and housing. This phase included changing how one thought about the future and one’s goals, while finding a way to support one’s transition. During this stage, young people highlighted a new positive orientation to their life, supported by an improved sense of health and wellness, self-confidence, and personal motivation.

A change in routine emerged for participants as they transitioned from living on the streets to mainstream society. Youth described a whole set of new physical and psychological changes taking place in their lives, including feeling healthier, sleeping better, and an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence. Shifts in routine were commonly seen as connected to newfound stability and consistency in participants’ lives and they spoke of developing new positive communities of support. These supports, which replaced

street activities, included formal employment and/or returning to school. However, subtle day-to-day shifts in routine (such as waking up and making coffee or coming home and watching television) were as celebrated as living in one's own apartment or going to work each day.

Somewhat surprisingly, considering the links between street youth and the formal employment market are often tenuous at best, one of the most significant forces of change in the lives of youth was linked to formal employment. Aside from the obvious (i.e. assisting with one's basic needs), work translated into a gradual shift in general lifestyle. Such changes generally involved the way participants managed time (work and free time) and viewed their future:

I wake up, I have my shower, I get something to eat. I'm taken care of, I'm happy, I'm fed, and I go to work. It makes me feel meaningful about what I do with my day and so, I go out and I'm able to give to the world instead of just trying to take for myself, which is an amazingly positive feeling. And I can pursue the things that make me mentally healthy. The depression that goes with the street life isn't there, the feeling that I'm less than, my old idea of intellectual pursuit was dropping acid and talking about this and that. (Ahmed, age 23, Vancouver)

Rejoining mainstream culture introduced young people to a new way of life, and much of their new structure came from simple routines, such as attending work and/or school. Simple yet important, new routines such as sleep habits, meals and free time all positively help youth readjust to society. At the end of the transition process many youth reflected on their past experiences, and for the majority of participants, this meant perceiving the street as an unhealthy and destructive environment. Armed with a healthier sense of self, youth were willing and eager to imagine and plan for their future within an improved context of personal control, wellness and happiness.

"Successful Exiting" – Redefining Sense of Self

The last stage associated with exiting the street involved young people's emotional and spiritual sense of identity. As the previous stage shows, 'successful exiting' included a sense of "being in control" and "having direction" in one's life. The majority of participants spoke of feeling proud of their exit from street life, with very few regrets. Youth expressed the simple joy and pleasure of being able to finally enjoy life on their own terms, of possessing a healthy self-esteem and self-confidence, and of being able to take care of themselves and be stable in terms of both housing/security and personal wellness.

Youth described a variety of concepts when discussing what it meant to successfully transition from street culture. A truly successful transition from street life meant more than literally removing oneself from the street or finding housing. The youth made clear that the process of becoming an ex-street youth required emotional and spiritual shifts within themselves and for many youth success involved personal stability and being comfortable in their living environment. To this end, youth spoke of feeling “self-sufficient,” “stable,” “able to take care of themselves,” and “in control” of their lives as markers of a successful exit from street life. In this way, feeling self-sufficient was a key to a successful exit. This translated into not needing street youth services or relying on social assistance benefits for support. Interestingly, this idea of self-sufficiency as a key marker of exiting street life was also expressed by youth still living on the street. As the youth pondered what success would look like for them, many explained that it would mean reducing one’s need for services:

Well, to be self-sustaining, you know, to at least be able to come up with my own food money, spend it on food and, you know, pay rent.
(Danny, age 22, Calgary)

In the same vein, it is not surprising then that youth often described obtaining housing, employment, and education as a sign of a successful exit:

Successfully getting off the streets is getting your own apartment, having a very successful job, avoiding street life like not panhandling, not having to fly a sign or go squeegeeing or anything like that. (Roger, age 21, Halifax)

Other young people expanded on this and suggested that rather than simply being housed and fed, they desired a sense of “home” and “stability”:

I have a home. I don't have to worry about weather. I don't have to worry about, I mean, I'm a woman, so I don't have to worry about being assaulted or stuff like that. Like just things that people don't even think of, like, I don't have to worry about where my next meal is coming from or how I'm going to get heat or hot water or the embarrassment of going somewhere. (Patricia, age 21, Halifax)

Leaving dangerous street activities (such as drug abuse and sex trade work or prostitution) behind was also noted as a measure of success and stability. In addition, participants identified positive feelings, emotions, and relationships when discussing their idea of success. For some youth, success was defined as a spiritual state of being – an emotion or feeling that provided a renewed sense of self:

I think success is a peace of mind. It's being able to sit down at the end of the day and feel satisfied with what I've done, with who I am and to live life to its fullest. Every minute is a success. That's where I want to be. I'm getting there. (Dana, age 18, Vancouver)

In all, successfully exiting street life includes various dimensions made up of both material and emotional elements. For almost all participants, becoming an ex-street youth requires stable housing, a return to employment and/or school, and a move away from street culture and activity. Other young people, especially those who had successfully transitioned off the street, added spiritual and emotional growth and stability to the elements necessary to their street exit.

Conclusion

Street youth are a troubled population who exist on the edges of mainstream society. It is a population that consistently experiences marginalization and stigmatization within society, and is continually monitored and harassed by both the police and members of the general public. They are poor and isolated, and have little in terms of social capital and social margin. As we know, they often appear “different” in looks and attire, and also have the added burden of being young, which makes it more difficult to find work and shelter. Most days they spend much of their time in public areas, where they must deal with criticism and marginalization while also having to worry about finding shelter, food, clothing, and social support (Karabanow & Naylor, 2010).

As we have seen, within each of the stages of getting off the street, young people spoke of social exclusion. For example, attempting to find housing and job opportunities as street youth proved extremely difficult and often humiliating. As one young person noted, “Who wants to give me a job – I look like a homeless kid. I am a homeless kid” (John, age 20, Vancouver). In this sense, each stage was connected with a set of challenges and obstacles (some personal and others structural) making getting off the street a complicated and difficult process. Reentering mainstream culture was the most difficult dimension, as young people were required to transition from an “identity of exclusion” (i.e., being different, feeling stigmatized and marginalized) to one of “fitting in” to mainstream lifestyles. Ironically, many youth found a sense of belonging within the street youth populations. For instance, the majority of street youth spoke of street life as a safer space than their previous environments, emphasizing the traumatic or horrific experiences that lead young people to the street in the first place. There was also evidence that street life can provide feelings of community and family for many youth, a space where some feel cared for, accepted, and even protected. Moreover, findings suggest that for the most part, street youth

services are seen as surrogate families for homeless youth, providing needed basics and safe and caring environments. It is precisely this sense of inclusion that makes it difficult for most young people to move away from street culture.

When exploring their hopes for the future, a majority of young people spoke of traditional ideas, including finding a loving partner, having meaningful work, raising children, securing some land, building a home and having a family (elements of belonging and being part of what can only be seen as “mainstream” society). This finding provides direction for how we as a society should think about helping youth with the exiting process. Reflecting on the data and hearing the voices of our participants, several recommendations emerge:

1. Develop ways of preventing youth homelessness that tap into its true causes, including poverty, family distress, abuse and neglect, violence, and failures in the foster care system. We need thoughtful educational strategies (such as runaway prevention programs carried out by numerous street youth organizations) to unscramble myths and stereotypes as to why these young people enter street life, survive on the street, and yet suffer. Along these lines, we need to invest much more heavily in our school and child welfare systems to prevent these young people from falling through the cracks and onto the street. For example, teachers and guidance counselors (for those schools that still have them) need better resources to support students experiencing significant tensions at home; child welfare structures need more investment in outreach and planning for independent living in order to create smoother transitions out of formal care.

2. Continue to support our existing frontline (“in the trenches”) resources, including shelters, drop-ins, health clinics, and outreach services. They are the first supportive and healthy adult contacts that most young people experience when living on the street and they use creativity and compassion in helping street youth meet their basic needs. The majority of youth participants spoke movingly and passionately about the significance of such resources throughout the street exiting process. Additionally, one of our most important findings is that it took youth an average of six attempts to get off the streets. The patience and persistence of frontline workers is essential in supporting youth throughout their time on the street and their efforts to exit the street.

3. Develop thoughtful long-term structural development initiatives, including supportive and independent housing and meaningful employment opportunities for youth. There are many examples throughout North America of innovative partnerships between government, business, and nonprofit sectors working together to build such initiatives (e.g., Montreal’s Dans La Rue, Toronto’s Covenant House and Eva’s Place, and Calgary’s Open Door) (see Karabanow et al.,

2005 for in depth case studies of promising programs/services). Young people in our sample were clear about the need for safe and sustainable housing in order to begin seeking job opportunities. Moreover, young people highlighted the importance of securing well-paying and personally meaningful work. Not surprisingly, youth participants shared their struggles with securing full-time, stable employment that could pay the rent, buy food and clothing, and allow for some savings.

4. Build national and regional coalitions of street youth, policy makers, service providers, housing specialists, and academics that can share best practice approaches regarding service delivery, policy development, education, advocacy, and voice. Examples are beginning to surface – The Homeless Hub has become more than simply an inventory of homeless research, but an intellectual space where meaningful knowledge is being mobilized or shared across government sectors and public arenas; Raising the Roof, a national, multi-sectored, non-profit organization has successfully raised street youth concerns within public and government discussions.

Such separate yet connected dimensions will provide our young people with the proper support and a fighting chance to climb out of homelessness and, equally significant, provide opportunities for them to become citizens rather than clients, victims, criminals or worse, invisible and insignificant bodies.

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4 Childhood Stress and Mobility Among Rural Homeless Youth

Stephanie Baker Collins

Introduction

Our mental image of homeless youth tends to be one of youth living on the street in a large urban setting. Most research on homeless youth in Canada takes place in cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary and Halifax. But youth become homeless in small towns and rural locations as well. This chapter reports on a longitudinal study (observation of a sample of youth over a period of time) of 40 homeless youth in the region of Niagara, a mix of rural, small town and urban geography.

The limited information on rural youth homelessness in Canada suggests there are unique issues that affect youth in rural settings (Elias, 2009; Skott-Myrhe et al., 2008; Transitions Committee, 2003; Voakes, 1991). Services are less accessible, since they tend to be centralized in nearby urban areas (Beer et al., 2003; Edwards et al., 2009; Elias, 2009; Skott-Myrhe et al., 2008; Transitions Committee, 2003), and when youth leave a rural area to obtain services, they leave behind social networks and emotional connection to a place (Beer et al., 2003; Elias, 2009). There are fewer housing options available for homeless youth in rural areas (Beer et al., 2003; Edwards et al., 2009; Skott-Myrhe et al., 2008) and so youth take up camping, couch surfing, and living in barns, abandoned farmhouses, or cars (Edwards et al., 2009; Elias, 2009; and Transitions Committee, 2003). As a consequence, they move around frequently (Transitions Committee, 2003).

In order to find out more about the nature of youth homelessness in Niagara, particularly its causes and impacts, forty homeless youth were followed over a period of six to twelve months. This study targeted youth in four separate districts of Niagara to see whether youth homelessness differed depending on geographic location. The goal of the study was to use the increased knowledge of the causes and impacts of youth homelessness to develop policies and programs that better meet the needs of homeless youth.

In this chapter, the multiple childhood stresses (parental conflict, physical/sexual abuse, alcohol and/or drug abuse, for instance) and mobility (movement) of this population will be explored in detail. In doing so, an argument will be made that understanding the causes of youth homelessness, such as childhood trauma, is insufficient if we do not also help youth heal from the impact of such serious trauma. Emergency responses are insufficient if we do not also provide adequate long-term support to help youth put their lives back together again. The findings of this study will be placed in the context of the literature on causes of youth homelessness in Canada, and recommendations will be made for more comprehensive programs for homeless youth.

Literature Review

For this literature review, a detailed examination of studies of youth homelessness in Canada was undertaken, including national reviews and municipal reports (Calgary, Halifax, Hamilton, Lanark County, Ottawa, St. John's, Toronto, Victoria, Waterloo, and Winnipeg). These studies were reviewed not only for their descriptions of homeless youth, but also to examine how the complex lives of individual homeless youth are captured in reports on homeless youth populations as a whole. In addition, given the significance of mobility (moving from one place to another) among the youth in this study, persistent homelessness and residential instability (instability in the place of primary residence before homelessness) among homeless youth in Canada are also examined.

Causes of Youth Homelessness

The challenge of describing the complexity of homelessness is widely recognized. One of the challenges identified is the problem of capturing both structural barriers that contribute to and maintain homelessness, and individual factors such as substance abuse and mental health issues that are more widespread among homeless populations (Anucha, 2005; Chamberlain & McKenzie, 2004). Gaetz (forthcoming) identifies three primary causes of youth homelessness: *individual relational* factors including family conflict, violence, abuse and substance abuse; *structural factors* including the lack of af-

fordable housing, unemployment, discrimination and inadequate education; and *systems failures* where systems outside the homelessness sector fail youth, including the child welfare, mental health, and criminal justice systems.

Research into the causes of youth homelessness is now well developed. Karabananow states that, “The literature has provided an impressive grasp on the causes and consequences of street life including family dysfunction, abuse and trauma, exploitation and alienation, poverty, addiction, and mental health and child welfare inadequacies...” (2009:1). The reports on homeless youth reviewed for this study demonstrate high rates of abuse, family conflict and substance abuse, as well as involvement with the child protection and criminal justice systems. Reports on youth homelessness generally take the form of a jarringly familiar list of common issues.

In order to arrive at this list, researchers break down individual lives into a series of characteristics (for instance, the experience of child abuse or substance abuse), the frequencies of which are then reported numerically as a total percentage for the group of youth being studied. An individual youth may have grown up in a home filled with conflict, suffered child abuse, experienced his or her parents’ divorce and been sent back and forth between both parents until being kicked out onto the streets. In final reporting, this experience is reflected in a list of numbers: this percentage of youth experienced family conflict, this percentage experienced abuse, and this percentage of youth was evicted by parents. Most of the Canadian studies reviewed for this article report on the causes of youth homelessness as a list of percentages (DeSantis, 2002; Evenson & Barr, 2009; Klodawsky et al., 2006; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Transitions Committee, 2003; Vengris, 2005; Wingert et al., 2005). While these lists tell us something important about the population of homeless youth in Canada, in generalizing the experiences of homeless youth, the increasing impact of multiple stresses on individual lives can be lost.

Some reports on youth homelessness do refer to the snowballing nature of stresses by reporting on the “complexity” of factors that work together to contribute to youth homelessness, and thus recognize that these factors pile up for individual youth (Koeller, 2008; PHAC, 2006; Wingert et al., 2005). McLean (2005) refers to the cumulative impact of multiple stressors and suggests that multiple stressors increase the likelihood of homelessness. Several reports suggest that the traumatic events, which occur early in the lives of youth, have an impact long after the event and can lead to later homelessness (Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration, 2007; PHAC, 2006).

Another way in which the complexity of youth homelessness is addressed is in moving beyond a “point in time” picture (i.e. where a youth was living, what a youth was doing at a particular time on a particular day) to recognizing pathways over time (Chamberlain & McKenzie, 2004; Karabanow, 2009; Staller, 2004). In a study that examined the housing history of 149 youth staying at Covenant House in Toronto, Janus et al., (1987) mapped out the pathways of runaway homeless youth and found that they cycle between family, institutions (group homes, foster care, custody), shelters (formal and informal), and the street.

Benoit et al., (2008) conducted a study of the major transitions during the life histories of street youth as compared to a random sample of adolescent youth in Victoria. They found that street youth had considerable disruption in their early years, had less supportive relationships with their parents and had parents with lower education and weak ties to employment. The authors concluded that street youth make the transition between adolescence and adulthood with a lack of social support and financial resources.

These studies found that youth are forced to take on adult responsibilities too early, without family and social supports (Benoit et al., 2008; Janus et al., 1987). The typical situation of adolescents in our culture (full time school attendance, living with parents, and financial dependence on parents) is traded for no longer being in school, insecure housing, no financial support from parents, early romantic relationships and risky behaviours (unprotected sex, drug use, etc.).

In a third study of the life histories of homeless youth, Di Paolo (1999) focused on the impact of multiple traumas¹ in the lives of youth. DiPaolo looked for links between past trauma and current functioning in a population of homeless youth, comparing those who had experienced trauma with those who had not. The multiple traumas he examined were child sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse (damage to a child’s functioning brought about by neglect or maltreatment), exposure to domestic violence, and exposure to neighbourhood violence. DiPaolo found that all five types of trauma were associated with post-traumatic stress disorder and that the level of psychopathology (mental illness and depression) among youth increased as the frequency and severity of each type of trauma increased.

Karabanow (2009) looked at pathways for homeless youth and found that neither the path to the streets nor the path off the streets moves in a straight line. Factors that pushed youth to the streets included chaotic, disruptive and inconsistent home lives, as well as uncaring, exploitative and unstable foster care placements. For

1. This study took place in California, not Canada, but it is instructive, particularly on the impact of trauma.

youth, the streets were seen as a safer and more accepting space than their homes. Karabanow outlines the six stages youth travel through to successfully exit street life, including thinking about exiting, having the courage to change, getting help, transitioning from street life to housing, changing routines and finally a successful exit. There were numerous obstacles at each stage of getting off the street and youth usually made several attempts before a successful exit.

Persistent Homelessness and Residential Instability

Persistent youth homelessness is measured in different ways, such as the number of times a youth has been homeless, episodic homelessness (i.e. rotating in and out of homelessness), duration of homelessness, and the percentage of homeless youth living on the street. In several studies, the percentage of youth with multiple episodes of homelessness (from three to five) ranged from about one third of homeless youth in Calgary (McLean, 2005) and Ottawa (Klodawsky et al., 2006), to 38.6% in Lanark County (Transitions Committee, 2003). With regard to street life, reports from Halifax (Koeller, 2008) and Waterloo (DeSantis, 2002) reported that half of homeless youth had lived on the streets, while a national survey found that over 60% of homeless youth had lived on the streets full-time at some point (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). In terms of duration, across the cities of Calgary, Toronto and St. John's, 68% of street-involved youth were found to have participated in street life for more than a year and up to five years (Evenson & Barr, 2009). A report on street youth in Winnipeg found that an increasing number of youth are chronically or regularly homeless (Wingert et al., 2005).

Youth are also found to have patterns of disruption and residential instability prior to becoming homeless. Karabanow (2009:4) describes this pattern of disruption as follows, “family instability, including numerous transitions and moves (i.e., divorce, separation, introduction of stepparents and stepchildren, moving homes, changing cities, and shifting living arrangements).” In their review of research on homeless youth, Robertson and Toro (1999) reported that homelessness among youth was part of a long pattern of residential instability including repeated moves. In a research scan of homeless youth in three Canadian cities (Calgary, Toronto and St. John's), Evenson and Barr (2009) found that 63% of youth across the cities had grown up in a family that found it hard to maintain housing. Benoit et al., (2008) found a dramatic difference in residency patterns between a group of homeless youth and a randomly selected sample of youth from the same geographic area. By age 13, only one quarter of homeless youth were living in the same family situation into which they were born (i.e., with the same family members), while 60% of a comparable group of housed youth were living in the same family situation. In Lanark County (Transitions Committee, 2003), a geographic area comparable to Niagara, youth who had experienced

episodes of homelessness were also transient (or temporary) in terms of residence, with 77% of youth having lived in their current residence for less than three months and 70% having lived in their previous residence less than a year.

The studies above demonstrate that examining youth homelessness over time reveals the risks of living on the street and the complex paths that homeless youth follow when seeking stable housing. In addition, the experiences of homeless youth before, during and after periods of homelessness are marked by residential instability, trauma at home and in the child welfare system, with added trauma experienced while on the streets. There are lasting impacts of this trauma including depression, post traumatic stress disorder and more severe mental illness. These findings demonstrate the importance of looking beyond the immediate causes of youth homelessness in understanding the needs of youth and looking beyond emergency shelter in program and policy responses to youth homelessness.

Homeless Youth in Niagara

The Project

This research project, which studied homeless youth in Niagara, had three goals. The first was to understand the causes and impacts of homelessness, the second was to look for differences in causes and impacts among homeless youth depending on their geographic location in Niagara, and the third was to use the increased knowledge to develop programs that better meet the needs of homeless youth.

Youth were recruited for the study at youth shelters, youth drop-in centres, and through youth outreach workers and community agencies. Youth were eligible for the study if they were between 16 and 25 years of age, had been homeless² during the previous year and had first become homeless as teens. In order to investigate differences among homeless youth based on their location in rural or urban settings, ten youth were targeted in each of four districts of the Region of Niagara: Fort Erie/Port Colborne in the south, Niagara Falls/Welland in the middle, St. Catharines in the north, and West Niagara.

The initial interviews with 40 youth began in the spring of 2009 and the last interviews were conducted in early 2010. The design of the study was to conduct two follow-up interviews at three months and at six months to see whether youth had achieved housing stability. The mobility or movement of the youth during the study resulted in longer time periods between interviews. Thirty of the youth

2. Homeless was defined as living on the street, living in unsuitable accommodation such as an abandoned home/car/shed, living in emergency shelter or couch-surfing.

were interviewed a second time, with an average of four months between first and second interview. Fifteen youth were located for a third interview, with an average time of ten months after the first interview. Youth were followed through contact information obtained at the first interview, through Facebook connections and with the help of agency staff at youth drop-in centres and shelters. The longitudinal nature of the study (following youth over time) provided important information on the difficulty of making the transition from homelessness to stable housing.

Project Setting

The Niagara Region extends from Lake Ontario in the north to Lake Erie in the south and is bounded on the east by the Niagara River and on the west by a boundary line that travels primarily through rural farmland. The region is divided geographically into 12 municipalities. Municipal boundaries were established when regional government was instituted and they are administrative boundaries that incorporate geographic areas larger than the built up urban area which gives the municipality its name³. There is one city with a population of 132,000 (St. Catharines), one of 80,000 (Niagara Falls) and one of 50,000 (Welland). The other municipalities all have populations of less than 30,000. The western area is primarily rural and the south is primarily small towns. The Niagara Region presents a combination of urban areas, some small towns and areas that are primarily rural farmland.

There are two shelters, one in Niagara Falls and one in St. Catharines, which serve homeless youth aged 16 to 24. There is a youth drop-in centre in Grimsby in West Niagara that is open in the late afternoon and early evening. There are adult shelters in St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, and Welland that house homeless youth, though there are no youth-specific services available in those shelters. There are also outreach services provided throughout the region to help youth connect to local services, particularly in areas in the south and west, where there are neither youth nor adult shelters.

Data Collection and Analysis

Youth were asked questions⁴ about demographics (age, gender, etc.), education, employment, income, parents' employment and income, social support,

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3. The 2006 census definition of an urban area refers to an area with a population of at least 1000 and no fewer than 400 persons per square kilometre. Although all of the municipalities in Niagara have a population above 1000, most have a density of less than 400 persons per square kilometre.
 4. Survey questions were based on instruments used in other homelessness studies (Aubry et al., 2007; Gardiner & Cairns, 2002; Sergeet al., 2002; Springer et al., 2006).

childhood stressors, current and past housing situations, services, and future dreams⁵. Follow-up questionnaires included a brief history of events since the last interview, current housing situation, school attendance, employment, income, social support, and connection to services. Ethical approval for the questionnaires, recruitment and interview processes, and consent forms was obtained from York University. Research procedures were developed using the Guidelines for Conducting Research with People who are Homeless (2008). Participants received an honorarium (payment) for each interview.

Quantitative (numerical) data from the questionnaires was entered into an SPSS data base for analysis and qualitative (narrative) data were coded by common themes. In addition, a research assistant worked with transcripts from the youth interviews to put together a narrative history for each youth that tracked their childhood experiences, periods of homelessness and movement during the study. The narrative was helpful since the history of each youth tended to be scattered throughout the responses to interview questions in unconnected ways.

Demographic Profile

The average age of youth when interviewed was 18. Seventeen of the youth were female and 23 were male. The majority of the youth, 35 out of 40 or 88%, were born in Canada. Of the five youth born elsewhere, two had lived in Canada since they were very young and three had lived in Canada for several years. Thirty-five youth described their race/ethnicity as Caucasian, one as African Canadian, one as Jamaican and three as Aboriginal. In terms of financial status, the largest group of youth (42%) reported their childhood financial situation as average, 21% as above average or wealthy and 37% as below average or poor.

Findings⁶

It will be clear from the findings that most youth in this study experienced lives filled with family conflict, parental substance abuse, unstable housing situations and mobility (frequent moves including cycling between homelessness, youth shelters, couch surfing and rental housing). The focus of the findings section will be to examine these familiar characteristics in the context of the complexity of the lives of individual youth. In compiling a narrative history for each youth in the study it became clear that these stresses were there, sometimes for years, before

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5. Survey instruments included an initial youth questionnaire and a follow-up youth questionnaire.
 6. Many important findings from this study cannot be discussed in this article due to space limitations. The community report summarizing the study, Sofas, Shelters and Strangers, is available online at the homelesshub.ca.

youth became homeless and for most, these same stresses continued after they found housing. The following discussion will focus on the mobility or movement of youth before and during the study, the snowball impact of multiple childhood stresses and the inadequacy of emergency responses to address these issues.

Mobility Before, During and After Homelessness

The following discussion will include a summary of several measures of mobility among the youth in the study including lifetime mobility, mobility during the study and rural youth mobility. Information on mobility was drawn from questions about current housing situations in both the first and follow-up interviews, questions about past housing situations, previous experiences of homelessness, most recent permanent address, as well as a question about who youth lived with while growing up.

Mobility During the Niagara Study

Information on the mobility of youth during the study was drawn from follow-up interviews, which asked about the current housing situation, the housing situation immediately prior to the current one and a general question about what had happened since the last interview. Mobility patterns during the study are available for the 15 youth who were located for a third interview. In addition, there is information about the housing situation of six other youth who were not located for a third interview, either from the youth themselves when trying to set up an interview or from shelter staff who knew of their housing circumstances. The housing situation of these 21 youth over the course of the study is outlined below.

Only three youth were in the same housing situation for all three interviews. An additional two youth were housed at the time of the second interview and remained housed in the same situation at time three. Eight youth were housed at time three though they were not housed at time two or were in a different housing situation. Eight youth were in temporary housing situations at time three, which included primarily couch surfing, with one youth in a shelter, one with grandparents and another in custody. Some youth moved from homelessness to rental situations during the course of the study, other youth moved from rental situations back into homelessness and a few managed to do both.

Table 1

Youth housing situation over the course of the study			
Youth ID	Time One	Time Two	Time Three
1	Renting	In custody	In custody again after renting for a bit
3	Shelter	Transitional housing	Same transitional housing
4	Shelter	Different shelter	Same shelter as time two
6	Abandoned house	Renting	Different rental
7	Shelter	Shelter	Renting
8	Renting	Same rental	Same rental
9	Couch surfing	Renting	Different rental
10	Couch surfing	With mother	Couch surfing
11	Couch surfing	Motel	Couch surfing
15	Renting	Couch surfing	Renting
17	Renting	Same rental	Same rental
18	Couch surfing	Couch surfing	Renting
24	Shelter	Renting	Rooming house after some time in custody
27	Shelter	Rooming house	Renting in another city
28	Renting	Same rental	Same rental
29	Renting	Boarding with family	Grandparents
30	Shelter	Renting a room	Couch surfing
31	Shelter	Transitional housing	Transitional housing
32	With father	Couch surfing	Renting
35	Renting	Same rental	Couch surfing
37	Motel	Renting	Couch surfing

Another measure of youth mobility over the course of the study was to count the number of times youth moved between the first and follow up interviews (see Table 2). These are conservative estimates since some youth were not able to recall each instance in a series of couch surfing arrangements. Youth moved an average of three times during the study, with three youth having no moves on one end of the continuum and seven youth moving more than seven times. (In the findings and discussion section of this chapter a critique will be made of the tendency of reports on homeless youth to present findings in a generalized fashion, obscuring the complexity of individual lives and the cumulative impact of multiple stresses. Averages are being used here to illuminate the individual mobility of the youth in this study as reported in Table 1 and the specific challenges faced by youth in rural areas.).

Table 2

Average number of moves during the study	
Regional Area	Average # of Moves
West Niagara	5.25
St. Catharines	3.14
Niagara Falls/Welland	2.16
Port Colborne/Fort Erie	3.33

Youth Mobility in Rural Areas

Significantly greater mobility among West Niagara youth, compared to youth in other areas of the Region, can be seen in the above table. This area of Niagara is the most rural of the targeted districts. There is no youth shelter here so youth must make their way to St. Catharines or Niagara Falls. As a result, youth in West Niagara have much higher rates of couch surfing compared to other geographic areas. Since couch-surfing is a very temporary housing solution it makes sense that West Niagara youth would have moved more than youth in other areas. As one West Niagara youth stated, “I don’t feel comfortable mooching off of friends. I stay two or three days, after that you are overstaying your welcome.”

Although transportation to services is a barrier in Niagara, since inter-city transportation is limited, transportation was not the primary reason youth opted for couch surfing. They described a fear of going to a large, unfamiliar city as expressed in the quote below from a West Niagara youth:

They tried to get me to go to the [the youth shelter] but I didn’t want to go to St. Catharines, I don’t know it there. Plus my friend went to St. Catharines and got shot there. It scares me when I’m in the city because cities are full of messed up people... Services are available in the city but not here. I’m scared to go to the city, but I would like those things.

A couple of West Niagara youth had been to the youth shelter in St. Catharines and came back:

We stayed there for two nights, three nights, and then came back here. It was too crazy there, and it was really weird being there... It felt really uncomfortable. You know you would go outside and it was totally different, you walked outside and there were cars, and people-city, right-way different than here. Felt more peaceful here.

Several youth from the Fort Erie/Port Colborne area of the region also expressed a desire to remain in their own community rather than leave friends and family to obtain services in an urban area. The following statement was made about services that are needed:

...and a local shelter, to not have to go to Welland if you need a place to stay, and leave your friends and everything. That's why if I hear someone is homeless I would always offer them my couch, a place to stay until they get something.

Lifetime Housing Mobility/Disruption

There was significant mobility among the youth who moved frequently while they were still quite young, primarily due to family disruption. Of the homeless youth in Niagara, only 6 of the 40 youth (or 15%) had been in the same living situation for their entire youth prior to becoming homeless. The majority of youth (85%) had experienced either a change in family make-up through divorce, had been sent back and forth between parents, had lived with other family members, and/or spent time in the care of Children's Aid Society. Three of the six youth who had remained in the same living situation throughout their lives had witnessed or experienced abuse in their parental home. This family instability was often, though not always, combined with housing instability. And housing instability did not necessarily result in frequent homelessness, as demonstrated in a youth's description of the combined family disruption/housing instability that occurred before homelessness:

When I was a kid we moved around a lot – my Mom... moved us around because she was trying to hide us from our Dad; she did everything she could to keep us away from him because he used to beat her every day and us. Court stated he wasn't allowed near us but he didn't really follow the law. He'd break into our house. One time he crawled in through our bathroom window – I was 7 years old – told us to pack our stuff, put us in a cab and took us back to Hamilton. We were in Vancouver. I bawled my eyes out. I didn't want to leave my mom – I love her to death. It took 3 or 4 years before we got back to mom.

Categories were developed for the youth in Niagara according to the frequency of homelessness prior to the study. The “housing history” categories developed were first/second time homeless, unstable housing, and chronic or prolonged homelessness. At the time of the first interview, 11 of the 40 youth were homeless for the first or second time, and 22 or 55% of the youth had experienced chronic homelessness. This left a group of 7 youth whose lives were character-

ized by a combination of unstable housing and/or unstable family life. These youth had experienced lengthy episodes of unstable housing, which included three or more moves in location and/or three or more changes in guardianship. The following statement describes the disruptive life one youth experienced:

My mom didn't like me, she sent me to live with my auntie. My auntie didn't like me, sent me back to my dad, and they kicked me out a week after so it's kinda like I didn't really care because I was getting sent everywhere you know.

Considerable family disruption and mobility was found among most of the youth in Niagara before, during and after the study. Mobility was examined by compiling narrative histories on the youth in this study. While mobility was not originally included in the list of childhood stressors, evidence suggests that moving frequently does function as a stressor in the lives of children and adolescents. Studies that look at the impact of frequent moves on children and youth have found adolescent adjustment problems (Adam & Chase-Lansdale, 2002), increased behavioural problems during childhood and increased risk-taking behaviour among adolescents (Jelleyman, 2008), as well as negative impacts on academic performance (Schafft, 2006; Cohen & Wardrip, 2011) and negative impacts on both psychological and physical health (Cohen & Wardrip, 2011).

Childhood Stressors

Reports on youth homelessness in Canada consistently identify early childhood stressors, including a hostile family environment and conflict and abuse as contributing factors to youth homelessness. Some reports note the long lasting impact of childhood stress (Evenson & Barr, 2009; Koeller, 2008; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006) and several suggest that the greater the number of childhood stressors, the more likely it is that youth will become homeless (McLean, 2005; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006).

In this study an index of childhood stressors was used to measure the number of traumatic events that youth were exposed to during childhood and adolescence.⁷ Eleven childhood stressors were included in the questionnaire, as shown in Table 3.

7. The index for this study was adopted from a similar index used in studies on homelessness in Ottawa and Windsor. The index originated in the Statistics Canada National Population Health Survey.

Table 3

Childhood Stressors		
Childhood Stressor	Number of Youth	Percentage of Youth
Frequent parental arguments	26	65%
Experienced/witnessed abuse	26	65%
Parental separation and/or divorce	24	60%
Youth substance abuse	24	60%
Parental substance abuse	23	58%
Long term parental unemployment	19	48%
Youth sent away from home	18	45%
Spent time in a foster home	14	35%
Spent time in custody	13	33%
Experience cultural conflict within family	10	25%
Spent time in a group home	6	15%

The results above indicate high levels of stress in the lives of homeless youth in this study. There were 26 out of 40, or 65% of youth who experienced and/or witnessed abuse. Half of the 40 youth were themselves abused physically or sexually. The primary form of abuse was physical, with 4 youth reporting sexual abuse in addition to physical abuse. Youth who were abused became homeless at a younger age than youth who were not abused.

Parental conflict and/or divorce, substance abuse and abuse were all experienced by over half of the youth, and for many youth these factors occurred together. Of the 26 youth who experienced and/or witnessed abuse, 77% reported frequent conflict between their parents, and 73% also had parents who abused drugs or alcohol. Given the lasting impact of childhood stress, it is significant that all but one of the youth experienced multiple stressors and the average number of stressors experienced was five.

Given the strong connection between youth homelessness and childhood trauma one might expect youth who were already chronically homeless to have experienced more childhood stressors. This was not the case for this population. Youth who were homeless for the first or second time did not experience fewer childhood stressors on average than those who faced unstable housing or chronic homelessness.

To show that multiple childhood trauma does not only affect the chronically homeless or unstably housed, three case examples were drawn from each of the housing categories: one youth who was first/second time homeless, one youth who experienced unstable housing and one youth who was already chronically homeless at the time of the study.

Vanessa (a pseudonym) was homeless for the first time when she was interviewed at age 17. She had witnessed physical abuse of her mother by her father, who also threatened her physically and this conflict with her parents led her to leave home. Prior to making her way to the shelter where she was interviewed, she stayed in an abandoned house with her boyfriend and then couch surfed with several friends. After leaving the youth shelter she and her boyfriend crashed at a one bedroom apartment with other youth he met at the youth drop-in centre, but conflict in the apartment led them to leave. After leaving she and her boyfriend lived outside in a tent and in abandoned buildings. She identified that she has tried to commit suicide. At last contact she was back with her parents, but given the ongoing conflict, was spending most of her time at her boyfriend's place. Vanessa moved at least seven times since the first interview and she had experienced four childhood stressors.

Lance experienced unstable housing while growing up. He lived with parents until he was twelve, witnessing alcohol abuse, conflict and physical abuse between his parents. They divorced when he was 12 and he lived with his mother and brothers. He eventually moved to a northern city with one of his brothers. He was first homeless at 16 when his brother kicked him out after an argument. He spent a week on the street, bumming change for a bus ticket back to Niagara before receiving assistance from the Red Cross' "Operation Send a Child Home". Back in Niagara he lived with his mom, was employed at various short term jobs and was also in custody on 12 different occasions. (He tried to commit suicide during this time.) After getting out of jail the last time he was allowed to return to his mother's on the condition that he was working and helping with the bills. After losing his job he lived with friends and spent time in shelters. At last contact he had been receiving Ontario Works and living in the same place with his girlfriend for about four months. He had experienced eight childhood stressors while growing up and moved two times during the course of the study.

Amber was already chronically homeless when she was first interviewed. Prior to becoming homeless she was living with her mom and they moved often, ("We moved to like every city and it was always a few months after another, live six months, move"). She first became homeless at age 14 when her mother kicked her out of the house and she went to live with friends. Then she was sent to live with her dad. Conflict with her father led to her being kicked out by him several times. Then she stayed with her boyfriend at his mother's place (where she was also kicked out) and then at his father's place. Subsequent to the first interview, she bounced from place to place because she could not afford rent on her social assistance income. At the third interview, she had her own place and was working on completing high school. She had both witnessed and experienced abuse had experienced seven childhood stressors and had moved at least three times during the study.

As was noted at the beginning of this article, when focusing on causes of youth homelessness, childhood stressors tend to be viewed as factors that trigger homelessness. But the evidence from this study shows that youth with similar experiences of childhood stress may not end up in the same housing circumstances. Each of the youth above experienced multiple childhood stressors, but at the time of the first interview each had a different housing outcome. Youth in trouble become visible when they are homeless. *But it is important not to conclude from this that their housing difficulties are a reliable warning system for that trouble.* Youth who have experienced significant trauma do not necessarily become visibly homeless. The importance of treatment, as well as housing, will be discussed in the recommendations.

Risky Housing Situations Persist

It is clear from follow up interviews with Niagara youth that many are not stably housed after leaving the shelter system for rental accommodation. A common source of risky housing comes from needing to share housing with other youth in order to afford rent. Sharing housing with youth they have met in the shelter or on the street is problematic since this option involves overcrowding, conflict and bunking with youth they may not trust or whose substance abuse problems complicate their own lives. One youth lost housing and possessions:

I had my own place..., even had my own car, nothing much, but it was mine. My roommates had cocaine problems. They sold my stuff, one day I came home and I was locked out.

The following example from the study provides an illustration of risky housing. In comparing youth narratives, five youth were discovered to be sharing a one bedroom apartment. Their story was pieced together because four of the five youth were connected to the study. The story begins with Julie, a crown ward since she was 12, having been evicted from a foster home. Drop-in centre staff helped her find a one bedroom apartment. After that, four other young people (two couples) whom she met at the drop-in centre moved in with her. There was ongoing conflict over the rules and paying rent. Eventually the landlord evicted her for having too many people staying in her apartment.

Vanessa (profiled in the case example above) and Justin's (her boyfriend, not part of the case example above) story illustrates the risky situations youth often face when trying to find housing. Tired of the conflict in the small apartment, Vanessa and Justin left one night, climbed the local marina fence, broke into a boat, slept there and snuck out the next morning. Justin was then arrested for trying to sneak into an abandoned house and spent time in custody. After getting out, he and Vanessa

rented a room in a house for \$750 a month. The owners used drugs and offered the youth drugs. Vanessa began using ecstasy which was available down the street. The landlords eventually told them they needed to move out. They both headed to conflict-filled homes. Justin spent time with an aunt and then returned. He slept in a tent for awhile with Vanessa. Then he found a place with a friend of his brother's, and had been there for four months at the last interview. Vanessa shared Justin's adventures and after the camping experience went back home, reluctantly, to a conflict-filled situation. She copes by spending lots of time at Justin's place. This case example and the mobility of youth during the study demonstrate that youth face significant barriers in their attempts to secure stable housing, especially without sufficient income to make good choices about living arrangements.

Discussion and Conclusion

When youth who are living troubled and traumatic lives become homeless, their troubled lives become visible. Society is rightly concerned that they have no safe place to live and that their homelessness puts them at risk for poor health, sexually transmitted diseases, violence, and brushes with the law. Homelessness becomes the risk around which efforts are organized, both to understand what causes homelessness and to provide emergency shelter. The literature review demonstrated a growing awareness of the complexity of the causes and impacts of youth homelessness and recognition that homelessness is a process rather than an event. Having said this, there is still a tendency when reporting on youth homelessness to focus on the causes of homelessness.

There are two concerns that emerge in this focus on causes. The first concern is that in order to draw conclusions about homeless youth as a whole, complex individual lives are lumped together and generalized. Bessant (2001) argues that there are problems in moving from group averages to individual cases. One cannot assume that an average risk for a population translates into a specific risk for an individual youth. In addition, in separating out the multiple stresses that occur in youth's lives into disconnected lists of separate factors that "cause" youth homelessness, the combined impact of multiple childhood stresses on individual lives is lost.

A second issue following from the first is that in focusing on childhood trauma as a cause of homelessness, serious events in young lives, such as abuse, may shift from being seen as a serious trauma which requires a response, to being a "cause of homelessness". For homeless youth, abuse, violence, and poverty become things that happened to them that caused their homelessness rather than experiences that contribute to ongoing stress and depression. Rather than asking why youth become homeless, a more fruitful question might be: What was happening in the lives of youth in the process of becoming homeless that

we need to respond to at the same time as addressing their homelessness?

There are two significant issues in the lives of homeless youth in Niagara that need addressing. The first concern is the damaging mobility before homelessness and considerable mobility after homelessness. A second issue is that the most serious trauma in many of these young lives had happened before homelessness and that *homelessness, damaging though it is, was not necessarily the most important dislocation in their lives.*

With regard to the first issue, it is clear that emergency shelter does not necessarily set youth on a path to stable housing. Staller (2004) argues that social policy based on “intuitive” or “obvious” solutions to social problems can aggravate the problem when applied to “complex, dynamic, nonlinear social systems” (380). For example, the Runaway Youth Act passed in the US in 1974, was based on an expectation that youth would move in a relatively straight line from the street to a shelter to home. This expectation map not only fails to capture the complexity of the situation, but also supports an inadequate policy response. Very few youth in Niagara moved from youth shelters to stable housing situations during the time of the study. Such thinking does not account for the complications of past trauma, current strained relationships, and lack of resources on the path to stable housing. Emergency shelter, as important as it is, is not a sufficient resource for youth facing homelessness.

With regard to the second issue, becoming homeless is a process that is complex, at times chaotic, and nested in multiple childhood stressors. Young people tend to experience lives filled with family conflict, unstable housing, abuse, and parental substance abuse and at some point in their tumultuous journey they may (or may not) become homeless; and it is their homelessness that triggers our response. Their homelessness becomes the warning system, the canary in the coal mine. The findings from this study of damaging mobility before homelessness and continuing instability after homelessness suggest that homelessness is not necessarily a very good warning system. Staller (2004), for example, in exploring the possible patterns for runaway youth as they cycle between home, friends, street, and shelter notes that some patterns describe housing instability but not necessarily visible homelessness. In other words, youth whose needs are not a publicly visible problem (like living on the street) may not have their needs addressed.

The recommendations that follow are designed to address both the need for treatment for multiple stresses in the lives of homeless youth and the need for fuller resources to make the transition from homeless to stable housing.

Recommendations

The following section outlines recommendations for program responses that address the concerns outlined above.

1. Move beyond a focus on emergency shelter to a focus on prevention of youth homelessness. There is growing recognition that prevention is as important as, or even more important than, emergency shelter in the response to homelessness. Overall, prevention strategies in other countries include early intervention to prevent someone from losing their housing in the first place, rapid re-housing for those who become homeless, and services to maintain housing once it has been established (Culhane et al., 2011; Pawson et al., 2006; Quilgars et al., 2011). Prevention is central to the response to youth homelessness in the United Kingdom and Australia (Winland et al., 2011). Key prevention services for youth include respite services (supported accommodation that allows for a cooling off period for the family), supported/transitional housing and family reconnection/mediation programs (Quilgars et al., 2011).

2. Include family mediation programs in services for homeless youth. How can care be introduced into the lives of homeless youth? Family mediation programs, especially accompanied by a case management approach, can begin to address family issues and provide youth with supportive adult relationships (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2011; Pawson et al., 2006; Quilgars et al., 2011; Winland et al., 2011). A unique family mediation program operating in Canada is Eva's Phoenix Family Reconnect Program, which is available to youth in the shelter system and youth in the community who are at risk of homelessness and who want to improve relationships with their families. A case management approach is used at Family Reconnect, with counselling and mental health supports at the centre. This approach helps youth connect to appropriate and effective services. Youth also receive important diagnoses that can help identify mental health issues and/or learning difficulties (Winland et al., 2011).

The outcomes of this program for youth include more active involvement with their family and improved relationships with family members. For many youth whose relationship with their parents is not reconcilable, there are other supportive family members, such as siblings, aunts/uncles, or grandparents, who can be involved. Addressing family issues is important for healing even when reconciliation is not possible: “Even where relations have not been completely reconciled, there is often an increased understanding of the nature of family conflict that helps young people and families move forward with their lives” (Winland et al., 2011:10).

3. Provide comprehensive individual case support in services for homeless youth. At the core of family mediation is case management (Calgary Homelessness Foundation, 2011; Winland et al., 2011), an approach that provides comprehensive transitional supports for individual youth. This support goes beyond addressing youths' relationship with their families to include general counselling, help with mental health issues, and referrals to other agency supports. The Calgary Homeless Foundation's Plan to End Youth Homelessness (2011) includes a case management approach called 'High Fidelity Wrap-around Supports'. Extensive supports are provided to youth that follow them regardless of their housing situation. These supports include family counselling, working with schools, social support and family reconciliation. Youth and family identify "people who they consider to be helpers in their lives" (31) who are trained in wraparound principles. Successful outcomes for homeless youth include increased social support, high school completion, and good interpersonal skills. A wraparound case management approach could be used to identify youth who have experienced abuse and other childhood stresses and include a plan for treatment as part of transitional support.

4. Include opportunities for treatment of trauma in services provided for homeless youth in Canada. McLean argues that youth who experience homelessness are "survivors of various forms of abuse and/or trauma; emotional, physical, sexual and economic" and that models of service must "situate opportunities for healing at the core of service delivery" (2005:xi). Serge et al., (2002) found that one of the links between the child welfare and homelessness systems is that youth who have been in care have not been helped to deal with the circumstances that led to their removal from the home. Kłodawsky et al., (2006) make the case that homeless youth face an absence of care in their lives. Applying an ethics of care (responding to physical, spiritual, intellectual, psychic and emotional needs) to the situation of homeless youth would mean moving beyond a narrow focus on achieving youth independence and employability to a multi-faceted approach that includes care, treatment for childhood trauma, and integrates social, emotional and practical needs.

5. Provide transitional housing and follow up services for youth as they move on from the emergency shelter system. Homeless youth are still developing skills for independent living. It is unrealistic to expect youth without adult support and with insufficient income and skills to move directly from emergency shelters to stable housing. Insufficient income and a lack of adult support contributed to significant mobility for homeless youth in Niagara after they left the emergency shelter system. Case management and follow up services may be sufficient for some youth to move to independent housing, but youth who are very young or who do not have adult support may not have the

skills to live independently (Quilgars et al., 2011). Transitional housing can play an important role in assisting youth to move to permanent, stable housing.

Family mediation, case management, treatment for trauma and transitional housing should be part of an integrated systems level approach, which Winland et al., define as “bringing together a range of services and approaches that work across the street youth sector, and ideally, also engage with programs, services and institutions ‘upstream’ – that is, before young people become homeless in the first place” (2011:11). Canada’s youth homelessness sector is still largely focused on emergency responses (Gaetz, forthcoming; Winland et al., 2011). The study of youth homelessness in Niagara confirms the need for care and adult support in the lives of homeless youth. Case management, family mediation, treatment, transitional supports and an integrated systems level approach could address the childhood stress experienced by youth before homelessness and prevent the kind of instability and mobility after homelessness that the Niagara youth experienced. As one youth in the study stated:

Homelessness is only a problem if you let it be. It's only a problem if you don't do something about it - society doesn't do something. Its two parts: they have to ask for the help and there has to be somebody there to help them.

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5 Nobody “Signs Out of Care.” Exploring Institutional Links Between Child Protection Services & Homelessness

Naomi Nichols

Introduction

In Ontario, youth between 12 and 18 years of age, can apply to the courts for a review of their child protection status (R.S.O. 1990, c.C. 11 s. 65.1(4)). Between 16 and 18 years of age, young people can apply to the Courts to terminate a Society or Crown wardship order. Some youth approaching 16 years of age do, in fact, want to end their involvement with the child welfare system and become legally independent.

Young people involved with the Children’s Aid Society (CAS) in Ontario commonly talk about “signing out of care” when they turn 16. This expression makes it hard to see the complicated institutional work that is involved in ending a wardship order with child protection services, not to mention the challenges youth face after leaving care. This chapter examines child welfare policy, practice, and legislation from the standpoints of former “youth in care” who were homeless at the time of the research. Four stories of young people’s involvement with child protection services ground an investigation of Ontario’s child welfare system. Keelyn¹, Aiden, Janella, and Sylvia’s experiences show us how provincial legislation and local practices and policies shape young people’s efforts to secure housing, make money, finish school, and engage in relationships with others (e.g. their biological parents, intimate partners, children). I hope to demonstrate that no one simply “signs out” of care.

1. All of the names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

This chapter has been written to be useful to professionals and communities who want to understand why so many of the homeless youth they assist have been involved with the child protection system. Young people's stories reveal how experiences of homelessness or housing instability are influenced by their interactions with multiple institutions/institutional processes. If people are interested in creating solutions to youth homelessness, they need to understand how various institutional systems (e.g., child protection, social assistance, sheltering) currently influence young people's life outcomes. Inter-institutional or systems-level research and planning is key to solving youth homelessness, particularly if the goal is to *prevent* youth homelessness – that is to intervene before a young person ends up in a shelter or on the streets. The systems-level analysis this chapter offers is intended to support cross-sector planning and service-delivery.

Chapter Overview

The chapter begins with a review of current research that highlights a relationship between involvement with institutions (including child protection services) and youth homelessness. From here, I provide a brief overview of the child protection system in Ontario. In the Findings section, I use ethnographic data² to provide a context for the frequency with which young people involved with child protection services end up “signing out” or “aging out” of care into homelessness or unstable housing.

The young people who participated in this research project commonly used the expression “I signed out of care” to describe how one ends a relationship with the child protection system. In attempting to learn how a young person “signs out of care,” I discovered that young people and their families navigate complex institutional and bureaucratic processes that they do not fully understand. In order to help youth leaving care achieve positive outcomes (e.g., stable housing, education, employment), we need to do a better job of helping young people and their biological families understand the institutional processes they encounter. In order to do this work well, institutional leaders (e.g., executive directors and managers) and frontline service providers need to understand these processes themselves. People who work in the homelessness sector have a clear understanding of how the sheltering system works, but may have incomplete knowledge of how the sheltering system intersects with the immigration, child protection, or education systems. Similarly, people who work in education understand how educational processes work, but may not understand how these are influenced by, or intersect with, social assistance, mental health, or youth criminal justice

2. Ethnography is an observational research method used to gather information on a particular group – in this case, homeless youth with links to child protection services.

processes. This chapter will help people understand the *inter*-institutional processes that shape their own and their young clients work.

Systems-Involvement and Homelessness

A high percentage (approximately 40%) of young people who become homeless have had some involvement with child protection services, including foster care, group home placements and/or youth detention centres (Dworsky, 2010; Dworsky & Courtney, 2009; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Gaetz, 2002; Gaetz et al., 2009; Karabanow, 2004; Osterling & Hines, 2006; Lindsey & Ahmed 1999; Nichols, *in press*; Mallon, 1998; Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Evenson & Barr, 2008; Serge et al., 2002). Young people involved with the child protection system are vulnerable to school failure, involvement with the youth criminal justice system, housing instability, unemployment, early parenthood, and financial struggles, as well as poor mental and physical health (Osterling & Hines, 2006; Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006). Young people who have had significant systems involvement (e.g., mental health, youth criminal justice, child protection) often experience disruptions in their mental health care as they transition between systems (Munson et al., 2011).

Similar to the inter-institutional work that youth involved in child protection services have to do, youth who are homeless navigate multiple institutional relationships, often with difficulty and poor outcomes for the youth (Nichols, 2008; *in press*). A person's experience of homelessness is linked to their involvement in schools, mental-health facilities, courthouses and jails, and social assistance programs and/or child welfare agencies (Karabanow, 2004; O'Grady & Gaetz, 2004). More than half of Canadian young people who are homeless have been in jail, a youth detention centre, or prison (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). Seventy-five percent of young people who are homeless and over 18 years of age do not have a high school diploma (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). Psychological assessments of a sample of 60 Canadian homeless youth revealed that 48% of respondents had clinically significant mental health symptoms, according to the results of two self-report surveys (Hughes et al., 2010). Youth who are homeless and who have both mental health and substance abuse issues may also be at increased risk of continued housing instability and health insecurity, as well as being victims of violent crime (Drake et al., 1991 in Goldstein et al., 2012).

Child Protection in Ontario

Child protection policy, legislation, and programming vary province by province. There are also local differences within each province. In Ontario, child protective services are provided by 53 Children's Aid Society (CAS) agencies.

Individual agencies are provincially regulated through the *Child and Family Services Act* (CFSAct). CAS organizations are required to investigate allegations or evidence of harm, protect children under the age of 16, look after young people brought into its care under the Act, supervise children who remain in the family home, and/or ensure young people are adopted (R.S.O. 1990, c. C.11, s. 15 (3)). If someone is in the “care” of the CAS, it means that a Society or Crown wardship order or a Temporary Care agreement has been put in place by the Ontario Family Courts. The term, “child in care,” refers to a child or young person who is housed and cared for by the CAS.

Local policies and practices regarding care and custody are established by Children’s Aid Societies (R.S.O. 1990, c. C.11, s.15 (2)), which “promote the best interests, protection and well-being of children” on behalf of the Ministry of Child and Family Services (R.S.O. 1990, c. C.11, s.1 (1)). The practices and policies of individual Societies are guided by statutes contained in the *Child and Family Services Act* (Ontario Ministry of Child and Family Services, 1990) together with the Crown by way of legislation such as the *Children’s Law Reform Act* (1990) or the *Family Law Act* (1990). Practices and policies also reflect the local contexts in which Societies operate. For example, the Child and Family Services Act requires that services provide “early assessment, planning and decision-making to achieve permanent plans for children in accordance with their best interests” (R.S.O. 1990, c. C.11, s.1 (2)). However, wait-lists for psychological and psychiatric assessments, a lack of permanent housing options, and a failure to integrate planning and delivery of various services in some areas mean that assessment, planning, and placements do not actually occur in “accordance with [youth’s] best interests.”

Care Agreements and Wardship Orders

Temporary Care Agreements are voluntary agreements between young people, their families, and the CAS. These short-term agreements (usually less than 6 months, but up to a maximum of 24 months) cannot be made past a young person’s 16th birthday and cannot last beyond a young person’s 18th birthday (R.S.O. 1990, c. C.11, s. 29 (6)).

Various orders may be established when the courts find that a young person is in need of protection³. Supervision orders allow young people to remain in the care and custody of a parent or other adult, “subject to the supervision of the Society” for between 3 and 12 months (R.S.O. 1990, c. C.11, s. 57 (1)). A supervision order would be put in place, when the courts decide that it is best for a child to remain in the family home, with ongoing supervision and support from a child

3. http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90c11_e.htm#BK54

protection officer. A Society wardship order places a young person under the care and custody of the Society for a specified period of time. A Society wardship order cannot be in place for more than 24 months (R.S.O. 1990, c. C.11, s. 57 (1)). After 24 months the order expires. At this point, young people are either returned to the “care and custody” of their parent or guardian or a status review is conducted and the young person becomes a ward of the Crown.

Under a Crown wardship order a young person is placed in the care and custody of the Society until the order is terminated by the courts through a status review (R.S.O. 1990, c. C.11, s. 65 (2)) or expires when a person marries or turns 18 (R.S.O. 1990, c. C.11, s. 71(1)). A Society *may* provide young people with extended care and custody after the expiry of a Crown wardship order (at 18 years of age), but it is not obligated to offer extended supports.

In the next section, I describe the research study that has informed this chapter. With the details of the study set up for readers, I spend the rest of the chapter explaining how child protection policy and legislation shape young people’s experiences of homelessness.

The Study: “All My Life I’ve Slipped Through the Cracks:” The Social Organization of Youth Work

This research project was conducted with a youth emergency shelter (YES) in a small Ontario city. The research (2006-2008) was an institutional ethnographic investigation (i.e. an observational research method used to gather information on a particular set of institutional relations) of public and social service organizations that are used by young people who are homeless.

As part of the larger study, I conducted interviews with 27 young people and 14 frontline service providers (two police officers, two educators, seven shelter workers, a crisis worker, a mental health nurse, and a CAS worker). The data for this chapter came from interviews with young people and service providers, a focus group discussion with six young people involved in the CAS as Crown wards, participant observation (e.g. spending time with young people as they go about their ordinary lives) and informal conversations with young people and service providers (recorded in field notes).

This chapter draws primarily on the experiential knowledge⁴ (i.e. knowledge

4. My aim was not to determine the “truthfulness” of people’s accounts or to pass any judgments about the stories they provided. I entered into the project with the aim of learning something about child protective services from young people’s interactions with them and other connected institutions and processes.

gained by youth through their experiences with CAS) of four youth: Janella, Keelyn, Sylvia, and Aiden. Janella was 15 years old, Aiden was 24 years old, and Sylvia and Keelyn were both 17 years old at the time of our interviews. Keelyn was pregnant with her second child. I also analysed a number of texts including: local policy, provincial legislation, institutional reports, and daily-use forms (e.g. intake and discharge forms, incident reports, observational notes or “dailies” from child protection services, the shelter, schools, mental health institutions and so forth). The combination of interview and text data allows for an analysis of institutions and organisations – in this case, the child welfare system – from the standpoint of the young people and service providers whose work⁵ is shaped by their interactions with it.

Findings

I began all of my interviews with youth by asking how they came to know about and stay at YES. When I asked Keelyn this question, she explained that she had been living in a group home in Middlesborough “and then like last June I got out of CAS finally. I went to court and stuff and they let me out” (interview).

Leaving “Care”

Like many young people, Keelyn’s use of a homeless shelter began with the end of her relationship with the child welfare system. It is common that a person’s first use of a youth emergency shelter happens as they leave institutional care (CAS, criminal justice, or mental health facilities). In order to understand how the child welfare system is organized in such a way that young people leaving it end up in the shelter system, one needs to understand how care is legislated or established through provincial and regional levels of government and the court system, and also how it interacts with policy in other institutional arenas (e.g. social assistance, education, probation). The institutional factors that influence youth homelessness cut across systems.

Society Wardship Orders and Temporary Care Agreements

Many of the young people I worked with over the course of this research applied to stay at YES after leaving CAS care. Many others began staying at the youth shelter while they were still involved with CAS. The first floor of the youth shelter has traditionally been paid for by CAS and occupied by young people in CAS custody.

5. Here the term, “work” refers to any activity that takes time and energy. It does not simply reference the work for which people get paid, but all of the things that people do as they go about their days and nights (e.g. applying for welfare, finding food when one’s Ontario Works funds have been spent, and so forth).

Relations between CAS, YES, young people, and their families are coordinated (in part) via wardship orders established through the family court system and voluntary agreements established between individual families, youth, and the Society.

A Society wardship Order is granted when a “child⁶” is found to be in need of protection (R.S.O., 1990, c C.11, 57(1)). When a young person is made a Society Ward, it means that the courts have decided that he or she is in need of protection for a limited period of time. Once a child is declared a ward of “the Society,” CAS is responsible for “the child’s care, custody and control” for up to 24 months (R.S.O. 1990, c.C. 11, s. 63(2))⁷. Before a Society wardship Order expires, the CAS agency that applied for the Protection Order must apply for a status review to designate the young person as a Crown ward, ensure that the child is legally adopted, or arrange for him or her to be returned to the custody of a legal guardian (Youth in Care Canada, 2009).

When I asked Aiden to tell me about the first time he used the youth shelter, he explained that it was after the expiry of a Society wardship order:

Aiden: The very first time [I used the shelter], I was kicked out of my mother’s. CAS released me from their care and I had nowhere else to go, so I stayed at the YES shelter ... [I was] 15 or 16 when they [CAS] discharged me.

N: So you weren’t yet a Crown ward?

Aiden: They couldn’t make me a Crown ward – rather, they kept me as a Society ward. In the end they couldn’t find a place to put me, so at the very end, they put me in Tom’s Motel (interview).

At the end of his term as a Society Ward, Aiden was “returned to the custody of a legal guardian,” his mother. However, conflict between him and his mother, which started before the Society wardship order, had not been resolved while he was away from home. Shortly after Aiden returned home, his mother “kicked him out” and he ended up at the youth shelter looking for a place to stay.

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6. A young person under 18 years of age is defined as a child for the purposes of CFSA, except the Part that pertains to Protection Orders. In this Part, a young person is only a child until he or she turns 16. All agreements between a child and the CAS expire when the child turns 18 years of age or gets married (whatever comes first). Extensions by 6 months are granted locally and *Extended Care and Maintenance Agreements* may be established between young people (18 years or older) and their local CAS in certain circumstances and only until a young person is 21 years of age (Ontario Ministry of Child and Family Services, 1990). These agreements require the young person to be working and/or attending an educational or training program.
 7. A Society wardship order cannot exceed 12 months (if the child is under 6 years of age) or 24 months if the child is over 6 years and under 18 years of age (R.S.O, 1990, c.C. 11 s.70(1)). The wardship order can be extended for a maximum of six months (R.S.O, 1990, c.C. 11s.70(4)).

Aiden was 16 years old when he applied to stay at the shelter; therefore, CAS was no longer required to provide him with institutional guardianship. Youth emergency shelters provide emergency shelter to people who are between 16 and 24 years of age. Between the ages of 16 and 18 years, a young person living without the support of a guardian is an “independent minor” in terms of the *Ontario Works Act* (1997). Independent minors can use the province’s shelter system, which is funded by Ontario Works.

Like most of the people who stay on the shelter’s second floor, Aiden used his time at YES to establish eligibility for Ontario Works (OW) social assistance⁸ and find a room in a rooming house. He finished high school and went on to college/university. In order to add to his OW income, he also sold drugs, which eventually led to his involvement with the youth and adult criminal justice systems both as an “offender” and as a “victim.” During this period in his life, Aiden dropped out of school and began using drugs. At 24 years of age, Aiden struggles with addiction and periods of homelessness.

Had Aiden become a Crown ward, CAS would have remained Aiden’s legal guardian until he was at least 18 years old or until someone applied to terminate the wardship order through the courts (as part of a status review). The fact that he was in school meant he would have been eligible for extended care and maintenance supports to cover the costs of his post-secondary education (as well as room and board). Rose, the CAS case-manager at the shelter, explains that CAS is reluctant to take someone on as Crown ward when they are, as Aiden was, 14 or 15 years old (field note).

Referring to a young woman who was then staying at the shelter as part of a Temporary Care agreement with CAS, Rose explained that when Janella was last released from criminal custody, her mother refused to let her return home. Since Janella was 15 years old, CAS was legally obligated to become her temporary guardian until she was 16. A Temporary Care Agreement was put in place. The agreement required consent from Janella, her mother, and the Society. Rose believes that CAS did not file an application to have Janella’s status changed to a Crown Ward because she was going to be an extraordinarily expensive and time-consuming client.

Legally, the Society has a duty to promote the “best interests, protection, and wellbeing” of any young person who is less than 16 years of age, but in

8. As we will see in Keelyn’s account, the process of establishing eligibility for Ontario Works as an independent minor is quite complex. First contact with the system is made via telephone. Later OW investigates a young person’s family and economic circumstances in order to determine whether or not he or she is eligible to apply for OW. It is at this point that a young person begins the application process.

Rose's experience young people nearing their 16th birthdays are unlikely to be designated Crown Wards. My aim is not to prove (or disprove) Rose's way of thinking; I want to understand how this knowledge (that CAS is reluctant to seek protection orders for adolescents) has been shaped by her involvement with CAS as the shelter's case-manager for youth in care.

A Temporary Care agreement is, obviously, temporary. It can only be extended (for a maximum of six months) with the consent of the Society, the youth, and his or her parent. The only way for Janella to remain under the care and custody of the Society beyond an extension of six months is if the Society believed that she was in need of protection and "brought the child before the courts," established a protection order, and terminated the Temporary Care agreement (R.S.O. 1990, C. 11 s. 33(3)). However, in Part II of the CFSA, a "child" in need of protection (R.S.O. 1990, C. 11 s. 37(1)) is defined differently than a "child" in the first Part of the Act. In Part I (which pertains to agreements), a young person is a "child" until he or she turns 18. In Part II (which pertains to orders), a young person is designated as a "child" until she/he turns 16. Once a young person is 16 years of age, there are no legal grounds to establish a protection order.

Janella refused to attend school and failed to show up for her CAS, medical, psychological, and legal appointments, attend probation meetings, or appear at her court dates. While she was under their care, the CAS was temporarily obligated to ensure that Janella met these institutional responsibilities *and* to cover the costs for appointments that she missed (field note). Providing Temporary Care for Janella was, as Rose suggests, expensive and time-consuming. Rose's observation that few youth become Crown Wards during adolescence is also perceptive; however, it is not because of the difficulty of caring for adolescents that few are designated as Crown Wards. The small number of young people who become Crown Wards as adolescents is actually a result of the Society's inability to secure a protection order once a young person is no longer deemed to be a "child" (i.e., under age 16) under this part of the Act.

Even young people who have been placed under the care and custody of the Society through Crown wardship orders can find their status up for review once they turn 16. The status review process can be initiated by the Society if:

- The child has exhausted all Society resources
- Is over sixteen (16) years and
- Is refusing to co-operate with the Society.
- The youth on independent living enters into a common-law relationship (equivalent to marriage). (C04.05.12 – Preparation for Independent Living of a Crown Ward, 2006:5)

Janella's approaching 16th birthday, combined with her refusal to "co-operate with the Society," make her an unlikely candidate for a status review prior to the expiry of her Temporary Care agreement. Because the agreement expired shortly after her 16th birthday and a status review was not begun before this date, she was ineligible for protection under the CFS^a.

When Janella's Temporary Care agreement expired, she established eligibility for OW, and applied to have them cover the costs of her staying at the youth shelter. Since she had been living at the shelter while under the temporary care of the CAS, she was simply moved from her single room on the first floor of the shelter to a double room on the "general residents" floor. Shortly thereafter, Janella was discharged from the shelter for failing to return before curfew.

Shelter staff are unable to discharge young people under the care of the CAS for failing to follow shelter rules. In fact, the shelter is not allowed to discharge CAS clients in any circumstances. When a wardship order or care agreement ends, young people who have completely ignored shelter rules are often discharged from the youth shelter immediately upon their "graduation" to the second floor, where for the first time, they are held accountable to house rules. Also, for the first time, then, these young people find themselves homeless. After she was discharged, Janella continued to violate her Probation Orders and incur new charges. When I last ran into her during the summer of 2008, she was heading off to a drug rehabilitation program as a condition of her most recent Probation Order.

Crown Wardship Orders

The termination of a permanent wardship order (as opposed to temporary care) can also influence later experiences of homelessness and/or involvement with the shelter system. Keelyn's first stay at the youth shelter followed the termination of her Crown wardship order. Just before she turned 16, Keelyn applied for a Status Review. She explains "once you're 16 with CAS, you can sort of go to court and sign yourself out;" but then adds that "you can't really do anything. Like I've been going [to court] since I was 16 and I didn't get out [of CAS custody] until last June [when I was 17]" (interview). This idea that you can simply "sign out of care" once you are 16 is popular among youth who are involved with CAS, particularly those who are not yet 16 years of age (CAS focus group).

9. "...where the child was under the age of sixteen years when the proceeding was commenced or when the child was apprehended, the court may hear and determine the matter and make an order under this Part as if the child were still under the age of sixteen years" (R.S.O. 1990, c. C.11, s. 47.).

It is striking that both Keelyn and Sylvia, another young woman who initiated the process of terminating wardship, use the expression “signing out” of care. Sylvia tells me that a “worker came down and one of the staff members from the group home, and my mom and my dad came because they both had to sign papers for me to get a court date to leave Children’s Aid because I was turning 16” (interview). But as Keelyn and Sylvia continue to describe the process of ending their involvement with CAS, it becomes apparent that one does not simply “sign-out” of care.

Sylvia. Sylvia assumed that signing papers and receiving a court-date meant the termination of her wardship agreement with the CAS. Neither she nor her biological family fully understood the process or its timelines. The papers she signed only started the process of having her status with CAS reviewed. The application process for a status review of Crown wardship is done through the provincial family court system, not through a local CAS agency. When an application for status review is brought before the courts, and if it is “in the child’s best interest,” the courts *may* terminate or change a Crown wardship order (R.S.O. 1990, C.11, s. 65.2(1)).

The Ontario Status Review for Crown Ward and Former Crown Wards application form assumes that in most cases “the applicant will be a children’s aid society” (Ontario Ministry of Child and Family Services, 2006: 1). It also assumes that “the respondent” is a parent, and states that “a court case has been started against [him or her] in this court” (Ontario Ministry of Child and Family Services, 2006: 1). These assumptions do not apply to the cases of Sylvia and Keelyn. As such, the application form is immediately more difficult for these two young women to understand.

Sylvia tells me that after submitting the status review application, she moved back in with her father, thinking that the wardship order was terminated. She explains that her worker, “...sent papers saying that I was out of care and everything – although I wasn’t. My dad, when he got those papers saying I was out of care, he kicked me out. He just wanted to collect that extra month’s money. So I moved into the shelter” (Sylvia, youth, interview). Sylvia’s story is full of confusing explanations like this one. I include them because I want to make it clear that neither she nor her family understood what they were doing, institutionally. Terminating a permanent wardship order is complicated work.

With further prompting, I found out that “the papers” CAS sent actually gave a date for Sylvia to appear in court. Contrary to her first explanation, they did not mean the termination of a Crown wardship order. Sylvia’s understanding of the process was that the children’s lawyer would take care of the review process and that if she did not hear anything from CAS, then this would indicate that her wardship had been terminated. She did not attend the hearings. She simply “assumed [she] was out.”

After being kicked out of her dad's house, she determined that she was homeless and applied to stay at the youth shelter. While she was staying at YES, she received a letter from CAS "saying that I had to call my worker. If not, [it stated] that she'd put a Missing Person's Report out on me" (Sylvia, youth, interview). When a "youth in care" is AWOL (absent without leave), CAS is required to file a Missing Person's Report with the local police. Once this Report has been submitted, the police become responsible for finding the "missing" individual and bringing her into custody. Even though Sylvia's worker had tracked her down at the shelter (i.e. she was not missing), the worker needed to provide written proof that she was following the appropriate, legislated (R.O.S. 1990, C.11, s.41(1)) protocol or steps for a young person who is AWOL.

In the end, Sylvia decided not to pursue the status review. She remained in CAS care until the Crown wardship Order expired when she turned 18 years old. At this stage, she was not considered by her CAS worker to be "a good candidate" for an "Extended Care and Maintenance" agreement with the CAS because she was unable to hold a job and refused to attend school (Mallory, CAS worker, interview). The Society is not obligated to provide extended care and maintenance to young people after the expiry of a Crown or Society wardship order. When her wardship order expired, Sylvia was moved onto the general residents' floor at YES, and then promptly discharged from the shelter for breaking the rules.

Keelyn. Keelyn recounts a similarly long involvement with the family court system. She explains that although she submitted the application for status review when she was 16 years old, the Crown wardship Order was not terminated until she was 17. Like Sylvia, Keelyn "never actually went to court." During the court proceedings, a children's lawyer represented her "case." After a year without seeing any progress, she says that she decided to go to court, herself: "I was all dressed up and stuff in case I had to go into the courtroom, but I didn't have to. I just sat in the hallway and my lawyer was like, 'yah, they've decided to let you out'" (Keelyn, youth, interview).

When Keelyn "tried" to apply for welfare after her wardship order was terminated, things began to get more complicated for her. Youth who leave care at 16 years of age can attempt to establish eligibility with the province's social assistance program, Ontario Works (OW). The process of establishing OW *eligibility* comes before the process of applying for benefits. Young people hoping to establish eligibility must have the appropriate documentation. To establish eligibility one needs to submit institutional identification (e.g. a provincial health card, birth certificate, and social insurance number); institutional documentation of "special circumstances" requiring a young person

to live outside the parental home¹⁰; and current immigration documentation, in the case of youth who were not born in Canada. Those who lack appropriate documentation will have difficulty establishing OW eligibility and will therefore be unable to apply for benefits (Nichols, 2008).

Because Keelyn, herself, had requested to have her Crown wardship status terminated, her eligibility for OW was questioned:

[OW] had to review [my eligibility] and stuff because they were like, ‘you were in CAS, so you had funding and housing and everything, and you left willingly, so we don’t know if we can accept you.’ So I was like, ‘well at the end of the year – because I was going to have the baby – they [CAS] were going to let me go anyway, right. They just let me go earlier because I requested it.’ Then they [OW] just overlooked it and were like ‘ok everything’s fine then.’
(Keelyn, youth, interview, original emphasis)

By initiating the review of her Crown wardship status, Keelyn unknowingly influenced her eligibility for OW. Because Keelyn had had “financial support available” through the CAS, and had requested to leave CAS care, thus giving up that support, the OW administrator was not easily “satisfied” that the circumstances of Keelyn’s application to OW were “no fault of the applicant” (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2009:2-3).

Her application was further complicated by OW’s practice of paying for housing directly in the case of OW beneficiaries who are less than 18 years of age. With her Crown wardship order terminated, Keelyn intended to come back to Middlesbrough, the city where she had previously lived in a group home: “I wanted to move back up here, and [OW] said, ‘ok then once you move to Middlesbrough and get a place and everything, *then apply.*’ But I couldn’t because in order to get a house, I needed to be on welfare to get money for a house” (Keelyn, youth interview).

10. In the case of OW applicants who are less than 18 years of age, the Administrator must be “satisfied that special circumstances exist requiring the applicant to live outside the parental home” (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services 2009: 1). Special circumstances include: physical, emotional or sexual abuse (requiring third party documentation); “irreconcilable differences” and clearly demonstrated “withdrawal of parental support”; parent’s inability to provide “adequate care and support”; or no “familial home” or “financial support available” through “no fault of the applicant” (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2009, pp. 2-3). Special circumstances must be demonstrated institutionally by agencies like CAS, or confirmed by parents, through an OW initiated assessment of “family circumstances” or through third party verification (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2009: 4). In other words, the OW administrator must be able to access evidence of the special circumstances warranting a young person’s OW eligibility.

Until a young person has completed and filed an “intent to rent” form, signed by a landlord for a specific place of accommodation, OW will not proceed with his or her application. Independent minors do not receive OW funding directly. All funds are processed through a “responsible adult or agency” (such as a Salvation Army volunteer) (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2001b:13), and rent is paid directly to a landlord in order to ensure a paper trail.

These practices are governed by the *Ontario Works Act*, which specifies conditions for payments to third parties (S.O. 1997,c.C. 25, 17(1), 18(1)). Keelyn’s inability to get an “intent to rent form” from a potential landlord meant that OW would not give her social assistance funding, despite considering her eligible to apply for benefits. She did not have to “get a place and then apply”, as she indicates above. She simply needed to initiate the paperwork, in order to allow OW to pay some of her benefits directly to a landlord.

In the end, she returned to Middlebrough without money or a place to live. After she was “admitted” to the youth emergency shelter, she applied to have OW cover the cost of her stay there. She was well into her first pregnancy when she met and began a romantic relationship with Dean, a 23 year old man who was also staying at the shelter. She moved out of the shelter with him, and he applied to have OW include her and her baby in his social assistance package. Significantly, at the time of our interview, Keelyn had yet to successfully complete the OW application process on her own. She told me that she “didn’t really even apply for welfare until [she] met Dean and [she] got put on his cheque” (Keelyn, youth, interview). Statements like “I got put on his cheque” work much like the phrase “I signed out of care.” They obscure complex institutional processes, which shape young people’s efforts to be housed, make money, take care of their children, and so forth.

Keelyn’s comment that she was put on Dean’s cheque also signals a transformation of their relationship, institutionally, so that Dean could claim her and Ashton as his “dependents” and the three of them become a “benefit unit.” An OW audit requirement is that financial assistance not be “paid directly to applicants or participants under the age of 18” (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2009: 1). Had Keelyn applied for OW benefits on her own, she would have needed to “meet the eligibility criteria for an applicant under the age of 18.” But because she applied with Dean who is older than 18 years of age, “A trustee [was] not required in this situation.” (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2009:10). While Dean was not Keelyn’s trustee, his involvement in her life meant that they received her OW benefits directly.

Dean would have seen his social assistance increase significantly by entering into a spousal arrangement with Keelyn (and a care-giving relationship with

her son, Ashton). Keelyn, on the other hand, still did not understand how the social assistance system worked. Over the course of my research, it was not uncommon for young women to tell me that their boyfriends (who were older than 18 years of age) collected OW support for the two of them (field note).

Keelyn's being a parent, when combined with her age, further defined the conditions through which she was eligible for OW. To be eligible for OW she was required to take part in the province's Learning, Earning, and Parenting Program (LEAP): "Participation in LEAP is mandatory for parents aged 16-17 who have not completed high school and who are Ontario Works participants or are part of a benefit unit receiving financial assistance under Ontario Works" (Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2009:9). Learning, Earning, and Parenting programs are designed to help young parents (between 16 and 25 years of age) access supports for education, employment, and parenting.

As part of this program, Keelyn had to attend a school for young mothers, located in a Middlesbrough church basement. When I asked if Ashton was in childcare while she attended classes, she explained that "What happens is that you kind of just have him crawling around doing his own thing with the other babies. He's in a swing or you're holding him" (Keelyn, youth, interview). Keelyn had to care for her son while trying to do her schoolwork; it is not surprising that she was not much closer to completing her diploma at the time of this interview than she was before Ashton was born.

In Keelyn's story, we see how child protection services, homelessness services, education, and welfare intersect. While I did not include it in this chapter, her story also outlines how her Crown Ward status shaped her involvement with the youth criminal justice system. Because her probation agreement included an order to abide by the rules of her group home, every time she was late for curfew or disobeyed the house rules, the police could cite her for a probation violation.

Conclusion

Sylvia, Aiden, and Janella's experiences in and directly after care were shaped by the conditions of their involvement with the CAS. Using their experiences, along with Keelyn's, allowed me to construct a fuller picture of the ways in which connections to various systems affect young people's experiences leaving care. Young people's previous interactions with the child welfare system impact their experiences leaving care and their efforts to live independently.

I deliberately organized this chapter to tell young people's stories as they told them, rather than attempting to use these stories to build a linear account.

Each interview was framed by a single question – how did you first connect with the youth shelter? The lack of clear direction in their stories reflects the barriers in their efforts to find and sustain housing. Each account offers another glimpse of the complicated institutional processes that shape these efforts.

Many practitioners and institutional leaders (e.g. managers, directors, principals) understand their own area of work, but only partly understand how their professional work with youth shapes and is shaped by young people's work in other institutional settings. An inability to see how various institutional settings work with youth can have negative consequences (e.g., homelessness, school drop-out) for young people required to interact with multiple institutions/institutional systems.

A solutions-oriented approach to youth homelessness requires that we understand how the organization of institutional care results in youth homelessness. Focusing our planning and prevention work on individual young people is less effective than focusing on our institutional responses to homelessness and the complex circumstances that lead to it. As this chapter indicates, preventing youth homelessness requires a strategic, inter-systemic approach that addresses the challenges young people face when involved in multiple systems.

Indeed, some provincial governments across Canada are pursuing integrated planning and service-delivery models. In Alberta, for example, the coordination of planning and program delivery explicitly aims to end homelessness. The province's 10-year Plan to End Homelessness recognizes that particularly for youth, the navigation of multiple uncoordinated services is difficult work. The Plan advocates for a "client-centred" model, which is achieved by streamlining intake processes and integrating case-management across a system of care. In this model, service providers work as "systems navigators," helping youth access the services, programs, and supports they need. Before the creation and adoption of the 10-year Plan, the province initiated the Alberta Children and Youth (ACYI) initiative to support collaboration across government ministries. The initiative aims to support a coordinated government-wide effort to address issues of health and wellbeing among the province's children, youth, and families.

In other provinces (e.g. New Brunswick and British Columbia), there is a similar focus on increasing the coordination of services for youth, particularly those youth who are understood to be "at risk." The province of New Brunswick has committed to support an integrated service delivery model for at-risk youth with complex needs. A 2009 report, *Reducing the Risk, addressing the need: Being responsive to at-risk and highly complex children and youth*¹¹ lays out

11. <http://www.gnb.ca/cnb/promos/risk/ReducingRisk-e.pdf>

a plan to create an integrated, youth-centred approach to program and service delivery. This plan involves the use of inter-professional Child Development Teams, composed of at least four different professionals in the areas of mental health, education, social work, and child and youth work. British Columbia has developed similar cross-ministerial guidelines to support educational planning and support for the province's youth in care. These guidelines have been developed to support information sharing and collaborative planning.

Obviously, the creation of provincial guidelines and plans does not translate directly into coordinated service delivery at a municipal or regional level, but it is striking that Ontario does not currently have a plan to address the lack of coordination between systems affecting homeless youth. Further, Ontario policies regarding the coordination of services for youth only address the coordination of mental health services. In order to prevent the flow of youth from one institutional system to another (e.g. from the child protection system to the youth homelessness sector), Ontario needs to adopt cross-ministerial guidelines for supporting positive outcomes among the province's youth in care.

As a starting place, I suggest a coordination of policy and service delivery across the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Child and Family Services, and the Ministry of Community and Social Services. A preventive inter-systemic approach to improving the "after-care" outcomes for youth who have been involved with the child protection system would position the Ministry of Education at the centre of this model. Research has demonstrated a causal relationship between policy interventions (e.g. raising the mandatory age of compulsory education) that increase educational attainment among people with historically low levels of schooling and greater life earning (Riddell, 2006). Participation in post-secondary education is one of the most effective predictors of employability, productivity and earning, and is also associated with longer life expectancy, better health, and reduced criminal involvement (Riddell, 2006). Improving the educational experiences of youth "in care" and adolescent wards of the Crown may therefore be the key to breaking the link between child welfare involvement and homelessness.

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HOUSING

6 Service Preferences of Homeless Youth with Mental Illness: Housing First, Treatment First, or Both Together

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Introduction

Homelessness in Canada has been on the rise since the 1980s, growing to the point of being declared a “national disaster” in 2006 (United Nations, 2006). Municipalities across Canada struggle with how to best address the related issues of homelessness, mental health and addiction – particularly among youth. Youth make up anywhere from 7.6 to 44 percent of the homeless population in North America (Community and Neighbourhood Services Policy and Planning, 2006; Edmonton Homelessness Count Committee, 2002; Casavant, 1999; Cauce et al., 2000; Ringwalt et al., 1998). Although the needs of homeless youth are different from those of other homeless groups (Haldenby et.al., 2007; Reid et al., 2005), few Canadian studies have addressed housing-first approaches (i.e. providing housing before requiring that someone deal with their mental health or addictions issues) for youth in particular, leaving decision makers without much information on promising solutions.

Youth Matters in London: Mental Health, Addiction and Homelessness – Treatment and Service Preference

Project Description

The main objective of the *Youth Matters in London* project is to investigate and better understand youth participants' *choices* regarding treatment and service options over a three-year period (as of the writing of this chapter, the study is still on-going). The study is following 187 homeless youth who are also living with mental illness and/or an addiction. Participating youth are being followed over three years in order to better understand their housing and mental health treatment preferences. The study provides participants with a choice between three treatment and service options: 1) *housing first*; 2) *mental health and addiction treatment first*; or, 3) *both housing and mental health and addiction treatment together*, and then tracks the outcomes and results for the youth. As such, the study team is interested in understanding why youth participants might choose one of the above-mentioned options rather than another. Participants are interviewed individually every 6 months over the course of 3 years, for a total of four interviews. By focusing on the choices and experiences of youth (and the potential changes in their choices over the 3 year time frame), the ultimate goal of the project is to develop effective options that can help street youth stabilize their lives and get off the streets.

This project is firmly grounded in the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR). As understood by the research team and community partners in our research context, these principles include the following: 1) the recognition of invested members of the community as key decision makers so as to solidify community capacity building; 2) promotion of a research environment wherein learning and empowerment are equally distributed, and therefore to the benefit of all research partners; and, 3) following suit, the dissemination of knowledge involves and is directed to the entire community wherein the research is conducted (McTaggart, 1991). To this end, the research team is comprised of university-based researchers, community stakeholders, and members of the municipal government. Representatives from the City of London, community agencies, and individuals with lived experience of mental health, addiction and homelessness meet regularly to discuss the project in all of its aspects.

Approach to Providing Housing and Services

Homeless youth experience extremely high levels of depression, stress and emotional distress (Yates et al., 1988; Smart et al., 1993; Ayerst, 1999; McCay et al., 2006). Mental illness may either be a major cause of homelessness, or a

response to the stress of life on the streets (e.g., exposure to violence and the peer-related pressures to participate in the sex/drug trade [McCay, 2006]).

Understanding the need for mental-health/addiction treatment and services among homeless and street-involved youth, the research team has been working closely with existing service providers in London (including a broad spectrum of community-based services including youth-focused, peer-supported shelters, drop-in services, mental health programs, addiction programs and treatment facilities). The focus of the research team and the service providers is on testing and evaluating three approaches that might be of benefit to homeless youth who have a mental illness (which may or may not have been previously diagnosed) and/or addiction (to narcotics, marijuana, alcohol, or tobacco, for instance).

The three approaches are:

1. Housing First

Housing first initiatives focus first and foremost on moving individuals to appropriate and available housing and providing the ongoing supports necessary to keep individuals housed. As described in the Mental Health Commission of Canada's 'At Home/Chez Soi' project, "Housing First creates a recovery oriented culture that puts the individual's choice at the centre of all its considerations with respect to the provision of housing and support services. It operates on the principle that individuals experiencing homelessness living with mental illness and/ or addiction should be offered the opportunity to live in permanent housing of varying types that is otherwise available to people without psychiatric or other disabilities" (MHCC, 2008:5).

The housing first model is very different from the general service delivery model, called the Continuum of Care approach – a model that assumes that individuals with mental illness cannot maintain independent housing before their mental illness is under control (Tsemberis et al., 2004).

Much in line with our findings, Tsemberis et al., (2004) and Padgett et al., (2006) found that the housing first approach was the most effective service option for homeless adults and adults living with mental illness and substance abuse/addiction.

The housing first model was designed by *Pathways to Housing, Inc.*, a not-for-profit, social service organization in New York City that serves persons who are homeless and have both mental health problems and addiction issues (Tsemberis & Asmussen, 1999). The model is based on the belief that hous-

ing is a basic right, and that people receiving mental health services have a right to make their own life decisions.

2. Treatment First

Treatment first initiatives seek to provide mental health supports and treatment solutions to the individual. This approach puts an emphasis on recovery, and the individual's choice is at the centre of treatment and support options. It operates on the principle that the symptoms and mental health/addiction concerns of the individual need to be addressed immediately.

In this study, service providers (primarily at the Youth Action Centre) provided treatment first options by facilitating appointments – where possible – with health professionals, such as nurses, physicians, psychiatrists or addiction counsellors through Ontario Works and the Addiction Services of Thames Valley.

3. Attention to Both Housing and Treatment Together

Providing housing and treatment together creates a recovery-oriented culture (one that is aimed at fostering hope, healing and individual empowerment, as well as using the individual's experience of care to inform improvements to services) that puts the individual's choice at the centre by offering simultaneous housing, mental health, addiction, and support services. It operates on the principle that mental health/addiction concerns and the need for housing both need to be addressed immediately. Housing first and treatment first approaches are offered at the same time.

Sample and Inclusion Criteria

The *Youth Matters in London* project works with youth aged 16–25. This range is the cut-off used by most youth services in London, Ontario, Canada. We use the same definition of *homeless* as the At Home/Chez Soi study (MHCC, 2008), which includes: *Absolute homeless* – having no fixed place to stay for more than seven nights and little likelihood of finding accommodation in the next month, or leaving an institution, prison, jail, or hospital with no fixed address; and, *precariously housed* – those whose main residence is a Single Room Occupancy (SROs, or a single room rented within a building), rooming house, or hotel/motel, or who in the past year have twice been absolutely homeless, as defined above (Tolomiczenko & Goering, 2001).

Study participants must also be experiencing a serious mental disorder, as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV, Text Revision (DSM-

IV TR), with or without also having a substance use issue; formal diagnosis at the time of entry into the project was not required. The focus is on those youth who are not formally participating in existing mental health treatment services or programs related to finding housing.

Our study includes homeless youth staying in shelters and those who use alternatives, such as living on the street or “couch surfing” (moving between friends’ and families’ places without their own address). Because homeless and street-oriented youth are particularly difficult to engage in treatment and service programs (particularly due to placing a low priority on health-related concerns), a clearer understanding of their preferences and choices will be essential for establishing appropriate services. It is recognized that some youth will choose none of the options as the study progresses. We will attempt to understand the reasons for youth’s choices as they evolve throughout the study.

Data Analysis: Initial Treatment and Service Preferences of Male and Female Study Participants

From the first round of interviews, youths’ responses to the following two questions were analyzed:

- 1. Which service model did you choose? (housing first, treatment first, both together, or none of these options)*
- 2. Tell me why you chose that particular service model (what did you like best about it? What were your concerns about other choices?)*

Participants answered these questions during the initial interview that took place at the beginning of the study (recruitment began in July of 2010). While enrolling in the study, all 187 youth study participants were told that there was no guarantee that they would receive the housing or treatment option they chose. It was explained that each participant would work closely with a service provider towards their treatment/housing preference. Participants worked individually with a service provider from one of the community partners (Youth Opportunities Unlimited) to find acceptable and affordable housing and/or referral to treatment.

Since the goal of the study is to better understand youth’s treatment/service choices, it is important that the youth be allowed to choose the treatment/service option they actually want. A controlled, randomized study would not allow youth to make this choice.

Table 1

Youth matters in London: Participants choosing each treatment and service option						
	Male	Female	Other	Transgender	TOTAL	
Housing First	50	23	2		75	40%
Treatment First	39	18			57	31%
Housing and treatment combined	18	19		1	38	20%
No Selection/Other	15	2			17	9%
TOTAL	122	62	2	1	187	100%

Participants' responses were sorted by gender, and then grouped according to treatment/service option preference (i.e., "housing first," "treatment first," "both together," and "other" preferences were analyzed separately). After careful deliberation, the team found that the naming/listing of gender identities is troublesome and obviously open to debate. The terms "male" and "female", though scientific-sounding, best capture the main gender categories of the participants involved in the study. The use of terms such as "men" and "women" is troublesome, too, in that many participants – for example, those who are 16 years old – may not identify as a "man" or a "woman," seeing themselves as "kids", "children", or simply "youth". One youth identifying as transgendered participated in the study; and two identified as "other" (such a choice reflects a potential discomfort with the other listed gender identities) Participants' statements were analyzed by two separate members of the research team, who read and re-read the responses in order to establish broad themes related to youth's preferences. Coding was open at first in order to identify, name and categorize recurring themes from the answers to the open-ended questions. A selective coding approach was then used to refine themes by either eliminating previous themes, or combining certain themes (for instance, if there was an overlap between two themes one of them was combined with the other). Through selective coding, one category was chosen to be the "core" category or key theme; other categories are then related to this core category or key theme. Youth's responses to each of the open-ended questions were taken down, word for word, by trained research assistants. Once themes specific to each treatment/service preference were established, responses were then re-read and coded according to these themes. However, some responses were very brief (sometimes limited only to a few words), and therefore difficult to code. Since there were 187 open-ended interviews conducted at the beginning of the study, a large amount of qualitative (narrative) data was gathered.

As well, many participants gave the same reasons for choosing a specific treatment/service option. For this reason we have chosen three of the most

common responses – in the form of example quotations – for each of the treatment/service options offered.

Housing First: Females

Getting Away From Bad Environments, and Providing for Children

Female responses were coded according to two major themes evident in the data. The core categories were: 1) *getting away from negative influences*, and 2) *providing a stable environment for children*. Typical responses included under the first theme described a desire to remove oneself from negative environments – often associated with alcohol or drugs. Such a desire is expressed in the following three sample quotations:

“Cuz that’s my basic need. I’m in a bad environment that I can’t be in”.

“I don’t know, it just made sense in order to get away from the alcohol and drugs. I need to get out of the shelters and away from the streets to remove myself from the temptations”.

“Because I can’t live with my parents, they show me a bad example all the time, they’re hypocritical. They tell me if I want to do what I want I have to get my own house and pay my own rent. So that’s what I want to do”.

Responses were also coded and grouped under the second theme, which centred on the practical and moral pressure for pregnant youth to get off the streets and into a place of their own. Having a place of one’s own was also understood as a condition to keeping or getting back custody of one’s children, as well as being necessary in order to provide basic shelter for a child. The following sample quotations indicate this urgency.

“Because I have a baby on the way and I’m on the streets”.

“Mainly my child, I need to take care of her first, then myself. Plus CAS [Children’s Aid Society] is involved and it will look good if I actually have a house”.

“I’ve been trying to fight for my son, between me and my mom. The only way I can get him is if I have my own place. The place where I’m at is not good – I can’t even go there”.

Housing First: Males

In Need of a Stable Living Environment to Decrease Social Stressors

Much like the female participants' responses, the males expressed an urgent need for a more stable living environment; however, a key difference was the underlying reason for wanting stability. For the male participants, the need for stability was a strategy of resilience: stable housing removed the stress of survival on the streets and made it possible to focus on other problems. The harmful effects of both addictions and mental illness, as was revealed by youth's repeated mention of their harmful and negative effects, could be avoided through stable housing. It was found that housing provided a stable base from which to set one's life in order.

Lack of housing was also described as a cause of mental health issues and substance abuse – which, ultimately, could be understood as a form of coping with the stress of life on the streets. As such, responses were coded according to the following theme: *attaining a more stable environment to decrease environmental/psycho-social stressors*. The following quotes describe housing as important to explaining and hopefully avoiding mental illness and substance misuse:

“Basically, with lack of housing I became really depressed and then I started drinking to deal. But if I had a place it probably wouldn’t have worked out that way”.

“I feel like that my drug addiction is because I don’t have a house. I feel like if you don’t have a stable environment, you’re bound to try to occupy your mind with something else”.

“Because, when you’re on the streets your mental health problems can affect you more. Because you’re more under more stress because you’re homeless”.

Treatment First: Females

The Need for Mental Health and Addiction Treatment

With regard to the female participants who chose treatment first, the main themes that arose from the data, and under which responses were coded, were: *need treatment* and *need treatment, but already have housing*. These themes indicate an urgent need to deal with issues relating to addiction and mental health before seeking stable housing, especially in those cases where participants did not have permanent or stable housing (many of the youth were concerned that housing would provide a stable place in which to use drugs). The quotations below indicate this urgency,

firstly for those who need treatment but do not have housing; secondly for those who explained that they have housing, but expressed that it may only be semi-stable or temporary – what is often referred to as “couch surfing”.

“Because I’ve had psychological problems before, but they were never diagnosed. I’ve had depression but I’ve never sought help before”.

“Because, like, the other day I woke up at 6:00 in the morning puking all over some girl, and I’m getting pill sick”.

“Well, I have a place I’m living in right now, and OW [Ontario Works] says it’s better for me to not be on my own. I’m in addiction counselling but I still want someone to talk to”.

Treatment First: Males

Housing is Not an Issue, or Housing Would Serve as an Enabling Environment

The situation was much the same for male participants in that many who chose the treatment first option already had housing. A key underlying difference for choosing treatment first for the males – as well as females – was that many saw housing as an enabling environment for continued addiction and mental health problems. The two themes under which responses were grouped show this reasoning: *already have housing* or *housing would provide an enabling environment for addiction/mental health problems*.

“I have a drug addiction. It would be more fair to get treatment first. It makes more sense to me. I’d rather be more comfortable physically before I have my own place. I’m just tired of being an addict”.

“I just think people need to help themselves. You gotta be clean before you can be housed. Because if you can’t take care of yourself, how are you supposed to take care of the things around you”?

“Because I’m a drug addict. Cause I know it’s not realistic to have housing and treatment for me, because I will turn my house into a chop-house”.

The living situations of both male and female participants were quite varied. Some participants’ had stable or semi-stable housing, while some lived with a parent.

"At the moment, I have semi-stable housing, and I find it's hard to keep housing when you're not mentally/emotionally stable".

"Housing I already have, and my mom has mental health issues and I'm not sure if I have it because I have a lot of the same symptoms".

"Because I already have housing and that's the biggest problem right now. We do need stuff for housing, we don't have much money because of our addiction."

Both Housing and Treatment: Females

For the housing and treatment together preference, the main themes for participants were: 1) *both are easier when done at the same time*, and 2) *both are top priorities*. For those participants with mental health and substance abuse problems, and who are also homeless or unstably housed, making both options a top priority was logical.

"Cause I don't have a place to live and I'm addicted to oxys; and I want to get off of them. They are both really important things".

"Because they're both top priorities. I've had a huge problem with addictions, I've been on pills since 15 and needles, a lot of health problems. And my daughter, I want to prove to her that I want to do more than what my mom did for me. And housing, oh god, I've just been bouncin' around, and my boyfriend is out in 44 days, so I need a place for me and him, and I'm banned from St. Thomas".

"I don't know, because it made it easier to do both together. I guess the people I surround myself with – those are the two most important topics. They are equal".

Both Housing and Treatment: Males

As with the female participants, the following quotations reveal that both treatment and housing were a top priority for males.

"Both, 'cause right now I'm living in the (homeless shelter) and I have drug problems. It's easier to take out two birds with one stone".

"Because if you do treatment first, then if they're homeless the treatment is pointless. If you give them housing first it sets up to give them

all that they need to do drugs. If you do both it isolates them so they can start treatment from there”.

“I want to figure out how to get an apartment. How to budget the treatment, I want to become a better person, to fix myself”.

Neither Housing nor Treatment: Other

A number of participants were grouped under the “other” category regarding treatment/service preference. This category was used for responses that either indicated a perceived inability to participate in the treatment/service options offered, or an inability to receive the treatment/service options offered through the project. Examples of some of the responses grouped under the “other” category are as follows:

“I chose employment”.

“I’m not on any drugs right now, and I’m living with my boyfriend”.

“Right now I’m court-ordered to live with my mom, so when that’s over I’ll need help with housing”.

Discussion

Responses from the initial interview questions suggest that participants’ choice of treatment/service option depends on whether they have an addiction, together with an understanding that the addiction is a problem and a desire for treatment. If this is the case, participants will most likely choose the “treatment first” option. Part of the rationale driving such a choice is that housing represents a potentially negative consequence: a stable place to use drugs.

Based on the responses, the “housing first” option seems to be the most preferred treatment/service option for both females and males. This preference indicates – at least at this point in the study – that housing is a very important concern for participants. This is a result of the view that housing (a permanent home) will add stability to one’s life – which fits with the values and social norms of Western (particularly North American) culture. And, from the perspective of homeless youth, without the stability of permanent housing one is more vulnerable to stress and anxiety due to environmental (i.e., poor weather) and psycho-social stressors (i.e., peer pressure to use drugs or engage in criminal activities), and a lack of private space. It follows that lack of housing or unstable housing can – according to project participants – ultimately trigger a mental health issue (for instance depression, as described in the example quotations above), or lead to substance

use to cope with the stress of homelessness. It must be recognized that substance abuse or mental health issues can also lead to homelessness or street involvement. Homelessness can be a cause of mental illness and addictions, or vice versa.

According to Tsemberis et al., (2004) and Padgett et al., (2006), individuals who are homeless and suffering from mental illness and addictions see housing as an immediate need; however, access to housing – under the Continuum of Care model – is only given when individuals first complete mental health and/or addictions treatment. The treatment first model is, according to Tsemberis et al., (2004), incompatible with the individual's priorities. This model excludes those individuals who are unable or unwilling to follow treatment programs.

The results of the Tsemberis et al., (2004), and Padgett et al., (2006) studies indicate that the housing first approach is effective in keeping individuals with a history of homelessness, mental illness, and addictions housed. In the studies mentioned above, approximately 80% of individuals given the housing first option remained housed. This can be contrasted with the At Home/Chez Soi project, wherein 72% of participants remained housed throughout the project (MHCC 2012). Participants' responses show that those who were given housing first had a greater sense of choice and independence than those who were given the treatment first approach.

Although the results from the studies mentioned above indicate that most participants prefer housing first, as did 40% of participants in our study, the picture is complicated by the fact that, due to mental health and addiction issues, not all participants were comfortable with the choice and independence that the housing first model provides.

Considering the diversity of responses and needs of youth in our study it is clear that a “one size fits all” approach to treatment and service provision is not enough. The social, cultural, financial and existential (i.e., the perceived meaning of one’s existence and place in the world, as well as how this meaning may influence the decisions one makes) situations of the study’s participants are very different.

For instance, at one moment a youth may find him/herself precariously housed by staying at friends’ places, while taking advantage of the benefits of the social support network provided by friends (such as having access to a group in which to discuss difficult situations; having people to share stories and similar experiences with; and, ultimately, having access to a group that can provide emotional support). However, the next moment (due to a variety of circumstances beyond their control) that same youth may find him/herself at a homeless shelter, an urban camp, or on the streets with no place to stay. He/she may not know where to seek help, or fear the stigma of seeking care in

the event of a mental health or addiction crisis. To this end, homeless or street-oriented youth with addiction and mental health problems are anything but a “single group” with similar and stable needs and preferences.

The life-context of each youth is unique, and as such, a “one size fits all” approach cannot address and treat youth’s many complex and constantly evolving issues. A variety of housing, mental health and addiction treatment and service options are needed. Although our study may be limited in that it focuses on one city, we think the relatively large number and diversity of participants allows us to at least suggest solutions for similar youth elsewhere.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to report on youth’s initial preference of service options for the *Youth Matters in London* study. We have shown how this choice is complicated by the fact that, due to mental health and addiction issues, not all participants are comfortable with the independence the housing first model provides. Some youth indicated in the open-ended answers that living in an apartment alone may be too isolating. Since many youth see their peer group as an extended family and support network, the thought of living alone may be quite painful for some youth – hence the potential discomfort with the independence the housing first model provides.

The sheer diversity of responses and needs of participants in our study shows that a “one size fits all” approach to providing treatment and services is not enough to capture the full spectrum of needs of street-involved youth. These needs include social and financial difficulties; issues related to teen pregnancy; and the demands of parenting on street youth with children.

Many housing first options assume that youth do not have children of their own, and therefore provide accommodation designed for individuals. However, families need to be taken into consideration when designing housing first options so that youth with children can be housed rapidly, well and safely.

With respect to youth experiencing ongoing addiction issues, access to treatment needs to be immediate, and may also need to occur before providing housing – since housing may actually serve as an enabling environment for continued drug use. A related issue is that since the major goal in housing first approaches is to remove individuals from the negative influences of street life such as the sex and drug trade, we need to find affordable housing in neighbourhoods located outside the downtown core of cities to truly make a difference in providing better, safer options for youth.

With respect to housing first models, it may be assumed that youth, like adults, have the experience and necessary skills for independent living and household management. Since youth typically have very limited independent living experience (or perhaps none at all), many may find it more acceptable and less threatening if housing first models included a life and living skills development component adapted from transitional housing approaches.

Coupled with this is the reality that many youth prefer to focus on one goal at a time (especially with respect to either treatment or service goals). As seen in some of the open-ended answers, when faced with competing priorities and peer pressures, many street-oriented youth seem more comfortable working on one goal at a time. In many cases, the decision making abilities of an individual can be influenced by the greater social and cultural context he/she belongs to. This may also affect whether or not an individual will choose housing first; if an individual feels that such a choice will take him/her away from his/her social group, then he/she may avoid the housing first option entirely. Also, many youth seem to have difficulty prioritizing health concerns owing to the competing demands of street survival (i.e., what to eat and when; where to sleep; avoiding confrontations and “drama” on the street). Housing first approaches often expect youth to transition to housing and address mental health and addiction issues at the same time. Along with peer pressure, gender identity is another factor that should be taken seriously in understanding decision making processes among street-oriented and homeless youth with mental health and addiction issues. Someone who identifies as male or female may have different concerns compared to someone who identifies as transgendered. As such, treatment and service options should also take into consideration the gender identity of each participant. Complicating matters is the notion that gender identities can be fluid, (i.e., a person could move between male, female and genderless identities over the course of months and years). The consideration of gender identity, then, along with the pressures, priorities, and anxieties associated with such identities, whether they be male, female, two-spirited, tri-gendered, transgendered or androgynous or ambigendered (i.e., a person who identifies as neither male nor female, but something perhaps in between), can help focus our understanding on sustainable interventions for street-oriented and homeless youth. Therefore, by centring on participants’ lived experiences and realities of choice-making, the ultimate goal of the *Youth Matters in London* project will be to develop effective “in the moment” responses and interventions that fit individuals’ treatment and service preferences.

The ongoing collection of data for the *Youth Matters in London* project will allow the research team to understand how youths’ treatment and service preferences may change and evolve over time. To this end, the *Youth Matters in London* study will be in a unique position to explore the relationship between

participants' social and financial situations, addictions, and mental health.

As well, following participants over time will make it possible to gain a better understanding of how youth's perceptions of their own social, psychological, financial and housing-related situations may or may not affect their help-seeking behaviours.

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7 Building Community: Supportive Housing for Young Mothers

Jeff Karabanow, Jean Hughes

Introduction

At a time when individuals need a strong support system to successfully address the complex and often challenging developmental tasks of adolescence, which are necessary for creating a stable identity and becoming productive and independent adults, an increasing number of adolescents find themselves dealing with an unrealistic test of independence – homelessness. Youth represent a unique subgroup of the homeless population with very specific needs – they face extreme alienation (from society and often family), and disadvantage during a life-stage that is tumultuous and difficult for even the most fortunate of young people (Hughes et al., 2010; Karabanow, 2004). Homeless youth are at risk for physical and mental health problems and are highly vulnerable to exploitation – both sexual and financial (Durham, 2003; Karabanow, 2004; Karabanow et al., 2007; Krauss et al., 2001). In turn, homeless/at-risk *female* youth are at particular risk for sexually transmitted infections (Hughes et al., 2010; Karabanow et al., 2005) and their pregnancy rates are significantly higher than those for housed young women (Greene & Ringwalt, 1998). In fact, mothers with children are the fastest growing group of shelter users in Canada (Rahder, 2006) and families account for approximately 40% of the homeless population in the USA (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2007; U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2004). Not surprising, motherhood during adolescence carries its own set of challenges

for those who are homeless (Martin et al., 2007), including physical health problems (Craft-Rosenberg et al., 2000; Hatton et al., 2008), mental health problems (Tischler et al., 2007), risk of abuse (Du Mont & Miller, 2000) and suicidal behaviour (Styron et al., 2000). In turn, teen pregnancy carries higher risks for the newborn (Crawford et al., 2011), including multiple birth complications, as well as physical, neurological, and nutritional problems (Chapman et al., 2007; Little et al., 2005; Stanwood & Levitt, 2004; Stein et al., 2000). Homelessness makes it extremely difficult for a mother to nurture her children, often leaving her feeling depressed, anxious, guilty and ashamed (Paquette & Bassuk, 2009). Yet, relatively little attention has been directed toward understanding the particular needs of homeless mothers; they are marginalized by society, not well supported by the service sector and are generally left to fend for themselves (Benbow et al., 2011; de Jonge, 2001; Tischler et al., 2007).

To help address this concern, our chapter uncovers the experience of young women living in a supportive housing initiative intended specifically for mothers and their children. Supportive housing is one approach to accommodation that is designed to address some of the social inequities that contribute to housing insecurity, homelessness, and social exclusion (Golden et al., 1999; Jackson, 2004; Karabanow et al., 2010; Peters, 2004). Golden et al., (1999) broadly define supportive housing as a midpoint between institutional and independent living. It focuses on keeping vulnerable people housed, reducing the burden on emergency services and shelters, and re-establishing an individual's social networks within a community – all critical factors necessary for easing isolation. This is achieved through supportive services that may be live-in (e.g., group home), or 'portable' and available within the broader community (Pomeroy & Campsie, 2004). Collin, Lane and Stevens (2003) argue that a broad array of comprehensive services are needed (e.g., education, employment services, child care, health services, life skills training and parenting skills training) to provide individualized attention in multiple ways (through staff, discussion groups, home visits, peer interaction, ongoing education in birth control choices, counselling, transportation to office visits, and advocacy by staff and health providers). Services should be available over the long term, be comprehensive in nature (provide housing, educational programs, counselling, etc.), and build a collaborative relationship between staff and clients. In addition, supportive housing needs to offer mothers a voice and be supportive of their choices, rather than telling them what to do (McDonald et al., 2009). Likewise, supportive housing needs to offer one-on-one support to foster individual strengths (a sense of moral worth, belief in one's maternal capacity) in ways that nurture "the young mother's self confidence and self-esteem, providing a counter-weight to the social disapproval she experiences beyond, and sometimes within, the family and working to lessen the poverty and material disadvantages she faces" (Graham & McDermott, 2006:31).

Most of the supportive housing literature focuses on services provided to people with mental illness and/or disabilities, and seniors. The relevance of these models for diverse populations with different needs and capacities, such as young mothers, is rarely documented. Likewise, while numerous scholars have argued for more formal assessment of program efficacy, research fails to distinguish successful programs from those that fail to work for young mothers or meet stated goals (Benson, 2004; Collins et al., 2000). Our research begins to fill the knowledge gap by exploring these issues through in-depth discussions with the young mothers and staff/board members who are intimately familiar with the Nova Scotia supportive housing development.

Methodology

This research used a case study approach to develop rich understandings of young mothers' experiences of living in SHYM (Supportive Housing for Young Mothers), a non-profit, community-based housing complex for young mothers who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. SHYM is a free-standing (detached) unit with 12 independent, furnished apartments that provide a range of infrastructure support: physical (facilities, offices, etc.), policy (housing regulations), human service (round-the-clock staff), and education (programs). SHYM accepts mothers, between the ages of 16 and 21, along with their children for up to 24 months. Mothers need to be financially supported through Income Assistance.

This research explored how tenants experienced SHYM, their quality of life, feelings of self-worth and hopes for the future. Two rounds of in-depth interviews were conducted six months apart with 10 tenants of SHYM (see Table 1). These tenants also completed the World Health Organization Quality of Life survey (WHOQOL-BREF) during each interview session. The study also explored staff and Board members' experiences working at/with SHYM, as well as their perspectives on the development and evolution of the non-profit organization. The study was guided by the following core questions: *What is the pathway through which young mothers become homeless and housed? How are young mothers experiencing SHYM? What are the strengths and limitations of this housing structure for young mothers? How do these young mothers understand themselves (their hopes, sense of self, health and social needs) in relation to supportive housing? How did SHYM evolve into its current housing form and what supports are needed to ensure that it is sustained and effective?*

Using a case study approach, we investigated the development of the organization and created a narrative of its evolution. Over a nine month period (August 2008 - April 2009), data collection and analyses were conducted in an iterative manner highlighting emerging themes (as described by Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Table 1

Tenant/Interview Information					
Tenant	Mother's Age at T1	Baby's Age at T1	Length of Time at SHYM at T1	Time between T1 and T2	Length of Time at SHYM at T2
1	17yr.	4 months	8 months	8 months	Left SHYM at 10 months
2	18yr.	5 months	3 months	No T2 interview	No T2 interview
3	18 yr.	5 months	8 months	9 months	Left SHYM at 12 months
4	18 yr.	13 months	7 months	8 months	15 months
5	18 yr.	2 years	1 week	No T2 interview	No T2 interview
6	19 yr.	1 year	10 months	7 months	17 months
7	18 yr.	5 months	1 month	8 months	9 months
8	17 yr.	18 months	2 months	No T2 interview	No T2 interview
9	18 yr.	7 months	1 month	5 months	6 months
10	22 yr.	1 year	2 weeks	4 months	4.5 months

Rethinking Teen Motherhood

Past literature on teen motherhood emphasizes the negative consequences for both baby and mother that result from early childbirth. These consequences include a lack of education and employment potential for the mothers, leading to poverty, poor maternal attachment (desire to protect and comfort) and sensitivity (awareness of infant signals, accurate interpretation of these signals, and appropriate responses) (Ainsworth et al., 1978), and behavioural problems for children (Basch, 2011; Beers & Hollo, 2009). Research suggests that teen mothers are often perceived as having compromised their human capital (potential) by dropping out of school or delaying entry into the workforce. Policies dealing with economic and social supports for teen mothers have always been based on this negative portrayal, seeing teen motherhood as a ‘problem’ that needs to be ‘dealt with’.

More recently, however, research on teen parenting has begun to examine these issues more carefully. Rather than viewing teen mothering as “untimely, a disaster of relentless risks and losses,” the issue is being reframed to address this populations’ strengths, struggles, and challenges (Smithbattle, 2009:123). This new strength-based lens is not intended to suggest that there are no negative consequences of early motherhood; obtaining an education and breaking out of the cycle of poverty is indeed a struggle for teenage mothers. Rather, recent research argues that early childbearing is not directly responsible for these negative outcomes. In-

stead, these outcomes could very well be the result of the personal histories of the mothers and the lack of resources and supports available to them when they become parents (Duncan 2007; McDonald et al., 2009; Savio Beers & Hollo, 2009). Indeed, Melhado argues that evidence shows teen mothers are more likely than their childless peers to have been “socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged by eighth grade,” meaning that they were more likely to come from low-income families, have lower educational aspirations, have experienced behavioural problems and been held back in school (2007:184). Such factors, alone or together, heighten the risk that young mothers will lack effective parenting skills (Flaherty & Sadler, 2011). Research suggests that access to resources is a better predictor of educational success than young parenthood, with resource-rich teens obtaining one to two more years of education than resource-poor teens – regardless of whether they are parents (Melhado, 2007). Indeed, some longitudinal research indicates that teen mothers are able to catch up “with their peers in education, employment and personal relationships” (Melhado, 2007). Further, there is evidence to suggest that teen mothers who have access to supports (e.g., continue to live at home with supportive parents) are able to develop healthy attachments with their babies (Flaherty et al., 2011). The challenges faced have more to do with “having a child out of the usual social sequence” (McDonald et al., 2009:46). In other words, teens do not lack capacity for learning to parent; instead, they experience a tension between wanting to become independent and needing help to manage their responsibility to their children (Meadows-Oliver et al., 2007; Stiles, 2008).

Regardless of the perspective, most agree that homelessness puts teen mothers at a greater disadvantage than those who are housed. Despite these disadvantages, evidence shows that young mothers themselves consider parenthood more of an opportunity than an obstacle, and argue that their capacity to care for their children is limited only by poverty, and the social stigma they face (Graham et al., 2006; McDonald et al., 2009).

Introducing SHYM: Goals and Objectives

Supportive Housing for Young Mothers (SHYM) is located in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, (urban core population 65,741 in 2001). Dartmouth is a city within the Halifax Regional Municipality (390,096 in 2011 Canadian Census, Retrieved 7 March 2012) on the Atlantic seacoast. Its population is highly Eurocentric and its economy is driven mainly by government services and private sector companies. The street youth population includes many youth from surrounding rural areas, yet the community has few street youth services (Karabanow, 2004). SHYM is a non-profit, community-based supportive housing complex for young mothers who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Founded in 2001 by a group of concerned community members, academics and service pro-

viders, SHYM opened its doors to young mothers and their children in the late fall of 2007 following intense planning and development efforts. The primary mission and vision of the housing complex is to provide a supportive, affordable and caring environment to young mothers in order for them to build/rebuild their sense of self and develop/redevelop social and human capital (regarding parenting, family living, job skills, etc.) for their future. Program goals include:

- To reduce the risk of violence, addictions, inadequate prenatal and infant nutrition and care, child development delays and social isolation for young mothers and their children.
- To provide safe and secure housing where residents can learn the life management and parenting skills essential to independent living.
- To provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children involved in the program.
- To provide individually tailored action plans that address the specific needs of residents.
- To provide a supportive and nurturing environment that includes individual counselling, the development of support networks (accessing family resource centres, peer support groups, etc.) and access to training and educational supports.

Programs such as SHYM aim to do more than just provide a safe and affordable place to live *for the present*. They strive to develop skills, knowledge, awareness, confidence, resources, and social support networks in the belief that these attributes will prevent or buffer homelessness in the future, and promote overall health, safety, and stability for each young family.

SHYM was developed to fill a gap in housing options: while a young homeless woman without children could access housing locally through housing supports for youth, the same young woman with children would be left with few choices. In addition, given that the eligibility criteria for Income Assistance (also known as social assistance) at the time of the study required anyone under the age of 19 to live at home with parents or an appropriate guardian (approved relative, foster care, group home, etc.), the options available to this vulnerable teenage population became even more limited.

In the beginning, SHYM's Board of Directors determined that it wanted to offer housing to young mothers who were between the ages of 16 and 21 and homeless or at risk of being homeless. SHYM envisioned itself as a supervised program where tenants would live in their own apartments, have access to support staff during the day and live-in staff at night, and attend skill-building/

support programs developed and offered by SHYM. The SHYM directors imagined a building that could house six to eight families with a small staff team.

As SHYM developed from dream to reality, the Board of Directors had to make numerous concessions and compromises (not unlike most non-profits) that had considerable impact on the organization's mission and method. In negotiations with the government funder, SHYM's plan for a six to eight tenant program shifted to 12 units with a rate of funding considerably lower than the financing received by other similar youth organizations. These compromises resulted in a larger number of clients needing services and fewer funds to serve those clients. In addition, because young women had to be on Income Assistance in order to live at SHYM, these women needed to be referred to the program. Most were referred by the government funder. As a result, while SHYM was designed for 'less troubled' mothers aged 16 to 21, in reality the tenants referred to SHYM were almost exclusively under the age of 19, and many had mental health and behavioural issues that challenged SHYM's small workforce, leading to staff re-structuring (redefining roles, responsibilities, and work schedules) and several tenant evictions (SHYM was the only option for some tenants if they wanted Income Assistance).

Life at SHYM: Independence and Structure

Many of the tenants at SHYM, like many homeless youth, came from tumultuous and often destructive home environments (Hughes et al., 2010; Karabanow, 2004; Karabanow et al., 2010). Many of the mothers who entered SHYM were essentially left with no other options: few could return home, they were ineligible for shelters (local shelters did not admit families), and were unable to rent their own apartments (because they were, for example, too young, had little income or due to landlord discrimination). Add to these realities the developmental stage of early adolescence (12-18 years) – a time filled with upheaval and role confusion during which many youth withdraw from responsibilities and rely on their peer groups for support as they search for an identity separate from that of their families (Steinberg & Morris, 2001) – it is not surprising that several tenants resented being "forced" into living at SHYM:

I think it's not fair that I should have to live here... And believe me, I did not choose to live here. I was forced to live here, [By] Income Assistance. They, well I had no choice but to leave my mom's. So I called Social Assistance for some help and they told me that my mother's financially responsible for me until I'm nineteen and the only way they could help me is if they put me in supervised housing. I said no, I said frig that, I'd rather stay with my mom and then, because I thought that SHYM was like a group home... But then I called them back when I realized

that I really had to get out because it was just getting more unsafe as the days went on. I was really excited at first because I knew I was going, like I thought I was going to have a lot more freedom. I have more freedom being here, like not, I can lock my door and not have to worry about people being around but it's not the same as being on my own.

Other mothers, however, expressed relief at finding housing:

I was so happy, I was so excited to have my own place and finally, not have to worry about where I'm going to lay my head or where my kid's going to sleep and just like a big relief.

Indeed, for some, SHYM appeared to be a very attractive option, not only for its safety, reliability and affordability but, since mothers had their own apartments, and for its promotion of independence:

In SHYM you live on your own, it's a very independent kind of living area. You raise your child on your own, you have your own apartment to keep clean... but you have your own apartment, you pay your own bills and you just have, just like if you were living on your own in any other apartment. The only difference is that you have support here; you have programs to help you be a better parent...

A sense of independence was highly important to the young mothers interviewed and closely connected to their self-worth. Just as Hallman (2007) noted that teen parents in classroom settings want to be treated as capable and competent students, teen mothers at SHYM emphasized their desire to be regarded as "good mothers," capable of raising their children independently. However, as many theorists argue (Meadows-Oliver et al., 2007; Stiles, 2008), while teen parents, like all youth, strive to develop an independent adult identity, they experience a tension between independence and a need for help, as their responsibility to their children keeps them dependent on others for assistance and support.

Part of SHYM's role was to offer structural supports (predictable organizational regulations) to its tenants. Hence, life at SHYM was governed by a number of house rules designed to create stable routines within a safe and respectful environment. For example, to encourage mothers to engage with their community, tenants had limits on the amount of time spent within the building. To encourage mothers to develop a sense of responsibility in caring for their babies, tenants were limited in the amount of time they could leave their children in the care of others, and in the number and frequency of guests they could entertain. According to staff, these house rules were designed to keep tenants safe, to support the development

of healthy relationships (maternal attachment with baby) and to maintain a clean, comfortable and respectful building. Not surprisingly, given their developmental stage, several of the tenants complained that these rules limited their independence. Both tenants and staff expressed concern that SHYM was on the brink of becoming – or had already become – a “group home” rather than “supportive housing.”

In addition to the house rules regarding visits and general behaviour, tenants were required to attend programming intended to build life skills and more generally provide tenants with a structured routine. According to the organization, this routine was not only important for the babies, but also the mothers: “Having routine programming might alleviate the boredom of being home all day with a baby, but it can also help prepare the teens for a return to school or work” (SHYM staff). Most of the tenants resented the number of programs they were required to attend, suggesting that the programs were an “imposition on their lives,” leaving them with little free time to spend with friends or family, or to complete necessary tasks (i.e. laundry, cooking, cleaning their apartments). While tenants enjoyed some of the programs – particularly those involving self-care – most complained that the programs were held at inconvenient times, interfered with their schedule, or had little relevance for them or their babies, particularly if their babies had passed, or not yet reached, the age for which a program was targeted. Clearly, finding ways to foster the transfer of knowledge and skills gained from one situation to another within this population was a challenge. In addition, finding ways to encourage *reflection* and *insight*, so that behaviour changes were internalized and maintained, was also a challenge. The most successful programs at engaging tenants were the ones that built physical and/or emotional relief/confidence.

Children served as the driving force for many of the tenants at SHYM. In fact, as studies of other supportive housing programs have found (Benbow et al., 2011; Karabanow, 2008), many of the young mothers at SHYM viewed their child(ren) as their reason for living and persevering through difficulties. Indeed, their new role as mother completely reshaped their sense of self. Nearly all of the mothers stated that “[my child] is my life,” “[my child] keeps me motivated” and “[my child] keeps me stable.” The mothers valued any program that directly and observably fostered their ability to be a “good mother”, which, in turn, bolstered important feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy – essential elements of resilience (ability to overcome adversity).

There was a delicate balance between SHYM’s desire to foster independence and the need for rules: while the mothers *required* support and structure, they also required and *desired* choice. Along these lines, the primary complaint about rules and programming at SHYM was that they left little room for maternal voice and choice – important dimensions in the development of responsibility

and accountability (Hughes & Gottlieb, 2004; Martin et al., 2005). The capacity to exercise choice, known as autonomy, is critical to development (Bertrand, 1996; Doherty, 1997; Steinhauer, 1998) as it assists in building a sense of mastery, control, and security – essential elements for managing life in productive and satisfying ways (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 1991). Autonomy requires not only free choice, but also critical reflection (thinking over decisions made and actions taken). And while independence is an important element, autonomy does not require that all actions be carried out alone. Instead, autonomy involves knowing when help is needed and *freely choosing to work with others* as opposed to being forced. Such capacity does not come automatically, but rather needs to be built, tested, reflected upon and tried again after failure (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Several tenants acknowledged a desire to create a more participatory and collaborative environment in which mothers contribute input (designing house rules, selecting programs, etc.) and work together with staff.

Challenges at SHYM: Internal and External

Tenants struggled with the balance between independence and regulation at SHYM and expressed dissatisfaction with the rules and programming. Staff were well aware of these issues, but felt constrained by challenges both within and beyond the organization. Within SHYM, the rules had shifted and changed substantially from the organization's beginning, in response to the more demanding and younger tenant population. As one staff member noted:

We recognize that the needs for young women, particularly in that kind of 16 to 18 year old developmental place, are that they do need a level of kind of supportive, even parenting. And so you can't give them all the control for things, you have to be able to do a balance of providing support and providing parental expectations and that's really, yeah I think that really has changed.

Not only did these younger mothers have challenging developmental needs, but their behaviours contributed to a house environment that was more volatile than expected. As is characteristic of young adolescents, every tenant referred to the "drama" of living in a building with a group of teenage girls. The drama – gossiping, backstabbing, sharing of boyfriends, and engaging in conflicts, which occasionally turned into bullying – was a significant part of their lives and a real challenge for SHYM staff to manage and support. As one of the staff explained,

I think the hard parts would probably be some of the interpersonal issues that can happen when eight girls of the same age all live together. And the idea that there's, you know, program expectations that they resist and

sometimes, particularly if there's interpersonal stuff going on, it's hard to be wanting to be in a group of girls that you're having issues with.

These internal conflicts were amplified by external complications. As mentioned, negotiations with government resulted in not only a more challenging tenant group, but also a lower rate of funding than necessary. Consequently, SHYM struggled to find the income to properly maintain its tenants. Interpersonal issues “escalated because at that time there was inadequate staffing” (SHYM staff) and the staff team was too small to cope with the needs of the tenants. Like many other not-for-profit agencies, while SHYM applied for – and received – additional grants, funding was limited and remained a fundamental struggle.

Benefits of SHYM

Despite all of the challenges, most tenants and staff agreed that SHYM was successful in two major and critical ways – it provided a safe housing alternative for mothers and children, which allowed them to remain together, and for both to thrive. As one staff member noted, “I don’t know but I believe that SHYM is beneficial because these moms have [their] babies with them and they might not otherwise.” Such observations reinforce the evidence that safe housing plays a key role in positive parenting (Anderson et al., 2003). A number of mothers reported a dramatic reduction in their stress and that of their child, since living at SHYM:

I've been less stressed. I've been around abuse, [my child]'s been actually a lot less stressed too. Like even for a newborn, he was really stressed and you could just tell and he's just been a lot easier; I can sleep better at night. Yeah, and that it's safe and I'm not going to run into anybody or anything.

Yeah. It's just, I don't know, it just feels better. Like I'm feeling good about myself and about being a mother here, because now I'm not putting him in any bad, like he wasn't in any bad situations before but he was in a stressed out situation and just everything like that and now that we're here [SHYM] I feel like I can concentrate more on him and like be there and stuff with him.

SHYM succeeded in removing mothers and children from the dangers of homelessness and/or abuse, in addition to providing an environment of support (emotional, structural and financial), encouragement, and educational resources. As a result, tenants at SHYM had an opportunity to gain critical insight that enabled them to begin to separate themselves from the destructive patterns of their lives (poverty, family violence, chronic chaos, addictions, etc.). One tenant explained:

I feel more positive now, living here, than I did living with my mom because when I lived with my mom, like for the first six months, I just didn't think that I was going to go anywhere. I thought that I was just going to be one of those young mothers on Welfare, until she's 25 or 30 or whatever and I felt that I wasn't going anywhere in life. But when I moved in here I started talking to people and everything changed. I think it's because I got away from the old pattern. Like I know if I would have stayed with my mom, I probably would have done, like I probably would have raised [my child] the same way she raised me, which was extremely unhealthy and unsafe. I guess it was just getting away from my old habits and realizing that I have something more important in my life than what I did have.

Tenants also commented that SHYM provided critical supports to assist in the development of reflection, problem-solving and other valuable life skills necessary for their growing independence:

So there's a difference between a safe home and then a safe, supportive home for where I'm at now. I don't know how to explain it, like if I was over here then I'd be like, okay now I got to pay bills, I got to worry about my child and I need to figure out what I'm doing and stuff like that. I'd be doing it alone. And then with SHYM, you've got your safe environment, I'm still paying bills but not as much as I would be over here, I've got the support systems and the information that I need to be able to further anything and like, there's two different kinds of safe environments. So with SHYM you've got a safe environment plus more, with the same environment, I could be in an apartment somewhere or living with a cousin or something.

Despite the conflicts between tenants, several mothers voiced their appreciation of the community and friendship available at SHYM. Many mothers agreed with the sentiment expressed by one tenant that, “at least, being here, I know people aren’t looking at me funny because I’m 18 and I have a kid and that I’m not with the father and that the father’s not coming around.” Entering a community in which they were free of stigma, and not immediately viewed as “other”, helped these teens build self-esteem and feel “not alone anymore.”

Despite reported incidents of conflicts, tenants also appreciated their relationships with staff. In particular, many mothers cited specific staff members whose one-on-one support and coaching was crucial to their development at SHYM. One mother recounted that:

The thing that I like about SHYM is that the workers are here, so you can talk to them about anything. So if I get to the point where I feel I'm going to have a breakdown, or even before that, I just go down and talk to [staff members], whoever's in and then, well I just feel better because I get to talk.

SHYM benefited its tenants by providing a physically and socially safe and supportive environment in which mothers could risk sharing their concerns with trusted others, and build the courage to try new skills, develop self-confidence, and break away from the destructive patterns of their past – all critical steps for building a sense of mastery, control, security, and autonomy (self-governance) in their search for an identity.

In addition, many mothers noted that SHYM allowed them “to focus on the future rather than the day by day survival” (SHYM tenant).

I know for a fact that if I wasn't in SHYM then I wouldn't be where I am today. I know that I would be more concerned about finding a place to live or just little things like that. Well not little but I'd be more concerned about kind of, in a way surviving every day but where I'm in SHYM and I have people to talk to and I have a place to live and the support system and whatnot, I'm able to focus on my future rather than taking it day by day.

The thing about SHYM is that when I was living at [shelter] and at the other apartment and whatnot, well not to sound drastic or anything, but survive kind of thing and now that I'm in SHYM, I can actually think about starting a future for my child and me. So I'm like, I'm happily going to school and he's going to daycare, so I'm going to achieve things in life. So SHYM has given me the opportunity to reach my goals. So I think that when I do move out, I know that I'll be better prepared for the real world.

By providing mothers the opportunity to focus on their goals, and think in terms of the future, SHYM broke the street-survival mindset of *living in the moment*; a day-to-day life of insecurity, uncertainty, and a constant search to meet basic survival needs (food, shelter, clothing). In contrast, SHYM allowed tenants the time and space to transition into a new phase of their lives.

Changes Observed in Second Interviews

Second interviews were conducted with seven of the ten tenants who were originally interviewed. Of these, five were still at SHYM, while two had left and were living on their own. The time between interviews ranged from four to nine months (see Table 1).

During the second round of interviews, some of the tenants suggested that the positive changes in their lives and the lives of their children (for the most part, greater stability and wellness) were a direct result of living at SHYM. Four of the five tenants still housed at SHYM at the time of the second interview spoke highly of their experiences at SHYM and described greater physical and emotional stability in their lives. While two of these tenants were positive about SHYM during both first and second interviews, two other tenants originally expressed negativity about SHYM but grew more positive over time, particularly with regard to the house environment, the meaningfulness of programs, and even the staff coaching approaches;

To tell you the truth, I actually do like it more than like, more than when we did the last interview. A lot has changed and the girls in the building actually get along now, they're not like ripping each other's hair out of their heads [laughter]. Well, not literally but, it's a lot better than it used to be and, like the programs, some of them are more meaningful now. Like we had a Will program and we had to make up our wills, we got to do them for free and it was a really awesome program. So I'm starting to like a lot of the stuff that they're doing lately.

I went to school, I'm still in school. I'll be graduating in June and I got accepted at [college] for September. Yeah, my child's in daycare and yeah, just a lot of different things. I'm fighting for sole custody of my child.

And just about like it's, I know [staff] she's bringing me a long way because she pushes and she's like, go do this, go do that and then we'll sit in her office and she'll be like, you have this, this, this and this to do and we're going to get this, this, this phone calls done and boom, and I come out of her office and I'm like, oh my goodness I feel like I accomplished like the world [laughter]. She makes me do it all. So it's pretty good. Like I do get a good, yeah this place, like they help me out like besides if you need help, like in the most needy, you know what I mean. But yeah, besides that, but other than that, I feel like it's awesome being here. Yeah.

Quality of Life

During both interviews, tenants completed a 26 item survey regarding their quality of life – the World Health Organization's *Quality of Life* survey (WHOQOL-BREF; 2004) (see Table 2).

Table 2

Quality of Life Responses (WHOQOL-BREF): Time 1 and Time 2 (Mean Score)		
	Time 1	Time 2
Overall Ratings (1-5)		
Quality of Life	4.2	4.1
Health	3	4
Specific Ratings (1-100)		
Psychological	65	69
Social	69	63
Environmental	59	62.5
Physical	48	51.2

During the *first interview*, using a scale from 1-5, tenants scored their *overall quality of life* as good (average score = 4.2, range 2-5), but were neutral (neither *satisfied nor dissatisfied*) about their ratings of *overall health* (average score = 3, range 1-4). Likewise, in terms of specific profiles (scale 1-100), tenants gave positive scores to their *social* domain (personal relationships, social support, sexual activity) (average score = 69, range 31-100), and *psychological* domain (body image/appearance, negative/positive feelings, self-esteem, spirituality, thinking/memory/concentration/learning) (average score = 65, range 44-88). However, they gave mediocre ratings to their *environment* (financial resources, freedom/safety/security, home environment, opportunities for acquiring new information/skills, recreation/leisure, transport) (average score = 59, range 44-81), and less than average ratings to their *physical* domain (activities of daily living, dependence on medicinal/medical aids, energy/fatigue, mobility, pain/discomfort, sleep/rest, work capacity) (average score = 48, range 25-63). The tenants' initial survey scores were consistent with their interview discussions from the same time. While mothers perceived their *physical* and *emotional health* to be at least satisfactory during the early part of their stay, they were only reasonably satisfied with their *living environment* and most were frustrated with SHYM's mandated rules and programming – which they perceived as a restriction on their freedom.

During their *second interview*, scores on the WHOQOL-BREF survey (see Table 2) changed, similar to the change reflected in the tenants' stories. In terms of their overall ratings (scale 1-5), tenants continued to score their *quality of life* as good (average score = 4.1, range 4-5) and grew more satisfied with their *overall health* (average score = 4, range 3-5). Likewise, in terms of specific profiles (scale 1-100), tenants continued to give above average scores to their *psychological* domain (average score = 69.1, range 63-88), and marginally improved ratings for their *environmental* (average score = 62.5, range 56-88) and *physical* domains

(average score = 51.2, range 38-69). At the same time, while still positive, scores fell somewhat for the *social* domain (average score = 63, range 44-100), which may have reflected some continuing concerns about SHYM's communal environment and/or tenants' relationships outside of SHYM. Every tenant reported some change in scores from Time 1 interview to Time 2 interview. Further, while five of the seven tenants reported at least some positive movement, two tenants reported only negative change. Interestingly, of the two mothers who participated in the Time 2 interview after leaving SHYM, one mother, who left voluntarily, reported improved scores in overall health and on three domains (physical, psychological and social), while the other mother, who was asked to leave, reported reduced scores in the same three domains (see Table 2).

Conclusions

In many ways, SHYM's story is similar to those of other small, non-government and alternative organizational structures, attempting to survive within very turbulent economic and political environments. It took a long, complex journey of unexpected collaborative partnering among diverse stakeholders to reach its destiny and, once achieved, it was not quite the reality that the founders of SHYM had imagined. SHYM had to reinvent itself and compromise on some of its ideals in order to adapt to the realities of funding and building relations mandated by government systems. Despite the compromises and strains, the organization consistently resisted and fought to maintain its vision and purpose. What was so encouraging about this research was that staff and mothers alike did not remain fixed in their views, but instead, with time and reflection, were open to a shift in thinking. Such behaviour is a good sign for the next phase in SHYM's journey.

This case study provides several 'lessons from the field' regarding how supportive housing initiatives might be repeated or adapted in other environments. First, it appears to be essential that a project have a committed and focused steering group of innovators and supporters who are dedicated to the often long, tedious and frustrating journeys necessary to translate ideas into concrete realities. Second, all projects need to have a deep understanding of the complex systems at work, both internal and external to the supportive housing initiative, and of the complex relationships between these systems. In other words, the steering group needs to understand how the policies from formal systems dictate the internal operations of the non-governmental organization. In addition, the steering group must work with, and be flexible and adaptable to changes in both the internal (the housing initiative) and external (government and service providers) environmental systems. Third, it is critical that the supportive housing steering group have a solid understanding of the tenant population (in this case homeless mothers), and, despite inevitable shifts in focus, stay true to the project mission and vision. Fourth,

providing safe and affordable housing with meaningful programs/supports is an extremely powerful and efficient approach to helping marginalized populations build the resilience necessary to overcome adversity and re-enter mainstream culture with the skills, confidence, and resources needed to succeed. And last, the ‘messiness,’ nuances and complexity of grassroots, community-based initiatives should be celebrated – not only for being innovative and creatively mending the tattered social safety net, but for demonstrating a collective and local response to a problem that consistently lacks government attention.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations can be gleaned from the findings of our study, which explores a Nova Scotia supportive housing development (SHYM) designed for young mothers and their children.

- The need for separate, safe, supportive housing programs for young mothers is clear; however, strategies are needed to ensure that decision makers and funders are not only made aware of the evidence, but engaged in ways that ensure such initiatives are sustained.
- Supportive housing needs to be long-term/semi-permanent/transitional (with tenure of up to at least 2 years), rather than simply emergency or short-term. This will provide the time and supports necessary to address the complex consequence that face tenants.
- Young mothers, with lived experience and perspective, need to be included in the design of supportive housing.
- Supportive housing requires a safe structure that fosters a balance between the need for purposeful routine and the desire for autonomy (free choice).
- Supportive housing needs to include a variety of tailored, relevant, accessible programming (both on- and off-site) that fosters the development of life management skills in ways that build on strengths, are solution-focused, and treat conflict as an opportunity; include mastery, reflection, problem-solving (opportunity to fail safely, learn from mistakes); build self-esteem; and focus on the future.
- Supportive housing programs need to provide on-going supports (mentoring, networking, consultation) for staff and boards, in order to build a trusted partnership, meaningful commitment among stakeholders and to assist in working with the complex behaviours so characteristic of adolescent development.

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HEALTH

8

Homeless Youth, Nutritional Vulnerability, and Community Food Assistance Programs

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Introduction

Nutrition is an aspect of homeless youth's vulnerability that has received little attention in discussions of interventions. This chapter begins with a brief overview of the nutritional vulnerability of homeless youth in Canada, drawing on the results of our research with youth in Toronto. We then examine youth's strategies for getting food, with a particular focus on their interactions with and experiences of food assistance programs in the community. Finally, we draw on data from a recent inventory of charitable food services in five Canadian cities to examine the operations of youth-focused food assistance programs. This description of current food assistance initiatives, considered together with our understanding of the food and nutrition needs of homeless youth, provides a foundation for some recommendations for policy makers and program directors.

Nutritional Vulnerability and the Health Consequences

Problems of food access and food deprivation among homeless youth in Canada have been widely documented, but our 2003 study of homeless youth in Toronto remains the only study in Canada to quantify the effects of homelessness from the perspective of nutrition (Li et al., 2009; Tarasuk et al., 2005). We recruited 261 youth (112 female, 149 male), 16 to 24 years of age, experiencing absolute homelessness. Youth were recruited from drop-in centres and various outdoor locations, and had spent 10 or more of the past 30 nights sleeping in a temporary shelter, indoor or outdoor public space, or a friend's place, because they had no place of their own.

Participants were interviewed when recruited and invited to meet for a second interview three days later or as soon thereafter as possible. Seventy-five percent of the participants completed second interviews. At the first interview, participants were asked what they had eaten in the past 24 hours, completed a questionnaire on current living circumstances and nutrition- and health-related behaviours and had body measures taken. In the second interview participants again reported what they had eaten in the past 24 hours and answered a brief questionnaire on current living circumstances. Twenty-five youth then participated in semi-structured, open-ended interviews designed to explore the social and symbolic meanings of food and strategies for getting food.

Most of the youth we interviewed were failing to meet their basic requirements for vitamins and minerals (Tarasuk et al., 2005). Over half were not getting enough folate, vitamin A, vitamin C, zinc, and magnesium. Additionally, more than half of the young women in the sample were lacking in iron and vitamin B-12. About one-quarter of youth consumed too little protein to meet their requirements. Youth were also simply not getting enough food to provide energy. On average, the level of energy (i.e., calories) in their diets was enough to support a very inactive lifestyle, but fell well below the level of energy needed for someone engaged in more physical activity (Tarasuk et al., 2005). Although we did not measure physical activity levels in this study, most youth would likely have fallen into the middle or upper range of activity levels, given their living conditions (see Tarasuk et al., 2005).

Adolescence is an important period of nutritional vulnerability. It is associated with increased nutrient requirements for growth and development, with a lack of certain nutrients having the potential to impact health over the lifespan (e.g. calcium and the risk of bone fractures later in life) (Mesias et al., 2011). Thus, the health consequences associated with nutritional inadequacies are profound. Chronically poor nutrition is associated with impaired function and increased risk of infections. Further, poor nutrition can pose problems in pregnancy and worsen health conditions such as depression, substance abuse, hepatitis C, hepatitis B, HIV, and other sexually transmitted diseases – all of which are common among homeless youth in Canada (Boivin et al., 2005; Frankish et al., 2005; Haley et al., 2004; Kulik et al., 2011).

The extreme nutritional vulnerability of the homeless youth we interviewed was a result of two things: i) the poor nutritional quality of much of the food they consumed, and ii) the food deprivation that many homeless youth endured on a fairly regular basis. Homeless youth's diets failed to meet the minimum recommendations outlined in Canada's Food Guide (CFG), and their eating patterns were nutritionally inferior to those of young adults

in the general population (Li et al., 2009). The youth consumed few milk products, fruit and vegetables, and their average consumption of meat and meat alternatives fell far below CFG recommendations for this food group. The youth also fell short in their consumption of whole grains, dark green and orange vegetables, fresh fruit, and leaner meat or meat alternatives; greater consumption of these foods is recommended because of their particular nutritional benefits (Health Canada, 2007; Katamay et al., 2007).

Almost all of the homeless youth that we interviewed did not have access to enough food over the past month, but for 43% of females and 28% of males, the barriers to food access were so severe as to result in chronic food deprivation over this period (Tarasuk et al., 2009). For 10 or more days in the past 30, these youth had reduced their food intake, including going completely without food, in some cases for whole days at a time, because they had no money for food. As one might expect, there were fewer overweight and obese youth among our sample of homeless youth than among youth in the general population. A few males exhibited muscle wasting, suggesting serious levels of chronic food deprivation (Tarasuk et al., 2005). Although some of the youth we interviewed had high levels of drug and alcohol use, this was not enough to explain the nutritional vulnerability we documented (Tarasuk et al., 2005). Even youth who were not using drugs or alcohol had inadequate energy and nutrient intakes.

Food Acquisition Strategies¹

The extraordinary nutritional vulnerability of homeless youth was rooted in the inadequacy and insecurity of the strategies they used to acquire food (Tarasuk et al., 2009). Purchasing food was the most common way for youth to get food. However, no one could afford to purchase all of the food they needed. Most of the youth we interviewed did not receive social assistance benefits or a regular salary. They depended instead on panhandling and other forms of ‘work’ in the informal economy (e.g. odd jobs such as snow removal and construction site cleanup); and to a lesser extent, on theft and sex and drug trade work to get cash. The money they made by these means was limited and highly challenging; 48% reported that the police had recently stopped them or tried to stop them from making money (Gaetz et al., 2006). Thus while 75% of youth bought at least some of the food they consumed in the course of a day, most also obtained food through other means, including the use of charitable meal and snack programs and receiving food from other people (friends, passers-by, etc.).

1. Detailed findings related to homeless youth’s ways of getting food have been published elsewhere (Tarasuk et al., 2009).

On any one day, about half of the youth in the study got food from charitable meal or snack programs, and in the course of a week, 88% of youth made some use of charitable meal programs. It was the second most common strategy for getting food (Tarasuk et al., 2009). Youth were most likely to eat food in drop-in centres or get it from outreach vans, but about one-third of males and one-quarter of females also ate in soup kitchens occasionally. Almost no one reported using food banks, a finding that likely reflects homeless youths' lack of cooking and storage facilities and resulting need for ready-to-eat food, but may also speak to the policies and practices of some food banks, such as requiring identification or proof of income or address that homeless individuals may not have.

Despite homeless youth's frequent use of charitable meal and snack programs, we found that using these programs had minimal impact on youth's overall nutrition (Tarasuk et al., 2009). While young men who relied more heavily on charitable programs for their food tended to have higher intakes of some nutrients, there was no evidence that greater use of meal and snack programs resulted in higher energy intakes overall. Neither the quantity nor the quality of young women's food consumption was linked to their use of meal and snack programs.

In addition to youth's lack of money, their homelessness limited the kinds of food they could buy, causing them to rely on fast food and pre-packaged snacks (e.g. chips, chocolate bars and pop) (Li et al., 2009). While the food obtained from charitable meal programs appeared more varied than food youth bought themselves, it was not clearly nutritionally superior to what youth purchased themselves². Moreover, youth's use of charitable meal and snack programs did not affect the probability of them reporting going hungry and not being able to get enough to eat.

While it might seem counterintuitive that homeless youth who eat meals in charitable food assistance programs do not benefit nutritionally and that such programs do not prevent the youth from going hungry, the explanation for this finding lies in the accessibility and quality of charitable food assistance programs available to homeless youth. The findings from the in-depth interviews with 25 (12 females, 13 males) youth, elaborated below, offer an understanding of charitable meal programs in the context of homeless youth's lives and highlight, from youth's perspectives, the problematic nature of obtaining food this way.

2. This observation is consistent with the results of a nutritional assessment of the meals served in 18 charitable programs in Toronto (Tse & Tarasuk, 2008). Although there was wide variation in the energy and nutrient content of meals both within and between programs, the levels of nutrients provided typically fell well below requirements.

The Experience of Obtaining Food from Charitable Meal and Snack Programs

The youth who participated in in-depth interviews pointed out problems related to program access, the quality and quantity of food served, and the atmosphere of community food programs. They expressed a certain amount of frustration about having to navigate a landscape of community food programs that operated on an unreliable, sometimes unpredictable schedule, and served food of varying quality. At the same time, they showed an understanding of the limitations of the charitable food services they received, and many even appeared resigned to these conditions.

By and large, youth preferred to purchase their food rather than get it from charitable meal programs. Purchasing gave them the choice of when, where, and what they ate, allowing them to maintain their independence and choose foods they liked. Personal choice was sacrificed in charitable programs. Getting charitable food meant “you eat what’s served or don’t eat at all” (Lisa)³.

“Well if I have money I’d rather buy food ‘cause you can just buy what you want, right. You don’t have to go wait in a line for it, or you don’t have to go ask for it. You just buy food and it’s yours and you can eat it.” (Dave)

While the frequency with which some youth used charitable meal programs suggests that it was a routine occurrence for them, most study participants used programs only when they did not have any money for food.

“I don’t like eating in the [community programs]. I like, you know, going out and buying something, even if it’s just a buck for Kraft dinner.” (Ken)

“When I have no money and I haven’t made anything panhandling, [a food program] is where I go to eat if I’m hungry.” (Mark)

Program Access

Youth’s descriptions of their use of charitable meal programs suggested that the schedules of individual meal programs were limited, irregular and sometimes changed with little warning.

“[Program A’s] usually open until 8:00. And there’s food there too. But, they’re only twice a week. And this week they were closed. They closed for like renovations or something. So, it totally screwed everybody this

3. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of study participants.

week because, you know to go all the way down there and then they're not open." (Nicole)

"... The last two times that I've walked there, they were closed. ... It was a Tuesday and I forgot about the different hours on Tuesday. And, they closed at 1 p.m. instead of opening again at 1 p.m." (Anita)

Access to meal programs was particularly limited on the weekends, as most youth were quick to point out.

"[On the] weekends you can't find food anywhere. [F shelter] is closed on weekends. [D drop-in] is closed on weekends. [G drop-in] is closed on weekends. Like the community centre has food on Sundays in the winter. But like on Saturdays, it's like they don't want homeless people to eat or something." (Chantal)

At times when no food programs were available, it was necessary to find ways to get money for food. As Dave explained:

"[I'll panhandle] if I have to, if I need to eat something. Yeah, 'cause I know the [outreach] van doesn't come on Sunday nights. And Saturday [there's no food programs], you sit and pan and hope, hope that somebody will give you something."

Thus, youth used charitable programs when they lacked money to purchase food, but they also worked to raise money when they were unable to get food from programs.

Food Quality and Quantity

The quality and quantity of meals served at programs was variable and unpredictable, depending on the food supply on the given day and the staff available to prepare it.

"Some days they'll have some really good food – Like they'll have actual Shepherd's pie. And I'll be like, yeah. I'm taking three of those! And I'll put them on my plate and eat them. But other days, I don't eat." (Anita)

Not all meal programs were described in negative terms. Youth also came across excellent meals.

[At Z shelter] it was like a home cooked meal kind of thing. Like they had roast beef, potatoes, mixed vegetables, salad. ... And it was well prepared, well cooked. It was good for you. It was a good healthy meal. Not like hot dogs and French fries or something like that. Actually, X drop-in is pretty good too. They've got some good food there. I had a well-balanced meal...hot food. Everything was cooked well. It tasted good. I had a little bit of everything. You know I felt good after eating it." (Ken)

Unfortunately, youth were only able to obtain meals at the shelter described by Ken one day per week and only during the winter months.

Youth seemed to understand that sometimes the demand for food was greater than the food supply and the agencies' capacity to serve.

"Some places are stingy with the food, some places aren't. Like, you don't always get a lot on your plate. And then they might not give you seconds. But I suppose they're all trying to ration because there are a lot of homeless people." (Ryan)

Beggars Can't be Choosers

Given their constant need for food and shelter and the limited options available to them, youth regularly found themselves with no choice but to seek assistance from programs that were accessible – whether they liked the programs or not. Youth seemed used to receiving food of variable quality and quantity, in settings that were sometimes crowded and unpleasant. Interestingly, they often acknowledged that the offerings at charitable food programs were in some ways a result of the limited resources in these programs, coupled with the high demands for food assistance.

"Program J is pretty good because they give you a lot [of food], but there's not much room to sit and eat. And sometimes you're sitting by a person who smells. But, I've been smelly too with being outside all the time." (Ryan)

The experience of getting food from charitable programs could be frustrating and time-consuming because demands for food sometimes exceeded the amount that had been prepared, and program workers were left scrambling to feed people.

"[At churches, in general] there are long lineups. And they only have a certain amount of food. And then they have to cook more. So you have to wait. Then the lineup, and then there's no more food so you have to go sit down and get back in the lineup when they say 'okay, food's there'. I have enough aggravation in my life. I don't need that on top of it." (Scott)

Homeless youth's desperate circumstances ultimately made them dependent on programs they disliked or were uncomfortable going to in order to meet their basic needs. Like homeless people in other studies (e.g., Evans & Dowler, 1999), several youth in this study used the phrase "beggars can't be choosers" to express their feelings about getting food in these situations. Despite the limitations of food programs, many youth were grateful for charitable offerings since, at times, they relied on this food.

"I can't complain about the food because it's free. Free food is free food...beggars can't be choosers." (Tony)

Food, Only One of Many Unmet Needs

Although the focus of our research was homeless youth's experiences obtaining food from community programs, the participants repeatedly expressed an appreciation for community programs that were able to offer them choices and comfort and address multiple needs with supportive, compassionate staff.

"I come here because the staff are cool and all my friends are here [not only for the food]. I come every day just to keep warm and hang out with friends." (Anita)

While the need for food was sometimes most urgent, getting food was not always the priority; youth sometimes ate in programs where the food was considered substandard or undesirable because they could meet additional needs at these places. Youth tended to seek out and spend time at multi-service programs that allowed them to make use of facilities in a number of ways (e.g. socialize, acquire food, shower, and obtain support services).

Youth valued opportunities for choice while attending programs, and this extended to the ways in which meal programs operated. In some instances, where the meals were of high quality and the atmosphere was pleasant, youth enjoyed being served at tables (as was the case with the weekly meal served at shelter Z, mentioned previously). But, in general, youth appeared to prefer programs that offered opportunities to actively participate in the process of food selection and preparation.

"Sometimes the van will just put out the bread and all of the stuff and you make your own [sandwiches]. That's cool." (Lena)

The few programs that offered a self-service or buffet style of food delivery stood apart from most of the meal programs that youth frequented, where they simply

ate whatever food was presented to them. Programs that allowed youth to serve themselves enabled them to choose what they ate, and how much they ate.

"[D Drop-ins] good. They had different kinds of soups and chili. Then they had bread, mayonnaise. Everything's all out. We can just make as many sandwiches as you want. You got like tuna, roast beef." (Ken)

Many of the youth who frequented one particular drop-in with an open kitchen, where people could prepare and store food, appreciated the opportunity to make their own meals.

"[At C drop-in] you don't have to wait in a line for [food]. Or you don't have to ask for it. You just buy food and it's yours and you can eat it. You can actually buy your food and they have a kitchen. They've got all the pots and pans. And they've got things like butter and milk. So a lot of the times I just buy Kraft dinner and go to C drop-in and cook it." (Ken)

In summary, our research indicates that homeless youth are nutritionally vulnerable and lack adequate, secure food access. While the charitable meal and snack programs offered by community agencies provide some assistance, navigating this system is complicated by infrequent hours of service, limited and somewhat unreliable meal offerings, and youth's desire to maintain as much choice as possible and to meet other needs in their lives. To more fully understand youth's criticisms of community-based charitable food assistance programs and identify opportunities for improvements, it is necessary to take a closer look at these programs. In the section that follows, we draw on data from our recent study of the organization and delivery of food assistance programs in five Canadian cities to examine the nature of food assistance programs available to homeless youth and identify opportunities to strengthen this system of front-line supports.

Charitable Food Assistance Programs for Homeless Youth

In 2010-2011, we examined charitable food assistance programs in Halifax, Quebec City, Toronto, Edmonton and Victoria. Our goal was to chart the full scope of charitable food services in each city and to assess each city's capacity to recognize and respond to local problems of unmet food needs. We began by developing comprehensive lists of agencies and organizations running charitable food assistance programs in each city, including food banks as well as agencies offering meals and snacks free or for a small charge. We then conducted a telephone survey with each consenting program director to obtain data on their operations. The survey was designed to obtain information about the nature and scope of the agency's food program(s) and included questions about the program's history

and goals, hours/days of operation, staffing, food supply, sources of funding, and capacity to respond to need. Interviews took between 20–40 minutes to complete.

In total, we identified 617 agencies providing food assistance and conducted surveys with 517 of them (84%). The options for food assistance in youth-focused programs are very limited.

Only 19 agencies had food assistance programs specifically targeted to homeless youth – 2 each in Edmonton and Halifax, 3 in Victoria, 5 in Quebec City, and 7 in Toronto. Seventeen of these 19 agencies served meals to homeless youth, and two (both in Quebec City) provided groceries to youth through outreach programs. Three agencies operated outreach programs targeted to homeless youth, providing meals from mobile units (vans), and another was a church that provided a single hot meal to youth in Toronto through the winter months. The other 13 agencies providing meal services for homeless youth were drop-in centres that provided multiple types of services, such as employment, immigration, recreation, housing/shelter, and addiction recovery. Two were arts-based initiatives, seven were connected to larger organizations (five ran out of youth shelters, one was part of a larger LGBTQ centre, and one was part of a church), and four were independent youth drop-in centres with a general focus on supporting homeless/at-risk youth.

Below we examine the food assistance programs operated by these 19 youth-focused agencies in more detail, considering the scope of their operations, resources, and apparent capacity to respond to youth's food needs.

Scope of Operations

Although there were some meal programs identified in our inventory that charged clients a small fee for food, all of the meals in the agencies targeting homeless youth were free. In all cases, meals were provided together with the delivery of other services and supports. All agencies provided youth with access other services, most (17) provided counseling, and 11 were engaged in advocacy. In the two multi-service agencies in Quebec City that delivered groceries to homeless youth through street outreach, workers spent time developing rapport with youth and providing referrals to other services, as well as clean needles and condoms.

Most agencies were delivering food assistance in ways that enabled youth to exert some choice over what they ate. Two of the agencies surveyed had facilities for youth to store food and prepare their own meals: one provided free access to a microwave, toaster oven, fridges and a pantry, and another allowed youth to make use of a full kitchen to prepare any food that they brought in. Five other agencies

had self-service buffets. In most other agencies, food was served cafeteria style, but two agencies served food to people seated at the table. Most agencies permitted clients to have second helpings of food, if the food was available and requested.

Except for two of the meal programs that were operating within shelters, there were no agencies serving meals on a Saturday, and only four other programs serving food on Sundays. Most programs operated on weekdays, but even then, some agencies provided meals on one or two days of the week. The size of meal services also varied dramatically. At one end of the spectrum was a meal program operating in a shelter serving upwards of 2,000 meals per day, each day of the week; however most of those meals would have been consumed by shelter residents and not by the small number of youth 'off the street' who were allowed to eat there. At the other extreme was an agency providing 8 youth with food each weekday, but none on weekends, and a church that fed 115 youth dinner on Tuesdays during the winter. On days when they did serve meals, only two agencies routinely made food available to youth throughout the day, allowing them to eat without following a rigid schedule of meal times. Other agencies offered meals at particular times of the day, most commonly over the lunch or dinner hour; only six agencies served breakfasts.

On days when programs were not in operation, youth could have found charitable meals at other locations (e.g., meal programs that were not targeted to homeless youth but open to anyone). However, a similar, steep drop in meal services on weekends was observed among these meal programs. Moreover, in most cities, there was little evidence of coordination between service providers to ensure consistent levels of food access from one day to the next.

Agencies received funding from a variety of sources including the municipal, provincial and federal levels of government; non-governmental organizations (e.g. the United Way); and private donations from individuals, foundations and organizations. Most of the funding that the food programs received was shared across a number of programs within the agency; only seven of the agencies reported having secure (core) and dedicated funding specifically for their food program. For the most part, the sources of these dedicated funds were private (e.g., annual donations made by individuals, annual fundraising drives, and a charitable foundation), but the youth-focused agencies in Quebec City also reported dedicated public funding. In addition, 13 agencies did fundraising to get money and/or food to support their meal programs.

Although all but two agencies had paid staff working in the food programs, most agencies also relied on volunteer labour. Given their precarious funding situations, it is not surprising that agency food supplies were a mix of purchased

and donated food; 11 agencies purchased half or more of the food they served, but the others relied more heavily on donations. Thirteen agencies were linked to a central collection centre in the area that gathers food from industry and public donations, and for 10 agencies, central collection centres contributed more than three-quarters of the donated food they served. In addition, 12 agencies solicited food donations from local businesses (e.g. Tim Horton's, Starbucks). Much of the food donated by retailers and manufacturers is food they cannot sell because it is nearing expiry dates or is imperfect in some way (e.g. as a result of manufacturing errors or damage during shipping, handling, and storage). Not surprisingly then, nine agencies reported that they sometimes received donations that were inedible, and two agencies said this happened often. The reliance on donated food shaped meal planning and preparation, as the quantity, quality, and variety of food donated was often highly variable, unpredictable, and largely outside the control of the meal providers.

Eleven agencies reported that their meal services were guided by nutrition standards, but we did not assess the nature of these standards. It should be noted, however, that many agencies had difficulty consistently sticking to their meal plans because of supply constraints. Most agencies (83%) said that the people they served needed more food than they provided. About half of the agencies said they sometimes had to serve unplanned items because they were running low on food. Seven agencies sometimes had to reduce portion sizes and eight sometimes had to serve less of a variety of foods because of supply constraints. Five agencies sometimes turned people away, four sometimes shortened their hours of service, and two said they sometimes prioritized who would get to eat because they had run out of food.

It is interesting to note that most of the agencies surveyed had been providing food assistance programs for many years. Thirteen agencies had started running food programs sometime before 2000, and only one agency had started providing charitable food since 2005. This suggests that the operations we are describing are relatively well established. The potential for improvements to the charitable food services documented here is limited by agencies' lack of resources. Three-quarters of youth-focused agencies said they would expand their food services if they could, but were prevented from doing so by a lack of resources, food supplies, and staff support.

Implications of this Research

Three key implications for policy makers and service providers emerge from our work:

1. Food needs to be an integral part of programs for homeless youth. As long as youth are unable to earn enough money to purchase the food they need, then there is a critical role for community-based agencies to provide them with food. The basic need for food is not easily separated from the multitude of physical, social and psychological needs that homeless youth have, and given their stated preference to obtain food together with other services, it is important for food to be an integral part of service delivery in youth-focused agencies. While our data would suggest this is happening now, the meal services appear, in many instances, to be scheduled around other services, rather than being the priority. This means that meals may be offered when the agency is open (e.g., during the daytime, Monday through Friday), but not timed to enable youth to meet their food and nutrition needs on a daily basis.

2. Food programs must serve nutritionally adequate food and coordinate the scheduling of meal services. Helping homeless youth to meet their nutritional needs means offering enough nutritionally adequate food, on a daily basis. Recognition of the importance of nutrition is evident in the high number of agencies that have some kind of nutrition standards. However, none of the agencies we surveyed appeared to be operating meal services that were designed to enable youth to fully meet their nutritional needs on a daily basis. For agencies to achieve this goal, the scale of food provision needs to expand considerably. This requires expanded program resources. In addition to securing adequate facilities and staffing for such programming, funding is needed for food. The unreliable nature of what programs can obtain from donors works against them ever being able to offer a consistent standard of nutritionally adequate food. To support agencies in meeting nutrition standards and developing additional policies/practices for effective meal provision, program directors/coordinators could ask the expertise and assistance of local public health units.

In order for youth to meet their food and nutrition needs, the scheduling of meal services must also be coordinated to ensure that youth can obtain enough food, each day. To achieve this, agencies serving homeless youth must network with each other to determine what food is being offered by each agency and at what times throughout the day. They also need to consult with the youth using their services to understand the gaps in food access. Agencies could then coordinate meal provision to ensure access to three square meals, every day of the week. The existing networks and associations of agencies serving homeless youth provide an ideal opportunity for this type of coordination.

3. In delivering food, programs need to consider client participation. Our interviews with homeless youth also highlight the importance of offering food

in a way that respects their individual preferences and desire for choice. This can be as simple as allowing youth to make their own sandwiches, but it can also extend to providing facilities for youth to prepare their own meals. Homeless youth would likely benefit from expanded programming that provides spaces for them to store and prepare food, ideally providing cooking equipment, cutlery, and dishes, and adding to the food youth are able to acquire with some staples (e.g., cooking oil) and condiments to facilitate meal preparation. Programs that facilitate independent food preparation dramatically expand the options for homeless youth, enabling them to make less expensive and potentially more nutritious food purchases, while at the same time fostering independence. This stands in stark contrast to the passive and sometimes demeaning experience of eating in charitable meal programs.

Conclusion

This chapter offers insight into the use and nature of charitable food assistance programs by homeless youth, from their perspective and that of the agencies that serve them. Many of the shortcomings related to program access and the quality and quantity of food served expressed by homeless youth in Toronto were also reflected in the results of our study of agencies providing charitable food assistance to homeless youth in five Canadian cities. By presenting the results from the two studies, we have sought to highlight both the problematic nature of obtaining food from charitable food programs and the aspects of these programs that appear to be helpful. Our results suggest three important areas for considerations: (1) addressing food needs as an integral part of programs for homeless youth; (2) providing nutritionally adequate food and coordinating meal services across programs; and (3) delivering food programs that include client participation. Our failure to facilitate more adequate food access for homeless youth has a negative impact not only on their nutritional health, but also on their social, psychological, emotional, and physical well-being.

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9

Which Comes First: Sexual Exploitation or Other Risk Exposures Among Street-involved Youth?

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Introduction

Street-involved and homeless youth are a diverse group, who end up in their precarious living conditions for a variety of reasons. Nearly all of these youth face serious threats to their health and well-being as they attempt to navigate a variety of harmful risks, such as alcohol and drug use, inadequate shelter, limited sources of food, discrimination, stigma, and high rates of violence (Roy et al., 2004).

One serious risk street youth face is sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation is defined by Canadian law and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as the exchange of any sexual activities by someone 18 years or younger for money, drugs, food, shelter, or other goods, or even for services, such as transportation (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1990). Canada signed the original UN Convention in 1990, and also signed an optional protocol in 2000, which included governments' commitment to address the sale of children, child pornography and child prostitution (United Nations Treaty Collection, 2000). By this definition, giving money or other things to a young person in exchange for sex is a form of sexual abuse, a violation of their right to be free from coercion (including the pressure of economic survival) in deciding when and with whom to have sex.

Among street-involved and homeless youth in North America, an estimated 1 in 3 report sexual exploitation, whether in Vancouver (Chettiar et al., 2010), Los Angeles (Milburn et al., 2006) or New York City (Gwadz et al., 2007). Even outside major urban centres, in communities such as Prince Rupert, Abbotsford or Kelowna, BC, around 1 in 3 homeless and street-involved young people report ever trading sex for money, drugs, or other things (Saewyc et al., 2008b).

Much of what we know about sexually exploited street-involved youth is from studies of older adolescents and youth, usually between 16 and 24 years of age, typically with an average age of 19 to 20 years (see for example, Haley et al., 2004; Marshall et al., 2008). Very few studies have focused on those under 19 (Cauce et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2007). However, most studies have found that risk exposures and health challenges for street-involved youth begin in early adolescence, or even younger. For example, most of these studies reported that street-involved youth may run away or get kicked out at as young as age 12, and exposure to family violence, alcohol or other drugs may occur even earlier. Sexually exploited older youth in these surveys also report first trading sex at very young ages, often by age 14.

There are common misconceptions about who is more likely to be sexually exploited. This is because much of the research about exploitation has recruited participants from among those who access services and programs, which misses others who are not reached by these services. For example, the recent report on commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth by the Canadian Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights states, “It is clear that the overwhelming majority of sexually exploited children are girls and the perpetrators are adult men” (Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights, 2011), yet large-scale studies of students in school, or multi-city surveys of street-involved and marginalized youth, disagree. Most of them have found that equal numbers of boys and girls have traded sex, or slightly more boys than girls. For example, a national survey of adolescents in grades 7 to 12 in the U.S. found nearly 5% of boys but only 2% of girls had traded sex (Edwards et al., 2006). In BC, a school survey of students in grades 7 to 12 in the rural East Kootenay area found just over 2% of both boys and girls had ever traded sex for drugs (Homma et al., 2012), while 6% of both boys and girls in alternative education programs in seven communities across BC have traded sex for money or other goods (Smith et al., 2008). On the other hand, a study of high school students in Quebec City reported that only 2% of boys, but 6% of girls had traded sex for money or other things (Lavoie et al., 2010). Among multi-city surveys of street youth, several have found nearly equal rates of boys and girls reporting sexual exploitation (see for example, Smith et al., 2007; and Greene et al., 1999).

There are a variety of paths by which young people may first become sexually ex-

ploited, and certain life circumstances appear to increase their risks. Stigma and marginalization due to poverty, racism, or homophobia all contribute to vulnerability; studies have found that Indigenous youth, refugee and immigrant teens, and gay, lesbian and bisexual youth are at greater risk of being sexually exploited (Saewyc et al., 2008b; Edinburgh et al., 2006; Seshia, 2005). Gangs recruit or coerce some young people into sexual exploitation (Auerswald et al., 2004; Saewyc & Edinburgh, 2010). Sometimes young people are recruited into trading sex by other youth, or emotionally manipulated by a “boyfriend” or romantic partner into trading sex to earn money for them to live on (Holger-Ambrose et al., in press). Some young people are exploited while living at home, and may be prostituted or pimped out by a parent or older sibling (Holger-Ambrose et al., in press). Others may trade sex to support their alcohol or drug use, which may have begun when they were drugged in order to be exploited (Edinburgh et al., 2006). A history of sexual abuse, whether in the family or by someone outside the family, can lead to sexual exploitation (Wilson & Widom, 2010), in part because such youth may run away to escape the abuse and end up trading sex to survive. Much of the research exploring pathways into sexual exploitation has involved qualitative studies with limited numbers of exploited youth (for example, Seshia, 2005; Holger-Ambrose et al., in press). While these studies show the variety of situations that can occur, they are limited in their ability to identify some of the broader risk factors, occurring at potentially earlier ages, that might place youth in vulnerable situations that lead to exploitation.

Understanding potential risk factors that may be linked to sexual exploitation for both boys and girls is an important first step toward prevention. Though we find young people reporting both sexual exploitation and possible risk factors, like substance use, at the same time, how do we know whether these risk factors cause sexual exploitation? In other words, which comes first, the various risk factors (e.g. substance use, homelessness) that have been found to be higher among sexually exploited youth, or the sexual exploitation itself? Are they potential causes of exploitation, or perhaps the result of it? To help answer these questions, this chapter draws on the findings from the 2006 British Columbia Street Youth Survey (BCSYS), conducted among street-involved and marginalized teens aged 12 to 18 in nine communities across the province. First, we will consider what other studies and the BCSYS suggest about the pathways into street-involvement or homelessness for adolescents, then what is known about pathways into sexual exploitation, and the timing of both, to tease out potential means for prevention. These findings have implications for policy and practice, particularly concerning the unintended consequences of existing policies and programs. We will compare two approaches to steering youth away from pathways into sexual exploitation, and offer some thoughts on where we might have a window of opportunity to prevent sexual exploitation or to reduce the trauma experienced by street youth who have been exploited. But first, a word about our data source.

About the BC Street Youth Survey

In the fall of 2006, the McCreary Centre Society conducted a Street Youth Survey in 9 communities across BC: Victoria and Nanaimo on Vancouver Island, Prince Rupert and Prince George in the North, Kamloops and Kelowna in the Interior, Abbotsford/Mission and Surrey in the Fraser Valley, and Vancouver (Smith et al., 2007; Saewyc et al., 2009). Unlike most street youth surveys, which focus on large urban centres, these communities include relatively rural and remote areas, and range in size from very small (around 8,000 people in Port Rupert) to regional hubs of 80,000-100,000 people, as well as Vancouver, the third largest metropolitan region in Canada. This makes it a relatively unique survey of street-involved youth. We used a participatory approach in conducting the survey, adopting a variety of strategies to actively bring communities into the research process. For example, we worked with one or two leaders from street youth-serving agencies in each city as community champions, who encouraged their colleagues and partner services to be involved in the research. They also served as an advisory group for the overall project. Through their recommendations, we hired street-involved youth and outreach workers from local agencies as community co-researchers for every step of the research process, from recruiting participants to sharing the results with communities (Martin et al., 2009).

We administered the pencil and paper survey in small groups or individually to young people aged 12 to 18 years who identified as street youth. For this survey, street youth were defined as “being involved in a street lifestyle, which may include being homeless, panhandling, involvement in the sex trade, selling and using drugs, or engaging in criminal activities” (front cover of BC SYS, 2006). To help with literacy issues but ensure privacy, the co-researchers read the questions aloud but the youth filled in the surveys themselves. The survey included more than 150 questions relevant to the life experiences and health issues of street-involved youth, such as reasons for leaving home and different kinds of housing and risk exposures. The survey included several questions about sexual exploitation, although that specific term was not used, as young people do not necessarily recognize their circumstances as exploitative even if the law does. All of the questions were phrased to be clearly understandable and non-judgmental; the survey included a number of positive questions as well, recognizing that youth in even the most toxic situations have personal strengths and supportive relationships that help them survive. We also included several questions about the age at which certain things first occurred, such as the age of first running away, of first being kicked out, being street-involved, first using alcohol, marijuana, and the age of first trading sex. Thus, we could examine the timing of these factors in relation to street involvement and sexual exploitation for both boys and girls. One area in which we did not have a question about first experiences was age of first sexual abuse, as it is difficult to

distinguish between sexual exploitation and other forms of sexual abuse, and some youth may have been reporting the age of first exploitation in both questions.

In all, 762 young people completed the surveys in the nine communities. The average age of the youth was just under 16. Unlike most surveys of older street-involved youth in large cities, which typically reach more boys and young men, half of those in our survey were girls, and 1% identified as transgender. More than half identified as Aboriginal (54%), although the survey also included youth from almost every ethno-cultural background found in Canada, and 14% of boys and 4% of girls said they were born outside Canada. Similar to other surveys of street-involved youth, sexual minority youth were more highly represented among youth in our survey than in the general population: only 76% of boys and 42% of girls identified as exclusively heterosexual and another 9% overall as not sure. More than 40% had been in government care at some point in the past; 65% of boys and 74% of girls had run away, while more than half had also been kicked out; many youth had both run away and been kicked out at different times. One in four young people had lived in the most precarious types of housing in the past year (hotels, tents, cars, shelters, squats, abandoned buildings, on the street, couch-surfing) and 21% were currently doing so; 70% had lived in 2 or more types of housing during the past year, and 19% had lived in 5 or more different types during that time period (Smith et al., 2007).

The picture is not overwhelmingly bleak, however. Street-involved and marginalized young people in BC also identified a number of positive assets in their lives, such as remaining connected to school, and having at least one positive relationship in their family or with other supportive adults. For example, nearly two out of three youth in our survey reported attending school (62%), including more than one-third of those living in the most precarious housing situations. Nine out of ten street-involved youth also felt their mother cared about them. More than half had a pet¹, which has been linked to an increased likelihood of attending school (Smith et al., 2007).

Drawing on the data from these young people, along with the evidence from other studies of street-involved and homeless youth in Canada, let us consider their reasons for street involvement and pathways into sexual exploitation.

1. This included rats, lizards, dogs, and cats. Also, some of these young people were in and out of foster care or family housing, where pets may reside, but while they were on the street, they still felt they “owned” or were connected to that pet. We also found a number of situations where a group of street youth shared a dog and cared for it together, as a street family, and if most members of one group participated in the survey, they all reported they had a pet.

Pathways to Street Involvement

Research in major Canadian and U.S. cities has repeatedly identified the same types of events that influence young people to run away or become street-involved. Most studies have identified family conflict, physical or sexual abuse, family substance use and poverty as some of the major factors. For example, an international study in Toronto, Montreal and Guatemala by Karabanow (2008) found that most of the homeless young women surveyed reported sexual abuse by family members, while young men reported physical abuse, and being kicked out as a sort of ‘tough love’ approach to parenting youth with problem behaviours. A study from Seattle identified family as the main site of physical abuse and non-family members more often as the perpetrators of sexual abuse, noting that the majority of problems these young people face happen before they run away or are kicked out (Tyler & Cauce, 2002). Even among much younger adolescents who have not been homeless for long, family violence is one of the main experiences that lead to leaving home. In St. Paul, Minnesota, police routinely ask a series of 10 questions to all runaways they encounter, one of which is why the youth left; a recent review of responses found the majority of boys and girls indicated some form of family conflict or violence as the reason for leaving (Edinburgh et al., 2012).

Part of the cycle of family problems that leads to street-involvement appears to be family substance use, and early exposure to alcohol and other drugs among street-involved youth is common. A variety of research shows a link between early use of alcohol and other drugs and later substance abuse (Anthony & Petronis, 1995; Chen et al., 2009), while other research shows high levels of substance use among street-involved youth (Smith et al., 2007). Very little of the research, however, has teased out whether early alcohol use leads to running away and exposure to other drugs, or whether early running away leads to exposure to alcohol and drugs on the street.

Street involvement, however, is not always an escape from family violence or neglect. Although 1 in 4 participants in our BC Street Youth Survey said they were on the street because of conflict with parents, and another 15% said they were on the street because of violence and abuse at home, these were not the most common reasons given. One-third of youth said they were street-involved because they had friends on the street, and nearly as many said it was because they feel accepted on the street.

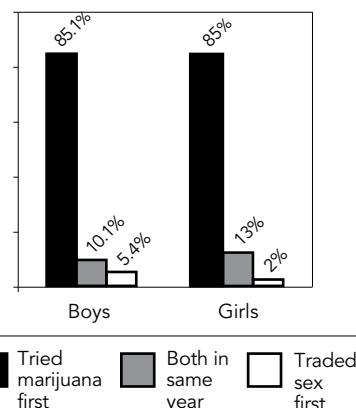
But how does sexual exploitation fit into street youth’s experiences? Not all street-involved youth end up being exploited; in the 2006 BCSYS study, 27% of the girls and 34% of the boys had traded sex for money, drugs, shelter or other goods. So, how does sexual exploitation figure into the risk ex-

periences among street-involved youth? Are some exploited before they run away or are kicked out? Do they begin using alcohol and other drugs before being exploited, during their exploitation (i.e., drugged and then exploited) or do they start using as a way of coping with their exploitation? To the extent that we can disentangle some of these patterns, we may be able to identify potential approaches in policy or practice to help prevent exploitation.

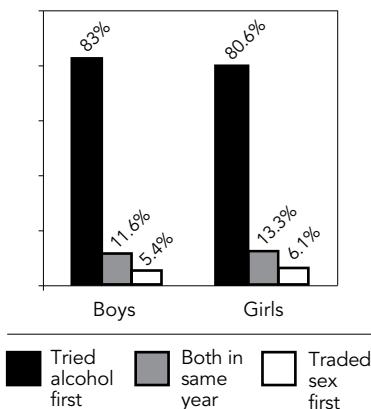
Which Comes First? Age of First Exploitation

With data from the 2006 BCSYS, we were able to identify the time at which youth identified being kicked out, running away, becoming street-involved, and/or trying marijuana or alcohol, in relation to when they were first sexually exploited. For these analyses, our sample was focused only on the 209 young people who had ever traded sex and answered how old they were when they had first done so. We present the average ages of first trading sex and the other risk behaviours for the entire group below, but this is not enough to identify the timing for each youth. For each risk factor, we compared how old youth were the first time they experienced that situation (running away, drug use, etc.) to how old they were the first time they traded sex. Exposure to each risk factor was categorized as happening before they were exploited, after being exploited, or within the same year. Those who said they had not done something (for example, they had never tried marijuana) were included in the group “exploited first.” Because there might be differences in the timing for boys and girls around other risk exposures, even if their average age of first exploitation is the same, we considered boys and girls separately. The results are shown below in a series of charts.

When Tried Marijuana v. Exploited

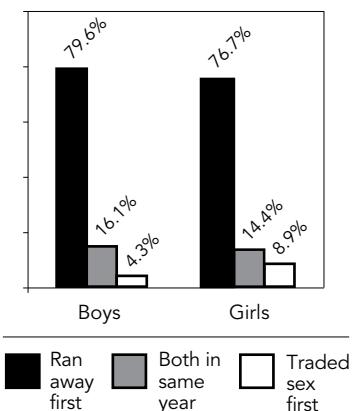


When Tried Alcohol v. Exploited

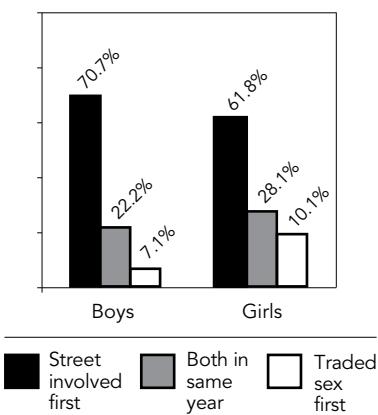


Among sexually exploited youth, the average ages of first trying alcohol or marijuana were quite young, both being between 11 and 12 years old. However, regardless of the age at which young people were first exposed to alcohol or marijuana, the overwhelming majority of them were exploited *after* they had first used these substances, with another 1 in 10 having it happen within the same year, making it impossible to determine which came first.

When Ran Away v. Exploited



When Street Involved v. Exploited



Similarly, youth first became street involved, ran away or were kicked out at fairly young ages. Youth can spend much of their time on the street with friends who are homeless and still go to a home at night, or can become involved in the street economy (i.e., panhandling, selling drugs, busking on street corners for income) while living with family, so running away or being kicked out could happen before or after street involvement. On average, exploited youth became street involved at about 12.4 years old, while they first ran away at about 12.7 years, and were first kicked out at about 13.3 years of age. The majority of boys and girls became street involved before trading sex; nearly 1 in 4 youth traded sex and became street-involved in the same year, and 1 in 10 were exploited before becoming street-involved.

Youth were also more likely to have run away before first being exploited, with even fewer reporting that running away and exploitation happened during the same year, or that they traded sex before running away.

The pattern is slightly different among those who were kicked out, especially for girls. Although the majority of youth were still kicked out before being exploited, more than 1 in 5 girls reported first trading sex at a younger age than first being kicked out, as did 7% of boys, while another 1 in 5 reported trading sex and being kicked out in the same year. For girls, this may be explained in part by their answers to another survey question, where they were living when they first traded

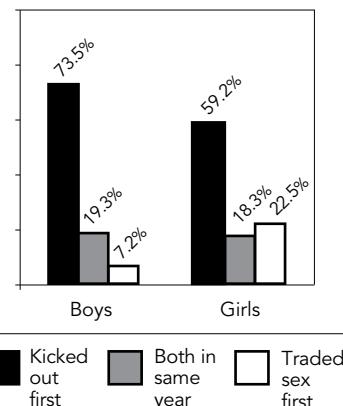
sex: 27.4% of girls reported they were living at home when they first traded sex, a significantly higher rate than the 14.4% of boys. Although we cannot conclude from this that family members were actually involved in sexually exploiting these boys and girls, it is possible, even likely, that this was happening in some cases.

One of the issues we could not test was whether sexual abuse (other than exploitation) occurred before or after sexual exploitation, because we did not ask the age of first sexual abuse. Sexual exploitation itself is a form of sexual abuse, so all of them should have indicated experience of sexual abuse, but exploitation may not always be recognized as abuse by young people; 73% of exploited girls and only 30% of exploited boys reported they had been sexually abused. On the other hand, we did ask who had sexually abused them, and the majority of girls (55%) and 17% of boys said they had been sexually abused by family members, relatives, or caregivers such as foster parents.

These findings are clear: young people face significantly increased risk of sexual exploitation, regardless of gender, *after* leaving home, or being forced from home, and becoming street-involved. Young people who are leaving home due to abuse, family conflict, or substance use issues are already experiencing trauma, and are vulnerable to exploitation and further trauma. These findings suggest that interventions to prevent or address sexual exploitation may be more effective when they target early risks, focusing on younger adolescents who are just beginning to run away, or are starting alcohol or marijuana use at very young ages, and whose families are dealing with conflict and struggling with parenting young teens. Indeed, preventing youth from being kicked out and becoming street-involved or persistently homeless appears to be a key strategy for preventing a good deal of sexual exploitation of young people. While it is important to address the trauma and urgent needs of young people who are already homeless or street-involved and sexually exploited, it would be far more effective to prevent their vulnerability to sexual exploitation in the first place.

Since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child's optional protocol on sexual exploitation in 2000 by both Canada and the U.S. (United Nations Treaty Collection, 2000), perspectives in law enforcement and child welfare in North America have started to shift from considering child and adolescent prostitution as criminal or delinquent behaviour on the part of the adolescent,

When Kicked Out v. Exploited



to a recognition that it is a form of sexual abuse. The right to safety and protection from violence is an important element of the Convention, but child welfare policies and community programs seldom engage with young people and their families at the point where teens are first running away, only intervening after they have become street-involved and persistently homeless (street-entrenched). Programs to help young people exit sex work reach out primarily to youth and young adults who have already been exploited for years. Must we wait? What policies or programs might make a difference earlier in the pathway? Let us critically consider some recent approaches and their potential to act upstream in preventing some of the health challenges faced by sexually exploited youth.

Policies or Programs to Address Sexual Exploitation Upstream

Implementing policy and programs to protect street-involved youth is no easy task. The right to safety and protection needs to be balanced against other rights in the UN convention that support youth's growing autonomy, such as their right to have a say in decisions that affect them. Of the various approaches to early intervention in street involvement and sexual exploitation that have been put into action around the world, most have elements in common with two particular approaches, one used in Alberta, and the other in both Scotland and Minnesota. Both involve recognizing youth who trade sex as victims of sexual exploitation, and runaways as youth at high risk for exploitation, but the two strategies take different directions to address their needs.

Protection of Sexually Exploited Children/Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Laws in Alberta

The Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution (PChIP) legislation, now called the Protection of Sexually Exploited Children (PSECA), was first introduced in 1999 as an attempt to protect children from sexual exploitation. It developed from an Alberta task force that was formed to respond to the issue of sexual exploitation (Alberta Children's Services, 2004), stimulated in part by the 1997 review of Canada's commitments to the UN Convention that outlined each province's commitment to ensure children were protected. The task force recommended increased powers for police, child welfare workers and families to ensure sexually exploited youth were protected (Government of Canada, 2001).

Although there were a number of voluntary supports for youth included in the PChIP programming, a key element of the approach was the development of Protective Safe Houses. Once a youth is suspected by authorities of being sexually exploited, police or social workers are legally permitted to apprehend the young person and detain them for up to 42 days in a safe house. The goal appears to

be to remove them from dangerous street environments and give them access to victim protection services and support (Government of Alberta, 2010). Although the purpose of the legislation is clearly aimed at supporting exploited youth as victims, it may not always work in the best interest of the exploited child or youth.

One of the potential concerns is that the legislation places protection above other human rights of exploited youth, and has the potential to cause further stigmatization. In one evaluation, youth focus groups and other stakeholders critiqued the involuntary detention approach as punishing youth who trade sex, saying that law enforcement singled out girls who are exploited rather than considering both boys and girls, and that the law did not address the underlying reasons that youth trade sex, often for survival (Alberta Children's Services, 2004). Stakeholders raised questions about whether the approach, where young people can be forced against their will into shelters merely on suspicion of involvement in prostitution, is a form of detention without actually being charged with or convicted of a crime. They also suggested it forces exploited youth to continue trading sex "underground," in more hidden areas, and avoid using services, making them less accessible to social workers or other essential service providers. At the same time, both staff and some former youth detained in the protective safe houses felt it gave them an opportunity for reflection in a safe place, and sometimes connected them with other services.

Others have cited this approach as an example of potential Charter rights violations for Canadian street-involved youth. Grover (2002) argued that PSECA does not align with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as the term, the 'best interest of the child,' an important clause in the Convention, is not actually included in the wording of the law (PSECA). Grover also argued that when the provincial government neglects to follow up or provide essential services to all street-involved youth, they are in violation of section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and of their responsibility to act as the *parens patriae*, the guardian of those in the country who cannot care for themselves, particularly children and youth.

To date, there has been limited evaluation of PSECA outcomes among youth who have been detained in safe houses, beyond tracking whether they have shelter 90 days after they are released from detention. As an intervention, PSECA is still closer to a harm reduction strategy, trying to reduce the harms from something that is already happening, than to a prevention strategy, since many of the youth they assist are already on the street and have already experienced sexual exploitation. It is unclear whether it is at all effective as early prevention for youth who are not yet persistently street-involved or being exploited.

Focusing on Young Runaways in Minnesota and Scotland

A different approach to early intervention and prevention has evolved in two different places: Grampian, Scotland, and St. Paul, Minnesota. In both settings, youth who run away or are kicked out are contacted and screened by either social workers or police as part of a referral service for addressing issues before youth become persistently homeless or street-involved. In Grampian, the Return Home Welfare program contacts youth within 5 days of their return home after running away, to interview them, assess their current circumstances, and refer them to supportive services when needed (Burgess et al., 2011). The youth generally were away from home for relatively short periods, as opposed to being persistently street-involved or homeless. In Minnesota, the Runaway Intervention Program (RIP) works in partnership with the police and other agencies to provide assessment and services for young runaways who have been sexually assaulted or exploited, or who are at risk of exploitation (Edinburgh & Saewyc, 2009). The program helped the local police department to then develop and implement a 10 Questions tool to use whenever they encountered runaways or youth who have been kicked out, to assess safety at home, reasons for leaving, potential injuries and harm that had occurred while the teen had been away from home, and referrals to the Runaway Intervention Program for more in-depth evaluation and access to home visits from nurses, health education, counselling, and other supportive services (Edinburgh et al., 2012). The police screening appears to be an effective route for identifying youth at risk who are new to the cycle of street-involvement, who may not yet be sexually exploited, and connecting them with needed support services.

RIP offers health care and case management services designed to reconnect young runaways with family, school, and other caring adults, offering positive youth development opportunities such as summer camp and volunteer activities, while also supporting parents in improving their relationships with their teens. Although the program was originally designed primarily for girls, it has been expanded recently to include boys, as well. An extensive evaluation of the first two years of the program showed that youth involved in RIP for 6 to 12 months showed significant improvements in family relationships, school attendance, and self-esteem, as well as reduced risk behaviours, trauma symptoms, and runaway episodes (Saewyc & Edinburgh, 2010). The evaluation showed so much improvement, in fact, that after 6 to 12 months of involvement in RIP, they were indistinguishable, with regard to the characteristics mentioned above, from a comparison group of girls in the general population who had never been abused. Even more promising, girls who had the highest levels of trauma, the lowest self-esteem, and the fewest social supports when entering the program actually improved the most with the intervention.

This completely voluntary approach, which reconnects youth to the social en-

vironments and caring relationships that are important to the healthy development of all young people, is focused earlier in the course of street involvement and homelessness and thus, may have a greater potential for prevention of sexual exploitation, possibly even preventing street involvement or homelessness itself. It may also work as harm reduction for those who are already exploited, or for the 1 in 4 young people identified in the BC Street Youth Survey as living at home when they were first sexually exploited; while the majority of young runaways in the RIP evaluation had not yet been sexually exploited, 14% had been prostituted, yet they too reported improvements as part of the program.

Conclusion

In working to offer safety and support for street-involved and sexually exploited youth, our policy and programs should aim to strike a balance between reducing the risks they face and fostering their connections to those they care about and who can care for them. Untangling the sequence of events that leads to homelessness – and among street-involved youth, the sequence that leads to increased risk of sexually exploitation – gives us clues as to when and how we might better intervene. As this research suggests, there are some key points in the pathway where prevention services might work best, when young people are just beginning to show the symptoms of family problems, such as early alcohol use, or family conflict, and the first runaway episodes. Although the interventions described in this chapter are still not at these earliest points along the pathway, as they focus on first runaway episodes rather than family problems, they do suggest that providing early support to youth and their families who are facing challenges is one potential area where policy may be effective. These may be important first line approaches, before young people become chronically street-involved and need harm reduction strategies instead.

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10

Promoting Health for Homeless and Street-involved Youth: Use and Views of Services of Street-involved Youth in Calgary

Catherine Worthington, Bruce MacLaurin

Introduction

Street-involved youth are seen hanging out or living on the streets of most major Canadian urban centers. The economic boom that occurred in Alberta in the early to mid-2000s drew people to the city of Calgary, putting greater pressure on affordable housing, and increasing the number of youth on Calgary's streets. The number of homeless people in Calgary went up 32% between 2004 and 2006, and youth homelessness grew at a faster rate than the adult homeless population during this period (City of Calgary, 2006). For youth and health service providers in Calgary, the issues faced by street-involved youth were thus of growing concern. Table 1 provides information about Calgary housing and homelessness at the time of the study.

In particular, the health and well-being issues of street-involved youth were a major focus of discussion among Calgary service providers, as the link between homelessness and poor health is clear (Turnbull et al., 2007). The health risks of street-involved youth are many, and may arise from *street environmental risks*, including inadequate shelter, poor diet, and violence (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002;

Gaetz, 2004). They may also result from experiences while on the street including those related to *sexual activity* (i.e. survival/obligatory sex or prostitution), such as high rates of sexually transmitted infections (or STIs, such as HIV, Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, or hepatitis B) and high-risk pregnancy (Boivin et al., 2005; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006a; Weber et al., 2002); *substance use*, such as drug overdoses, or hepatitis B, C, or HIV infection through sharing of needles or drug injection equipment (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2007; Roy et al., 2007); and *isolation and lack of social support*, which may lead to mental health problems (including depression and suicide attempts), or worsen existing mental

Table 1

Calgary Housing and Homelessness (2006)	
Calgary Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) Population (2006) ¹	1.1 million
Rental households spending more than 50% on shelter (at risk of homelessness) (2006 census) ²	8,605, 8.6% of all households
Average market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Calgary (2006) ³	\$960, 16.9% increase from 2005
Rental vacancy rate (2006) ³	0.5%
Social (non-market) housing units (2005) ⁴	12,667
Count of homeless people (point in time) – Calgary total (2006) ⁵	3,436
Count of homeless people (point in time)– Calgary youth (age 24 and younger) (2006) ⁵	647 (18.8% of total count)
Emergency Shelter beds – Calgary (2006) ⁶	1,442 available (of which 1,383 (96%) occupied)
Transitional Shelter beds – Calgary (2006) ⁶	1,635 available (of which 1,440 (88%) occupied)

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health issues (Boivin et al., 2004; Kidd, 2006). While many street youth use hospital emergency services and health clinics, they typically only turn to these when seriously injured or ill, and often cannot afford medicines (Carlson et al., 2006; Ensign & Bell, 2004; Geber, 1997).

Youth and health service providers in Calgary wanted to understand how to improve services to support health and healthy behaviours for street-involved youth. From 2004-2007, health and social service providers worked together with researchers to conduct a study with street-involved youth in Calgary. One of the goals of the study was to better understand the types of services used by street-involved youth with different levels of street involvement, and to hear the opinions of street-involved youth about services, in order to improve service delivery. In this chapter, we review the results of the *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street Study* regarding service use by street-involved youth in Calgary, report youth's views of services, and discuss implications for youth services (Worthington et al., 2008; Worthington & MacLaurin, 2009).

Defining Street-involved Youth for Health Studies

A variety of definitions of street youth have been used, but most health research in Canada focuses on youth under 25 who face some degree of precarious housing (e.g., those 'couch surfing' at friends' homes or staying in hotels) or absolute homelessness (those living outdoors, in abandoned buildings or shelters) over a given time period, and who use street services (Boivin et al., 2005; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006b). A more inclusive perspective defines street-involved youth as young people under the age of 25 who spend considerable amounts of time on the street, hang out with others on the street, and who may live or have lived independently of parents or guardians in marginal or precarious situations (Brannigan & Caputo, 1993). This approach acknowledges diversity among the street-involved youth population, and includes youth who may not be accessing services, as well as youth who may be street-involved, but who have not lived on the street. This approach also considers factors that lead to street involvement, which typically include family conflict, violence or abuse (Adlaf & Zhanowicz, 1999; Hyde, 2005), individual issues (such as mental health issues and substance use) (Boivin et al., 2005; Martijn & Sharpe, 2006), or child welfare or educational systems issues (Thompson et al., 2004).

Within the last decade, there has been growing recognition within the research literature that for youth, involvement with the street is broken up into episodes, and may consist of one or more cycles on the street where youth become more involved in street life for a period before moving away from street involvement, and then perhaps back again (Adlaf & Zhanowicz,

1999; Auerswald & Eyre, 2002). Studies have thus recently begun to examine health risks, health outcomes, and use of street services according to the levels and types of street involvement to understand the different ways that youth use services and to develop more appropriate services (Carlson et al., 2006; Garrett et al., 2008; Greene et al., 1997).

The Calgary Youth, Health and The Street Study

In order to examine street and health services use by street-involved youth with different levels of street involvement, as well as their views of services, this study used a community-based research approach. Community members (including 3 street-involved youth and representatives of 14 agencies) acted as research team members, and contributed to the drafting of study questions and survey and interview instruments, the administering of surveys, and the interpretation of data. Community-based research is a form of research where community members (in this case, street-involved youth) and service providers collaborate with researchers through the entire research process. Because community members help establish the research questions and the research methods, study results are relevant to the community, and results are used by community agencies. The process also ensures that researchers understand community contexts, and provides research training and skill-building for community members (Israel et al., 1998).

The *Calgary Youth, Health and the Street Study* included a paper-and-pencil survey completed by 355 street-involved youth, and in-depth interviews with 42 street-involved youth to supplement the survey information. The self-completed survey included questions on childhood experiences, street experiences, health, services use and views of services. Youth targeted for the study were between the ages of 14 and 24 (although participation of youth up to the age of 29 was accepted if they engaged with other youth), and involved in street-life to varying degrees. Thus, in this study, the term ‘street-involved youth’ included youth who were currently living on the street, youth who were not living on the street but who had lived on the street at any time in the past, and youth who were involved with street culture but were not currently living on the street and never had. This last group primarily included youth who spent a large amount of time on the street or in public places during the day. An effort was made to collect surveys in as many areas and locations as possible in order to attract a diverse group of street-involved youth participants. Surveys were collected in all quadrants of the city of Calgary, and were conducted in indoor and outdoor gathering places, agency locations, and shelters.

Of the 355 survey participants, 60% were male (39% were female, and 1% were transgender), 51% were 19 or younger (43% were 20-24, and 6% were 25 or older), and while 62% were White, 26% were Aboriginal (12% said

“other”). A total of 47% of survey participants were currently living on the street (*Currently on Street*); 33% were not living on the street but had lived on the street in the past (*Not on street – History*); and 20% were involved with street culture (i.e., who spent a good deal of time on the street or in public places during the day) but were not currently living on the street and had not lived on the street in the past (*Not on Street – No History*).

Purposive (a sample selected in a deliberate and non-random fashion to achieve a certain goal) and snowball sampling (a sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances) were used to recruit youth for interviews from 9 Calgary youth street services. The 42 qualitative interview participants came from various ethno-cultural backgrounds (White, Aboriginal and visible minorities), and ranged in age from early teens to late 20s, but were predominantly in their early 20s. A total of 21 males and 23 females were interviewed. Fourteen interview participants were *Currently on Street*; 23 were *Not on Street – No History*; and 5 youth were *Not on Street – History*.

In the next sections, study results regarding survey respondents’ use and views of street and health services are presented first for the survey respondents. These are followed by the qualitative interview results to provide further commentary on study participants’ views of services.

Survey Results: Street Services Use and Views of Services

Surveyed youth reported using a variety of services within the past three months (see Table 2). Overall, only 11% indicated that they had used no services in the past 3 months. Among services used most frequently were shelters (48%), drop-in centers (44%), medical clinics (41%), outreach services (37%), and food banks (32%). As might be expected, youth *Currently on Street* reported significantly greater use of shelters (72%), drop-in centers (68%), and outreach services (53%) than other youth. Those *Not on Street – History* more frequently reported using counselling services (26%), compared to 15% of youth *Not on Street – No History*, and only 10% of youth *Currently on Street*. Finally, youth *Currently on Street* reported the greatest use of services overall, whereas youth *Not on Street – No History* reported using services the least.

Table 2

Services Used in the Past Three Months (N=333)	Current Level of Street Involvement							TOTAL	
	Not on Street - No History		Not on Street - History		Currently on Street				
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%		
Food banks	22%	14	38%	43	33%	50	32%	107	
Shelters *	19%	12	32%	36	72%	111	48%	159	
Drop-in centres *	12%	8	30%	34	68%	105	44%	147	
Medical clinics	35%	23	45%	51	40%	61	41%	135	
Outreach services *	9%	6	32%	36	53%	81	37%	123	
Financial aid	6%	4	15%	17	8%	13	10%	34	
Employment services	23%	15	21%	24	29%	44	25%	83	
Educational services	20%	13	16%	18	10%	16	14%	47	
Counselling services	15%	10	26%	30	10%	16	17%	56	
No services used	22%	14	17%	19	2%	3	11%	36	
TOTAL	Column totals not provided because participants could choose multiple responses								

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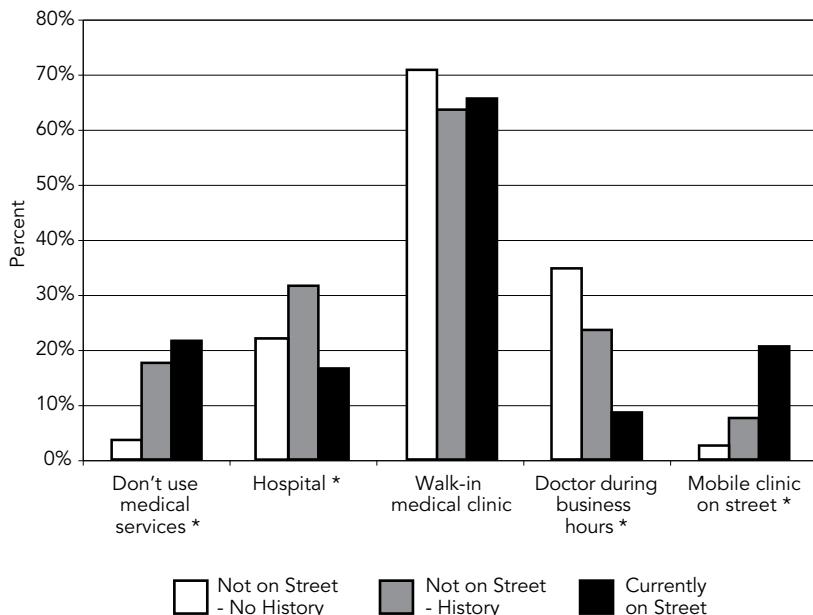
Based on a sample of 333 responses with information about use of street services and current street involvement

* Significance level $p \leq .05$

When asked about problems with each street service, the majority (ranging from 51% to 64%) of youth respondents indicated that they had not had any problems. Overall, only 5% to 12% reported issues with specific types of services. For example, for food banks, 9% overall said that the service was not open when they needed it, and 8% said that the rules were rigid. For shelters, 12% overall said that the staff were not helpful, and 10% said they had been refused service. Where there were differences among youth with different levels of street involvement, youth *Currently on Street* were more likely to report problems: 11% of Youth *Currently on Street* indicated they had been refused service at a food bank (compared with 6% of those *Not on Street – History*), and 18% of youth *Currently on Street* indicated staff were not helpful, compared with 7% of youth *Not on Street – History*, and 2% of youth *Not on Street – No History*.

Medical Services Use and Views of Services

Figure 1: Use of Medical Services by Level of Street Involvement



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* Significance level $p \leq .05$

Types of medical services used varied by level of street involvement (see Figure 1). Overall, 66% had used a walk-in medical clinic, 23% had used a hospital, 19% had used a doctor during business hours, and 17% said “at this time” they did not use medical services. Youth *Currently on Street* more often reported not using any medical services (22%), compared to 18% of youth *Not on Street – History*, and only 4% of those *Not on Street – No History*. Those youth *Not on Street – History* more often reported using hospitals (32%), while youth *Not on Street – No History* more frequently reported using a doctor during business hours (35%), and youth *Currently on Street* more often used a mobile clinic on the street (21%).

Youth were asked what problems they had encountered, if any, when trying to use medical services. Overall, 37% said there were no problems. The greatest problem noted was waiting times (47% of the survey participants said this was a problem), 17% said they had problems due to not having a health card or medical insurance, 16% said they had problems with staff attitudes, and 15% said they were afraid of being judged (see Table 3).

Table 3

Problems with Medical Services (N=341)	Current Level of Street Involvement							
	Not on Street - No History		Not on Street - History		Currently on Street		TOTAL	
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
None	45%	32	35%	39	34%	54	37%	125
Confidentiality	4%	2	12%	14	8%	13	9%	30
Needed a health card/insurance *	7%	5	21%	24	19%	29	17%	58
Fear of being judged	10%	7	20%	23	14%	22	15%	52
Staff attitudes *	6%	4	19%	21	19%	30	16%	55
Rules and regulations	4%	3	5%	6	6%	10	6%	19
Consent	4%	3	6%	7	5%	7	5%	17
Waiting time	47%	33	41%	46	51%	80	47%	159
TOTAL	Column totals not provided because participants could choose multiple responses							

Calgary Youth, Health and the Street - Final Report

Based on a sample of 341 responses with information about problems with medical services and current street involvement

* Significance level $p \leq .05$

Most Recent Medical and Dental Care

Surveyed youth were asked about the last time they had used medical or dental care (see Tables 4 and 5). Overall, 19% had received medical care within the past week, while another 17% said they last received medical care over one year ago. For dental care, there was also great variation, with 27% of participants saying they had been to the dentist within the past 6 months, and 19% indicating they had last been to the dentist more than 5 years ago. No significant differences were found between levels of street involvement and the last time youth received medical care. However, youth *Not on Street – No History* reported seeing a dentist within the past six months significantly more than other youth (50%), compared to 28% of those *Not on Street – History*, and 15% of those *Currently on Street*. Youth *Currently on Street* more often reported seeing a dentist more than five years ago (29%).

Table 4

Last Medical/Dental Care by Level of Street Involvement								
Last medical care	Current Level of Street Involvement						TOTAL	
	Not on Street - No History		Not on Street - History		Currently on Street			
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Within past week	22%	15	17%	20	17%	27	19%	62
Between 1 week and 1 month ago	15%	10	23%	26	17%	26	18%	62
Between 1 and 6 months ago	32%	22	35%	40	32%	51	33%	113
Between 6 months and 1 year ago	17%	12	10%	11	14%	22	13%	45
More than 1 year ago	14%	10	15%	17	20%	32	17%	59
TOTAL	100%	69	100%	114	100%	158	100%	341

Calgary Youth, Health and the Street - Final Report

Based on a sample of 341 responses with information about last medical care and current street involvement

Table 5

Last Dental Care by Level of Street Involvement								
Last Dental Care *	Current Level of Street Involvement						TOTAL	
	Not on Street - No History		Not on Street - History		Currently on Street			
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#
Within past 6 months	50%	35	28%	33	15%	24	27%	92
Between 6 months and 1 year ago	13%	9	26%	30	17%	28	19%	67
Between 1 and 2 years ago	19%	13	22%	26	16%	26	19%	65
Between 2 and 5 years ago	7%	5	14%	16	23%	36	16%	57
More than 5 years ago	11%	8	10%	12	29%	46	19%	66
TOTAL	100%	70	100%	117	100%	160	100%	347

Calgary Youth, Health and the Street - Final Report

Based on a sample of 347 responses with information about last dental care and current street involvement

* Significance level p ≤ .05

Qualitative Interviews: Service Views of Calgary's Street-involved Youth

Street Services for Youth

The 42 youth who participated in in-depth interviews described a variety of agencies that provided services specifically to street-involved youth. They also discussed the range of services these agencies provided including shelter/housing, necessities such as food, counselling and support, skills and employment training, and referrals to other services. The majority of youth spoke positively about many aspects of the services available for street-involved youth. Youth appreciated flexibility of services, positive employee attitudes, a comfortable atmosphere, and a sense of safety and security. Many of the concerns expressed about services were direct opposites: inflexible service policies, poor employee attitudes, inaccessible location of services, and limited hours of service. When views of services were examined by level of street involvement, there were some differences by specific type of service. In the next sections, youths' general views on the positive and negative aspects of services will be described, and then the differences for some services by level of street involvement will be presented.

Positive Aspects of Service

The youth who were interviewed indicated that they appreciated programs that were flexible. The youth felt that flexibility around curfew times and open meal programs were necessary in meeting individual needs. As one youth explained:

[Agency X] was a lot more lenient. Like if I called them up and I was like, "Yeah, I'm hanging out with a friend for a while. Is that okay?" They'd be like, "Yeah. Stop by at this time then." Or they'd be like, "Well, what time were you planning on showing up?" And they gave me more leniency – I couldn't do that every day, but like they'd let me do that every once in a while as a treat so I didn't have an early curfew.

Flexible program times and full day programs were also appreciated. One youth accessing these services said, "You can come and go as you please and, you know, you don't have to be there if you don't want to."

Positive employee attitudes were another aspect of services that youth described as being essential to a good program. The majority of the youth shared positive experiences in interacting with the staff, describing ease of conversation, mutual respect and support as integral to relationship building. Several youth cited the relatively young age of the staff as a positive factor.

They were “really cool, down to earth people.” As one youth described:

But the staff here are very young and friendly and I believe I can trust them. If I have some information or if I need help with something, I wouldn't be, you know, ashamed or anything. I'd be comfortable to talk to them because they're so young, and they're a couple years older than me so they already went through that and their generation is basically the same.

One youth described staff as “friendly. You can sit around there and they listen – Yeah, I guess you could talk to them and they’ll listen, kind of help you out with pointers, which way to go.” Another youth said, “I’ve always been able to talk to them about anything. It’s kept me out of trouble.” Several also shared experiences where staff actively assisted them. One youth explained:

And then I came – I went to [Agency X], and I talked to one of the staff members and she was actually the one that helped me get off crystal meth. She took me to the doctor's and that same day I saw a doctor and I got sleep after that.

The youth who were interviewed also appreciated when agency staff interacted with them without judgment. Interview respondents stated that agency staff’s non-judgmental attitudes were essential to creating an open and accepting atmosphere and developing trust. One youth explained in detail:

Like I said before, you can hang out, it doesn't matter who you are, who you've been, they don't – they don't look at the bad points in you. They just welcome you in and hope you have a good time. You're safe. You can sit back and just relax, make new friends, and guaranteed, there's a person in there that's been through the same things you have. The people that work there or volunteer there, they're willing to talk to you and it doesn't matter what time of day, what time of night. They extend their ass to you, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Many of the youth interviewed also expressed their appreciation for the direction and guidance they received when they were struggling. The bond created allowed staff to let youth know when they felt they were making a mistake. One youth said, “They gave me a place of a chance,” and another described the style of discipline:

They actually [behaved] like literal adults who, when you're not doing something, they're all, “Hey, you're not doing something.” But you know, yeah, you have fun. Yeah, they can be all fun with you, but when it's time to work you need to – They're like, “Hey, it's time to work.”

Many youth commented that the services they enjoyed were those that offered a comfortable atmosphere and entertainment. In the shelters, the youth appreciated access to a range of activities. As one youth said:

You know, you have a pool table, you have TV, you have a phone, you know, you can check your e-mail. Like it's just – it's just like a comfortable environment when I come here.

Youth indicated they often associated these services with “home” or “a homey feeling.” These services were open to all youth and there was no concern about being turned away. As one youth described:

It's a place to come just to chill out, you know, it's still like my home until I turn twenty-one, you know? Like, I like coming here just to relax. It gets me away from everybody else. All the stupid shit.

Finally, youth appreciated the safety and security offered by some services for street-involved youth. These services provided not only a drug and alcohol free environment but also an alternative to negative influences and criminal activities. These services provided spaces where youth could relax. As one youth said:

So I like coming here because instead of going out and doing drugs or going out and partying and getting into fights and stuff I come here and I can dance and there's no alcohol and there's no drugs here so I can dance, play pool, and hang out with all my friends. I just like this place.

And another said, “There was no fights. No one expected you to act a different way. They never turned you away. It was great. It was an alternate place in my mind to hang out. You were safe.”

Service Concerns

Youth who were interviewed identified a variety of concerns with street-youth services. These included the location of and distance between services, limited hours of service, personal safety issues, employee attitudes, and policies that restricted services to certain youth. As previously noted, many of the concerns expressed contrasted with opinions expressed about the positive elements of service (e.g., sense of security, flexibility, and positive employee attitudes and service environment).

Location was one of the most frequently identified limitations to the services provided to the youth. The services were often described as being in unsafe neighbourhoods or not accessible due to the distance from the main meeting

areas for the youth. Many youth stated that they did not use some services or limited their use of some services because the location was not “easy to access for youth on the street.” The youth were undecided about service locations downtown. As one youth said, “That’s another unknown area that I won’t go down... that’s all crack alley basically.” They acknowledge that services provided in the downtown core were accessible but recognized that the location came with negative influences and easy access to substances. One youth described his difficulty:

A lot of the shelters are downtown and that's just kind of inconvenient for me because I... can't be downtown right now. So it's kind of hard, I'll have no choice but it's [access to drugs] a risk that I'm taking every time I go.

A few interview participants also noted that services for youth were spread throughout the city. As a means of addressing distances between service locations, youth were given bus tickets and bus passes. Bus passes and bus tickets could often be earned for different chores done around a facility. As one youth said, “Honestly, I don’t mind. If she asked me to both – clean both of the bathrooms for a bus ticket, it’s like, you know, it’s a free bus ticket. It’s my way home, you know.”

Limited hours of operation were identified as a service limitation. Youth stated that many of the shelters woke youth early and then closed for the day. Youth felt this was inconvenient because they needed “a place where you can hang out for the day.” This raised particular concerns during bad weather or when youth were sick. Some other youth programming was closed during the weekends, which youth felt “kind of sucks because it’s usually when kids get into most trouble.” One youth described the issue in detail:

I'm on the street, I have nowhere to go, the shelters, there's no place to go during the day to sleep. Unless you get, like, a sick pass and say you need days, but if you're working nights, there's no place during the day where you can go to sleep. If you're working nights, you need to have proof that you're working nights. If you're working for cash, they're not gonna let you sleep during the day because there's no proof that you actually have a job! They're, like, "You just want to sleep during the day." [They] say, "Screw it, you don't wanna go to work, you're just lazy." But there's a lot of people out there, I'm like that, that just need once in awhile they need, like, a day to relax. Today's my day off, if I was on the streets and I was working full-time, my day off, we need some place you could go sleep.

Availability of shelter was a service limitation identified by a few youth who were interviewed. These youth stated that finding shelter could be difficult some nights because of the number of youth on the streets. Weather played a role in

the availability of spaces in shelters especially during “winter, if you try to get into a safe house it’s actually really difficult because there’s really only, like, three youth safe houses.” Youth stated that during bad weather, shelters were “always packed, they’re always full. You’re lucky if you can stay in a bed in [Agency X].”

Personal safety was identified as another concern about youth services. Several interview participants stated that some services were better equipped than others because of funding. Where some services offered privacy, entertainment, and meals, others were less developed. As one youth described:

Um, you know, [Agency X], I don’t really like the atmosphere at [Agency X]. I understand they don’t have quite the same funding or the situation, right. You know, it feels like you’re sleeping in a warehouse. Like I’ve gone to [Agency X] and um their different warehouses that they have, and that’s what it feels like, you know. You’ve got a mat, but you know, in [Agency Y], you’ve got the little walls and a shower curtain.

Youth said the places with less funding were “dirty” and could be dangerous. One youth described these agencies as places “I would never go [again]. I hated hanging out there, like, after dark. I hated hanging out at [Agency X] after dark, any, like, shady place like that where there’s a lot of crime.” These youth felt that the services that provided only the bare necessities often housed people who were drunk or high. Youth indicated that in these accommodations they feared for their personal safety and worried about losing their personal belongings. One youth recalled a time when he “woke up and a guy was trying to take my boots off my feet.”

Interview participants felt that using some services indicated that they had “hit rock bottom” and that after using certain services it “was a very downhill step” as it was easy to get “into a lot of criminal activities.” Youth indicated that criminal activity was associated with some services and not others. One youth said, “The parents send them to [Agency X]. Now they’re stealing cars and doing drugs. It’s not – it doesn’t help.” Youth stated that they would avoid certain services because of the reputation clients had for substance use and criminal activity on site. Some of the youth felt that using these services might lead them to negative influences. Several made connections such as “I started smoking weed when I was in [Agency X]” or “I learned more about the street at [Agency Y].” As one youth described:

I went back to Grade ten at [School X], which was a wonderful place except for some of the people were there – uh, I kind of frowned upon the situation that I was getting myself into. The people – there was like ex-peelers [exotic dancers] and all kinds of people there. Like it was a great school, but the drugs that were going through it on the down, though, was insane.

Another concern youth expressed about services had to do with some staff characteristics and attitudes. Youth identified staff with high caseloads, employee turnover and negative attitudes towards the youth as issues they faced in some youth services. Some youth felt that at times the staff could be disrespectful and impatient with them and that this behaviour impacted their experience of services. One youth described his impression:

The other ones [other staff members] were assholes. They used to yell at me all the time for not doing things. They always – staff would always pick on me. Like I asked to use the phone and they'd make smart remarks towards me and I just didn't like it. I was never rude to any of them. I don't understand why they were rude to me.

Program rules also presented a barrier to use of services by the youth interviewed. Many youth felt that they had left previous living situations because they could not live up to the rules and expectations. As one youth described:

You were put on discipline notices pretty much, and if you did something bad, they'd give you this and you couldn't have like seconds at meals, you couldn't have coffee in the morning, you couldn't do this, you couldn't do that, couldn't do this, couldn't do that.

Rules and expectations that were considered to be unreasonable included “can’t go out for a smoke after six pm” or “can’t smoke at all,” chores, curfews, and sobriety regulations. An inflexible curfew was difficult for those who smoked, as one youth explained:

I'm stuck in the house for thirteen hours. I at least need to go out for a cigarette. This morning, oh, I almost freaked out this morning. I got up, I was supposed to have a meeting, my social worker was supposed to come and meet me at nine-thirty, but she didn't, and I was waiting, they're like you have to be out of the house at nine, and I was like my social worker is supposed to come, so we were started like a whole bunch of times and I was like, I just need to go out for a cigarette. They're like, "If you go, you have to go out all day." I'm like, "But we're trying to get a hold of my social worker." I'm like, "I just need to go outside."

Another youth said, “[Curfew] is, like, actually the hugest problem I have with the shelters... I don't know why you would expect your kids to be coming back at six and sitting around with one another and like just talking to other street kids all the time.”

Youth also identified different program policies that limited access to services. Policies restricted some services to those who were not using alcohol or drugs, to those who were referred by child welfare or justice programs, or to those who were in a certain age group. Youth reported that shelter services providing accommodations often did not allow youth access when they had been using drugs. Interview participants indicated that shelter was especially important during times when they have been using or were high because “if they [a shelter] sends them away and they go somewhere and they have a bad trip or they don’t know where they are and something happens to them, then well, wouldn’t they rather them be somewhere safe when they’re high than on the streets?” A few youth also said that some programs that were available to help youth required youth to first be stable for a period of three months before getting access. These youth felt that program policies that required a period of stability before receiving assistance were setting youth up for failure. As one youth said, “You have to be stable for three months, but where can you be stable for three months?”

Other youth expressed the concern that the benefits of the programs they were attending were limited because they were obligated to attend by child welfare or justice programs. These youth stated that freedom of choice was essential in order for them to commit to certain programs. One youth said, “My social worker, like, forced me to go there and I wasn’t addicted to drugs, really.” Another said that youth were not committed to a program they were forced to attend:

Nobody really wanted to be there. Most of us were forced to be there. I was there so that I had food, had a place to live for a while.

A final concern about services was that services were sometimes restricted according to age or child welfare status. As one youth said, “Basically they bounce you between [Agency X] and [Agency Y] unless you have [child welfare] status, then you can stay at [Agency X].” Another explained:

I think, uh, that kind of stuff for people it isn’t fair, because if your fifteen days are up, and there’s no other place for you to go, and you haven’t been doing a whole lot there, they do kick you out, and you’re stuck out on the street, because there’s some, there’s some kids, that you know, don’t look sixteen, seventeen [years old] to get into the [Agency X].

Views of Street Services by Level of Street Involvement

When the views expressed by street youth about street services were examined according to their current level of street involvement several differences were noted (see Table 6). These views are organized by type of service that youth

commented on most frequently, including shelters, drop-in centers/outreach services, and food banks (other types of services were not mentioned frequently enough to make comparisons by level of street involvement).

Table 6

Service Opinions by Level of Street Involvement (42 in-depth interviews)			
	Not on Street - No History	Currently on Street	Not on Street - History
Shelters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dislike of all shelters: beneath them • Dislike of adult shelters • Don't like policies on smoking, curfews • Too dirty • Don't like locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of complaints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Dislike policies about curfew, smoking, and age restrictions ◦ Didn't like rules and chores ◦ Discomfort of the facilities • Policies make it difficult for youth to have stability • Many comments about staff being helpful: counseling, referrals • Adult shelters are unsafe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of complaints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Not enough rooms & beds ◦ Generally not helpful/ "crappy" • Generally found them helpful-staff, referrals • Recommendations: Need more beds/ rooms, cleaner, later curfews, allow smoking
Drop-In Centres/ Outreach Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common comments: safe, helpful, relaxing • Liked to access school programs at centres • Many comments about liking them as places to hang out with friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common comments: safe, helpful, relaxing • Most comments positive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ caring staff, ◦ practical life necessities being met (laundry, shower, hygiene products, food) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common comments safe, helpful, relaxing • Commented on practical assistance: food, showers • Accepting • Dirty, unsafe
Food Banks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most had not used them • Found them easy to access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Had good experiences • Didn't know about them • Lied to access them (re: housing requirement) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No comments

Youth *Not on Street – No History* disliked shelters, and found them particularly unappealing because they were seen as “scary”, and “dirty”. Adult shelters were seen as particularly “scary” as they were crowded and places where youth could

be victimized. But fundamentally, youth *Not on Street – No History* disliked the notion of using shelters because they did not want to be identified as a “street kid”:

Staying in a shelter is not an option for us because we don't want to be known as street kids, you know? We don't want to stay [inaudible]. We're trying to be healthy. We want to live somewhere instead of staying in a shelter and carrying our one bag around and all that.

Youth *Currently on Street* and youth *Not on Street – History* had favourable comments about shelter staff, but had more specific issues with policies (curfews, smoking, age restrictions), the physical environment of shelters (cleanliness and safety issues), and the availability of shelter beds. One of the key issues identified by youth *Currently on Street* and youth *Not on Street – History* were policies that restricted youth to staying at a facility for a particular number of days before having to move to a different agency (see quotations in the previous section).

Drop-in centers/outreach services were favourably viewed by most interview participants, although the emphasis of their comments was somewhat different. For youth *Not on Street – No History*, drop-in centers/outreach services were seen as safe, relaxing, drug free places to hang out with friends. Youth *Currently on Street* and youth *Not on Street – History* had the same range of positive comments about the service environments (safe, relaxing, friendly), but they tended to comment more on practical assistance and necessities provided by the drop-in centers/outreach services like food, showers, and laundry facilities.

Many interview participants did not know about food banks. Food bank services were not mentioned by youth *Not on Street – History*, and had been used by very few youth *Not on Street – No History*, but for those youth Not on Street – No History who had used them, they reported they were easy to use:

I used the food bank if I was out [of food]. If I'm four days away from being paid, I got no food, my kids have to eat, so that way, it's a last minute thing, like okay... Right now, in five hours, my daughter would still have enough milk for one more drink, I'd go pickup food and come back and she'll have more milk.

Youth *Currently on Street* who knew about food banks found them difficult to access as they required a permanent residence. Once youth said,

I lied 'cause I said that I had a place so that was pretty good... But I wanted the food because I was hungry. But I lied because I didn't have a place. It was just that half the stuff I ended up giving away because uh – the box of cereal and bread – lots of bread.

Health Services

Many youth who were interviewed reported using health services on an as-needed basis. There were few differences noted in the views that street youth had of health services by level of street involvement. This is likely because youth had a more extensive history with use of health services throughout their lives, and so spoke about health services generally, and not specifically about their current situation.

The majority of the youth were aware of the health services provided in the community and the specific services provided at each clinic. One youth said:

So like [Agency X] helped me get my health care for free and everything and if like – if I thought something was wrong, I could go to the doctor. Plus they also had clinics there for people who were using it [drugs] intravenously specifically.

Information and basic medical care were accessed through street friends and outreach workers, as well as from a street survival guide provided by shelters and outreach workers. One youth described services provided by street nurses:

They have street nurses there, though, too, and they just wander around and help people out and give them, like, Polysporin if they have infections or anything, and if you have bugs, they'll give you some bug juice, and if you have a problem you can just go see the nurse and she'll tell you probably what it is and what would be the best place to go to, which is good.

Feedback regarding health care was primarily positive, with some concerns expressed about wait times and cost of care. A few respondents identified finances as a major barrier to accessing health services. Interview participants indicated that youth may not have personal identification or health coverage and often cannot afford to pay for treatment. Some health personnel offered “samples when you don’t have money to pay for the actual product.” Youth described how finances influenced interactions with the health care systems, as medical clinics that provide free service and treatment were crowded, and wait times made youth hesitant to seek treatment. One youth related a hospital emergency wait:

I spent nine hours sitting in the hospital gasping for air turning white. Ready to pass out... It was like oh no, I've just got three broken ribs and for all I know, I could be bleeding through my lung. Like, thanks. And there's some woman there that did like – did something to her knee – and she was in [treatment] there like four and a half hours before me. And it's like, Okay, she can sit there and she's not in pain. I'm sitting here and I don't know if I'm going to be able to stand up. Like come on.

Services Implications

The Calgary context at the time of the study was unique and challenging for street-involved people and for service providers. It was a time of rapid economic growth in the city, which put stress on affordable housing, street services and other social services. Even so, in our study, only 11% of street involved youth had accessed no services in the previous 3 months. Thus, our study, as well as other studies conducted in other centres, suggests that the large majority of street-involved youth access services (Carlson et al., 2006; Worthington, et al., 2008; Worthington & MacLaurin, 2009). It is also clear from the study results that youth with different levels of street involvement may access different types of services, use them in different ways, and have different views of services. Service providers need to take this into account when designing services for youth in order to minimize risks and maximize benefits for street youth while they are becoming engaged in street life, while living on the street, or after transitioning off the street.

The survey results showed clearly that those with different levels of street involvement used street and health services to different degrees based on their specific circumstances (see also (Worthington et al., 2008; Worthington & MacLaurin, 2009)). For example, shelters were more likely to be used by youth *Currently on Street*, while counselling services were more likely to be accessed by youth *Not on Street – History*. Youth *Not on Street – No History* were more likely to visit a physician during office hours, while youth *Currently on Street* were more likely to use a mobile street clinic (van).

The qualitative interview results confirmed that there are some elements of services that are important for all street youth – particularly services that had caring, non-judgmental staff, were accessible, and had flexible rules. (Conversely, concerns noted by youth included issues related to difficulty accessing services, employee turnover, negative staff attitudes, and rigid program rules). These are also aspects of services that have been found to be important in other studies (Carlson et al., 2006; Ensign & Bell, 2004; Garrett et al., 2008; Gerber, 1997; Greene et al., 1997). Service providers need to pay attention to these service elements and develop criteria to assess the quality of services, with the input of youth, to ensure that services are being delivered in ways that make them accessible and acceptable. In terms of physical accessibility (i.e., location, hours), youth had a range of opinions about whether being located in the downtown core close to other street services was a good (ease of access) or bad (promoted risk behaviours) thing. A mix of service locations would appear to be an ideal solution.

It is also clear from the qualitative interview results that services are seen differently and used differently by youth with different levels of street-involvement –

this has also been found by a few other studies (Carlson et al., 2006; Garrett et al., 2008). The key service implication here is that service providers need to be aware of where a youth is in terms of his or her level of street involvement in order to best understand what types of services and contact he or she will appreciate (Carlson et al., 2006; Garrett et al., 2008). Thus, service providers need to be aware of their role in providing prevention, safety or stabilization services for youth at different stages of street life in order to maximize their health and well-being.

Services are required to assist young people at different points, specifically, before youth become regularly involved in the streets; during street involvement; during a transition from the street to stable housing; and as a follow-up to street-involvement (Silbert & Pines, 1983). Services also need to be multifaceted, and address physical needs (food, clothing, shelter) of young people involved in street-life, as well as needs related to their physical and mental health, education and employment (Kufeldt & Burrows, 1994). Thus, many sectors need to be engaged in services for street-involved youth, including street services (shelters, food banks, drop-in centers, etc.), mental health and addictions services, education, child welfare, public health, and the criminal justice system. Service providers therefore have the opportunity to connect with youth in a number of different capacities. These points of contact provide an opportunity to support youth who are continuing to live on the street, or youth who may be interested in exploring options for getting off the street. For example, one recent study has suggested that for youth living on the street an effective approach is a comprehensive drop-in centre model that provides safe facilities to bridge the gap between the street and transitional or permanent housing (Shillington et al., 2011).

However, with the exception of a few studies (like the Shillington et al., 2011 study cited above) there is currently very little research on interventions to assist street-involved youth, and even less research has been done on the best way to provide services to different sub-groups of street-involved youth (Toro et al., 2011). Nonetheless, there have been some recent suggestions, both internationally and locally, about how to best meet the needs of different groups of youth who are street-involved or homeless (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2011; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). For youth who have not yet lived on the street, family interventions, life skills development, and information and outreach through educational and social activities (e.g., sports teams, community centres) have been suggested as key strategies (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2011; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). For those youth who are leaving a care system (e.g., foster homes, correctional services, mental health and addiction facilities), discharge planning needs to be done so that youth are placed into transitional housing, or reunited with families. Similarly, for youth who are new to living on the street, family reunification or transitional housing support are key strategies, along

with outreach services and case management services (Winland et al., 2011). For the smaller group of youth with more severe mental health, addictions or life challenges who remain street-involved into adulthood, permanent supportive housing is suggested as a strategy (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2011; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). At the policy and service systems level, this type of service approach requires a well-coordinated system of components linked through a shared understanding of goals, quality standards, a common assessment framework and central referral processes, and shared tools and resources. In Calgary, such a plan has recently been proposed (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2011).

Communities need to promote and support positive life choices among street-involved youth while respecting their independence. Research has shown that while street-involved youth are at higher risk for a variety of problems related to survival, safety and health, these youth possess resilience and a strong desire to develop a future for themselves (Carlson et al., 2006; Garrett et al., 2008). A male street-involved youth eloquently described this hope for the future during a study interview in Calgary:

It's not a dark road. I mean, it's whatever I want to make of it. Wherever I want to go, I know I can get there. It's gonna take work, it's gonna take discipline, it'll take a lot of things, but it's not unreachable. So, I'm not hopeless.

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MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTIONS

11 Substance Use & Mental Health Problems among Street-involved Youth: The Need for a Harm Reduction Approach

Maritt Kirst, Patricia Erickson

Introduction

A growing body of research has documented a highly disadvantaged health and social profile among street-involved and homeless youth compared to non-homeless youth. In Canada, studies have shown that life on the street for youth is associated with poor nutrition, victimization, substance use and abuse, and limited access to healthcare and other services, which all impose harmful effects on health (Adlaf & Zdanowicz, 1999; Boivin et al., 2005; Kirst et al., 2009; Kirst et al., 2011; Roy et al., 2004). As a result, street-involved and homeless youth experience more health problems than non-homeless youth, and particularly high rates of addiction and mental health problems (Adlaf & Zdanowicz, 1999; Boivin et al., 2005; Kirst et al., 2009; Kirst et al., 2011). In many urban centers, a variety of services are available to support street-involved youth, such as shelters, drop-ins, meal programs, literacy improvement, and counseling programs (Karabanow & Clement, 2004). However, other important resources including long-term housing solutions, harm reduction services, substance use treatment and mental health services are limited, uncoordinated and/or unattractive to youth (Haley & Roy, 1999; Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005). In particular, use of available substance use and mental health services tends to be low among street-

involved youth (Carlson et al., 2006; DeRosa et al., 1999; Haley & Roy, 1999; Kort-Butler et al., 2012; Unger et al., 1997). Such a lack of service availability and accessibility for street-involved youth may worsen their already poor health and contribute to chronic homelessness (Ferguson et al., 2011).

This chapter reviews current research on the health and social profile of street-involved youth, and more specifically draws on research findings regarding prevalence (frequency within the population) and contributing factors to co-use of multiple substances and co-occurring mental health problems within a sample of 150 street-involved youth in Toronto, Canada (Kirst et al., 2011; Kirst et al., 2009). Such analyses are important because street-involved youth are a highly vulnerable population with complex social service and treatment needs. The chapter then discusses use of various services among the youth, and explores the implications of findings on the current health service system and the need to expand harm reduction alternatives for this vulnerable population.

The Health and Social Profile of Street-involved Youth

Studies have consistently found that homeless youth report high rates of alcohol and drug use compared to youth in the general population, and that substance use is a common feature of life on the street (Adlaf et al., 1996; Adlaf & Zdanowicz, 1999; Boivin et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2005; Kirst et al. 2009; Kirst et al., 2011; Roy et al., 2004; Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005; Whitbeck et al., 2004). Previous research has shown that 40-71% of street-involved youth abuse alcohol and/or other drugs (Adlaf et al. 1996; Johnson et al., 2005; Kipke et al. 1997). One study observed drug abuse rates 10 times higher for homeless young males and 17 times higher among homeless young females than found in a national sample of non-homeless youth (Whitbeck et al., 2004). Rates of tobacco use are also high among street-involved youth, with one study finding that 97% of street involved youth had used tobacco in their lifetime and 27% were addicted to nicotine (Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005).

Among street youth, substances may be used for various reasons: to become a member of a social network, for recreation and pleasure, or as a mechanism for coping with the hardship and struggle for survival related to life on the street. Substance use may worsen other problems by increasing the risks of infectious disease, addiction, mental health problems, sexual exploitation, drug overdose, criminal behaviour and violence related to the drug trade (Baron, 1999; Kerr et al., 2009; Roy et al., 2004; Strike et al., 2001).

The greater the number of substances consumed by the youth, the greater the risk for drug-related harms, including co-occurring or simultaneous mental health

problems (Johnston et al., 2005; Kipke et al., 1997). Rates of mental health problems are at least twice as high among street youth as among comparable groups of non-homeless youth (Schweitzer & Hier, 1993; Yates et al., 1993), and street youth also appear to have elevated rates of co-morbidity (i.e. having two or more co-existing mental health conditions). Studies with street-involved and homeless youth have found that 34-60% of youth have met diagnostic criteria for both substance use and mental health problems (Adlaf & Zdanowicz, 1999; Whitbeck et al., 2004; Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005). Factors such as family dysfunction, substance use as a coping mechanism, victimization, criminality and sexual risk behaviours have been found to predict co-occurring substance use and mental health problems among homeless and street-involved youth (Adlaf & Zdanowicz 1999; Merscham et al., 2009; Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005; Whitbeck et al., 2004).

Street-involved and homeless youth also experience high rates of suicidal contemplation (i.e. thoughts of suicide) and suicide. The rates of suicide attempts among homeless youth far exceed those of housed youth in Canada, with between 27% and 46% having attempted suicide (Frederick et al., 2011; Kidd, 2004; Kirst et al., 2011; McCarthy & Hagan, 1992). Histories of child abuse, recent victimization, depression, and substance abuse have been found to place street-involved youth at heightened risk of suicide (Frederick et al., 2012; Go, 2007; Kidd, 2006; Roy et al., 2004; Yoder et al., 1998).

With respect to all of these health conditions and patterns, there is little understanding of differences between males and females and of the implications of co-occurring mental health and substance use issues for the service needs of street-involved and homeless youth. This chapter addresses these gaps in knowledge by drawing together the research findings on substance use and co-occurring mental health problems, and also examines health and social service use among street-involved youth in the Youth Pathways Project.

Methods

The Youth Pathways Project (YPP) was conducted by an inter-disciplinary team of researchers from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and the University of Toronto, and community partners from the Children's Aid Society in Toronto, Canada. The purpose of the study was to examine and compare pathways to either independent living or continued unstable housing situations among high-risk young women and men over time. The YPP study also sought to explore the links between physical and mental health, drug use, victimization, criminal activity, pregnancy, and service use and housing status among vulnerable youth. The study used a longitudinal design in which youth aged 16-21 accessing services for street-involved youth in Toronto were recruited to participate in four interviews over the

course of 12 months. After screening, youth participated in a private face-to-face interview, and were paid \$20 for their participation. Data collection took place from January 2005 to June 2006. In the first study wave, a total of 150 participants were recruited through social and health service agencies and interviewed (for a complete discussion of study methods see Kirst et al., 2009; Kirst et al., 2011).

Characteristics of Street Youth

Seventy-three percent of participants were between 19-21 years of age, and 27% were between the ages of 16-18 (see Table 1). Many reported poor physical and mental health, and had experiences of abuse and victimization. With respect to housing, participants had stayed in various locations, with 44% having stayed on the street in the last four months. Overall, youth were highly transient and had an average of 9 moves in the last four months. Thirty-five percent were currently staying with friends or with a partner. Significantly more females reported currently staying with a partner or friends than did male participants (49% vs. 20%). Experience with the Children's Aid Society (CAS) was evenly distributed among male and female respondents, with 43% reporting having been apprehended and in the care of a child welfare agency at least once in their lifetime. Seventy percent of participants had been arrested at least once in their lives, with more males having been arrested than females (80% vs. 61%).

Thirty-three percent of participants rated their overall health as fair or poor. Thirty-nine percent of the participants had been physically assaulted in the last 12 months, and males reported higher rates of physical assault than females (51% vs. 27%). Thirty-nine percent had experienced physical abuse and 23% had experienced sexual abuse in their lifetime, with significantly more females experiencing sexual abuse than males (31% vs. 15%).

Table 1

Sample Characteristics, by Gender			
	Total (N=150) # (%)	Females (N=75) # (%)	Males (N=75) # (%)
Age**			
16-18 years old	41 (27%)	28 (37%)	13 (17%)
19-21 years old	109 (73%)	47 (63%)	62 (83%)
Education			
High school incomplete	126 (84%)	65 (87%)	61 (81%)
High school complete	24 (16%)	10 (13%)	14 (19%)
Stayed on street in last 4 months	65 (44%)	30 (40%)	35 (47%)
Lives with partner or friends***	52 (35%)	37 (49%)	15 (20%)
Number of moves in last 4 months – Mean (SD) ^a	9.4 (21.4)	9.4 (21.4)	9.5 (21.5)
Experience with Children's Aid Society	64 (43%)	32 (43%)	32 (43%)
Ever been arrested*	104 (70%)	46 (61%)	58 (80%)
Self-rated health			
Excellent/very good/good	101 (67%)	47 (63%)	54 (72%)
Fair/poor	49 (33%)	28 (37%)	21 (28%)
Physically assaulted in last 12 months**	58 (39%)	20 (27%)	38 (51%)
Experienced physical abuse in lifetime	58 (39%)	28 (37%)	30 (40%)
Experienced sexual abuse in lifetime*	34 (23%)	23 (31%)	11 (15%)

Gender differences: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001¹

^a high standard deviations indicate a wide range of values reported

Substance Use among Street-involved Youth

High rates of substance use were observed among the youth (see Table 2). Seventy-one percent had used alcohol in the last 30 days, 91% were current cigarette smokers, and 73% had used marijuana in the last 30 days. Thirty-four percent of the youth had used hallucinogens (mainly ecstasy), 16% amphetamines, 24% cocaine, 11% crack and 5% heroin in the last month. Significantly more males than females reported using alcohol (80% vs. 63%) and marijuana (82% vs. 64%) in the last 30 days, and were also more involved in drug dealing in the last 12 months.

- P-values or significance levels reflect the probability that an apparent difference between groups, suggesting a relationship between two factors (e.g., gender and arrests), occurred simply by chance (Utts & Heckard, 2007).

(51% vs. 35%). The mean number of substances used in the last 30 days was 2.3. Among female participants, the strongest predictors of multiple substance use were living with friends and having been involved in drug dealing in the last 12 months. For the males, having fair or poor health and involvement in drug dealing in the last 12 months were moderate predictors of multiple substance use.

Table 2

Substance Use Behaviours and Mental Health, by Gender			
	Total (N=150) # (%)	Females (N=75) # (%)	Males (N=75) # (%)
Substance Use in Last 30 Days			
Tobacco	136 (91%)	68 (91%)	68 (91%)
Alcohol*	106 (71%)	47 (63%)	59 (80%)
Marijuana*	109 (73%)	48 (64%)	61 (82%)
Hallucinogens	50 (34%)	25 (34%)	25 (34%)
Amphetamines	24 (16%)	10 (13%)	14 (19%)
Cocaine	35 (24%)	18 (24%)	17 (23%)
Crack	16 (11%)	6 (8%)	10 (14%)
Heroin	7 (5%)	4 (5%)	3 (4%)
Number of Drugs Used in Last 30 Days – Mean (SD)	2.3 (1.6)	2.1 (1.5)	2.5 (1.5)
Drug dealing in last 12 months*	64 (43%)	26 (35%)	38 (51%)
Ever received a mental health diagnosis	63 (42%)	32 (44%)	31 (41%)
Concurrent mental health and substance use problems	36 (24%)	21 (28%)	15 (20%)
Ever self-harmed**	64 (45%)	40 (56%)	25 (34%)
Suicidal ideation in last 12 months	41 (27%)	28 (37%)	13 (17%)
Suicide attempts in last 12 months*	23 (15%)	19 (25%)	4 (5%)

Gender differences: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Co-occurring Substance Use and Mental Health Problems

In addition to the above-mentioned high rates of substance use, mental health problems were common among the street-involved youth (see Table 2). Forty-two percent reported having received a mental health diagnosis in their lifetime. Participants also reported high rates of suicidal contemplation, with 27% indicating thoughts of suicide and 15% reporting suicide attempts within the last 12 months. Forty-five percent reported self-harming behaviour, such as cutting or hurting oneself without the intent to kill oneself, in the last year. Significantly more females than males had engaged in

self-harming behaviour (56% vs. 34%), and had attempted suicide (25% vs. 17%). Twenty-four percent of participants could be described as having co-occurring mental health and substance use problems, reporting both a mental health diagnosis and symptoms of alcohol and/or illicit drug dependence.

Table 3

Substance Use and Co-occurring Mental Health Problems		
	Homeless Youth with Co-occurring Problems (N=36) – # (%)	Homeless Youth without Co-occurring Problems (N=114) – # (%)
Aged 19-21 (vs. aged 16-18)	27 (75%)	82 (72%)
Female (vs. male)	21 (58%)	54 (47%)
Sexual minority	15 (42%)	32 (28%)
Involved in street economy	13 (36%)	23 (20%)
Lives with partner/friends	12 (33%)	40 (35%)
Stayed on the street in last 4 months	20 (56%)	45 (40%)
Number of moves in the last 4 months – Mean (SD)**	15.3 (31.8)	7.6 (16.7)
Self-rated fair/poor physical health	16 (44%)	33 (29%)
Tobacco dependence	23 (64%)	63 (57%)
Involvement with child welfare system	17 (47%)	47 (41%)
Experienced physical child maltreatment*	19 (53%)	39 (34%)
Experienced sexual child maltreatment	12 (33%)	22 (19%)
Street victimization in last 12 months**	22 (61%)	36 (32%)
Suicidal ideation in last 12 months	16 (59%)	25 (40%)
Previous arrest*	23 (64%)	51 (45%)

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

We found a number of significant differences between youth who could be described as having co-occurring substance use and mental health problems and those without co-occurring problems (see Table 3). Street-involved youth with co-occurring problems were more transient, with a greater average number of moves in the last four months (15.3) than youth without co-occurring problems (7.6). Youth with co-occurring problems were more likely than others to have experienced victimization, with more having experienced physical abuse as children (53% vs. 34%) and victimization in the

last 12 months (61% vs. 32%). Furthermore, more youth with co-occurring problems had a history of arrest than those without co-occurring problems (64% vs. 34%). We also examined factors predicting co-occurring substance use and mental health problems among the youth. Victimization in the last 12 months emerged as the strongest predictor of co-occurring problems.

These findings suggest that among an already marginalized population, street-involved youth with co-occurring mental health and substance use problems are experiencing added vulnerabilities with respect to health and social functioning. These results highlight and confirm the need for targeted services for street-involved youth that address multiple, complex physical and mental health conditions (Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005).

Health and Social Service Utilization

Not surprisingly, given the poor health experienced by the study participants, 64% had visited a doctor for medical care in the last four months, and 30% had sought services in an emergency room (see Table 4). While use of services for physical health problems appears relatively high, only 24% had accessed therapeutic services for mental health issues and 16% had accessed substance use-related services in the last four months, despite the high prevalence of mental health diagnoses and substance use among the youth.

With respect to social service use, 33% of participants had accessed a service to help them get welfare, disability or other benefits in the last four months. Forty-one percent were involved with an employment service, and 36% were involved with an education program or service. Fifty-three percent had stayed in a shelter in the last seven days, 57% had accessed housing services for assistance with finding housing, and 38% had accessed legal services in the last four months. No significant differences in help-seeking between males and females were observed, except that significantly more females had accessed a doctor for medical care than males (73% vs. 52%).

Overall, use of physical health services among the youth was high, while use of mental health and substance use-related services and some social services (e.g., social assistance and education) was relatively low. This is similar to findings in other studies of street-involved and homeless youth (Carlson et al., 2006; DeRosa et al., 1999; Kort-Butler, et al., 2012; Unger et al., 1997). These findings raise an important issue: how can we increase help-seeking and use of mental health and addictions services among street involved youth at earlier, rather than later, stages? Greater availability of more “user-friendly” services geared specifically to the complex needs, stage of development and marginalization of street-involved

youth is needed to prevent worsening of their health conditions and continued homelessness (Carlson et al., 2006; DeRosa et al., 1999; Karabanow & Clement, 2004; Kort-Butler et al., 2012; Unger et al., 1997).

Table 4

Health and Social Service Use	
Service Use in the Last Four Months	(N=150) – # (%)
Accessed a doctor for medical care	119 (64%)
Sought services at an emergency room	45 (30%)
Accessed therapeutic services for mental health issues	37 (25%)
Accessed substance use related services	24 (16%)
Accessed a service to help get welfare, disability or other benefits	49 (33%)
Accessed an educational service or program	67 (36%)
Accessed employment services	75 (41%)
Accessed housing services	105 (57%)
Stayed in a shelter in the last 7 days	80 (53%)
Accessed legal services	57 (38%)

Discussion: The Importance of Harm Reduction

Given the complex service and treatment needs of homeless populations, harm reduction is an important service approach to addressing the health issues of this population (Barnaby et al., 2010). Harm reduction services promote and facilitate the safe use of substances in order to reduce substance use-related harm, rather than seeking to eliminate use itself (Erickson, 1997). However, as this approach is viewed by some as promoting or condoning drug use, and given that the desired societal goal is that young people not use drugs, it has been challenging to introduce harm reduction based-services and education for youth (Erickson, 1997). In the late 1990s, when an innovative harm reduction program in Toronto created a video aimed at encouraging safer drug use practices among street youth (Poland et al., 2002; Tupker et al., 1997), it created quite a stir in the media and attracted a great deal of negative criticism for accepting that these young people did, indeed, use drugs, rather than trying to get them to stop using. Yet more recent research indicates that there is a sizeable group of street youth who are injecting drugs, using crack, and can be classified as multiple drug users, and are potentially at considerable risk of harm from these practices (Barnaby et al., 2010; Kerr et al., 2009; Kirst et al., 2009). The usual assumption is that harm reduction programs such as safe injection sites, needle and syringe exchanges, opiate maintenance or even heroin assisted treatment programs involving the prescription of heroin to opiate users as part of a medically controlled intervention, might be a last resort for drug-addicted

adults with long histories of poor addiction treatment outcomes, and for this reason age limits often are used to exclude youth from programs. The reality that street youth use more drugs, more frequently, and with more harmful consequences than housed youth, is difficult to reconcile with the goal of abstinence. The data reported from the YPP study also indicate that given the extent of substance use and substance use problems in this group, few youth seek addiction treatment.

In addition, due to the generally compromised health, both mental and physical, of street-involved youth, it is important to consider whether health and social services not directed specifically at substance use treatment might draw in youth and refer them to effective interventions for substance use problems at a later stage. This is one of the main lessons from the experience of the supervised injection site InSite in Vancouver (McNeil, 2011). It can also be argued that compared to adults, youth are just as much, or more, at risk of overdose and infections from unsanitary or reused drug equipment, and that it is discriminatory to deny them access to needle and syringe exchange programs, opiate maintenance and even safe consumption rooms, where drug users can go to use drugs in a safe, clean environment. As a result, more research on the effectiveness of these types of services for street-involved youth is needed.

Furthermore, as our and other studies have shown, street-involved youth are using a variety of substances, commonly including alcohol, tobacco and cannabis (Adlaf et al. 2006; Johnson et al. 2005; Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005). Services for street-involved youth that address multiple substance use from a harm reduction approach are needed. In particular, street-involved youth have high rates of tobacco use compared to housed youth (Wenzel et al., 2010) and experience complex health issues and disadvantaged social environments which may make quitting tobacco use a challenge (Greaves & Jategaokar, 2006). Thus, services focused on reducing the harms related to tobacco use should be made more available in order to help these vulnerable youth to reduce the risk of future tobacco-related illness and death.

Certainly, when drug using youth themselves are asked about their own preferences, they express a wish for access to a broad range of services that are non-judgmental, readily available and would empower them to act to protect their health (Barnaby et al., 2010). Public perceptions tend to view street youth as a visible community “problem” linked with drug use and criminal activities, leading to stigma. This stigma, in addition to the general controversy about providing harm reduction services to youth, interferes with assessment and delivery of services that can and should be delivered to all citizens according to their needs (Gaetz, 2004).

Some discussion has occurred in the harm reduction literature about the im-

portance of engaging youth fully in program design, planning and implementation, from the earliest stages, in order to maximize their empowerment and sense of responsibility (Paterson & Panessa, 2008). There is some early indication that such an approach will be more successful in attracting and keeping youth in programs, and will produce better treatment outcomes. However, it has been cautioned that more research needs to be done on the varied and unique needs of youth who arrive on the street from many different social and cultural contexts. Specific needs related to gender and its relationship with poverty, trauma, mental illness, lack of skills and early pregnancy and parenting must also be considered. Nevertheless, if street-involved youth are seen not only as 'at-risk,' but also as highly resilient (Kolar, 2011), innovative harm reduction approaches that recognize their right to choice may help reinforce these resilient qualities. Despite the lack of family and social support leading to their homelessness and early transition into adulthood, positive outcomes may be possible when appropriate alternatives are available (Benoit et al., 2008).

Concluding Remarks: Advancing Health Services for Street-involved Youth

Findings from the YPP study have confirmed vulnerability with respect to health and social functioning among street-involved youth, with high rates of substance use, co-occurring mental health problems, histories of abuse and experiences of victimization. We have also noted gender differences in many of these experiences, with more males than females engaging in substance use behaviours, such as monthly alcohol use and marijuana use, and drug dealing. The study also showed high rates of tobacco use, with 91% of participants being current smokers. In particular, there is a need for more research on tobacco use among the street youth population. Few studies have examined the frequency of tobacco use among street involved youth, yet those that do show very high rates of tobacco use, which places youth at increased risk of becoming adult smokers and acquiring tobacco-related illness. Furthermore, a greater understanding of service needs related to tobacco use cessation (i.e. quitting) and harm reduction services for vulnerable youth is needed (Morris, et al., 2011).

In this study, alarming gender differences were also observed in mental health problems, with more females than males reporting self-harm during their lifetime and suicide attempts within the last 12 months. Youth with co-occurring substance use and mental health problems were also at increased risk for self-harm and suicide attempts compared to those without co-occurring problems.

These findings clearly underline the importance and urgency of a new wave of targeted interventions that address the complex needs of street-involved youth,

such as gender-specific, integrated mental health and addiction services (for instance, combined mental health and addictions treatment which addresses young women's experiences of sexual abuse), and harm reduction programs in order to more effectively prevent the worsening of already poor health among this population (Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005). In particular, harm reduction services that acknowledge and address substance use and co-occurring mental health issues, and do not demand abstinence from substance use or participation in mental health treatment in order to gain access, could attract these vulnerable youth, and then connect them with other health and social services.

Housing is a human right, and while there are a number of housing interventions focused on homeless adults with complex health needs, few options exist for youth. There is a fundamental need for long-term housing solutions (with a focus on preventing the worsening of health conditions associated with chronic homelessness) for street-involved youth to assist them in transitioning off the street and into stable housing (Karabanow & Clement, 2004; Wenzel et al., 2010). Innovative adult intervention models could guide the development of interventions for street-involved youth with complex service needs. Promising findings have emerged from studies on the effectiveness of the 'Housing First' approach. This approach embraces harm reduction principles as adults experiencing homelessness and severe mental health issues are provided with housing without requirements for substance use abstinence or participation in mental health treatment, and are given flexible access to supportive health and social services (Stefancic & Tsemberis, 2007; Tsemberis et al., 2004). These studies have shown that participants in 'Housing First' interventions have remained stably housed, and have better mental health outcomes compared to groups not receiving such interventions (Tsemberis et al. 2011; Tsemberis,et al., 2003). In fact, the effectiveness of the Housing First approach is being examined in Canada through the Mental Health Commission of Canada At Home/Chez Soi study, in which homeless adults (aged 18 and older) with severe mental health issues are being provided housing and support services in five cities – Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Moncton (Goering et al., 2012). Given the distinct, age-related needs of youth, more research is required to examine the possibility of 'Housing First' models and other housing interventions for street-involved youth (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012). Research is also needed in the context of these interventions to explore the types of support services youth need to transition off the street and remain stably housed (e.g., greater life skills services and supports for living independently) (Kolar et al., 2012).

Overall, we are seeing increasingly poor health among street-involved youth in Canada, yet there are considerable service and policy gaps in addressing this problem. Due to conflicting social views of youth as innocent beings who

should not be engaging in risk behaviours such as drug use, and the stigmatization of those youth who are, there is a great deal of controversy associated with the provision of harm reduction services to youth. Canada needs to resolve this controversy and invest in a public health approach that will improve the well-being of street-involved youth and prevent worsening health and social outcomes. Public health researchers, service providers and policy makers need to coordinate and work together to address this growing disadvantage and develop innovative solutions to address the complex needs of street-involved youth.

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12

Back to the Future for Canada's National Anti-Drug Strategy: Homeless Youth and the Need for Harm Reduction

Kristy Buccieri

Introduction

The landscape of national drug policy has changed significantly in Canada over the past ten years. In 2003, reducing alcohol and drug related harm was a national priority. Accordingly, Canada's Drug Strategy (CDS) had, "the stated aim of reducing the harm associated with alcohol and other drugs to individuals, families, and communities" (PHAC, 2003:n.p.). Further, the CDS explicitly endorsed initiatives such as, "needle exchange, methadone maintenance, [and] abstinence-oriented treatments such as therapeutic communities" (PHAC, 2003:n.p.). In 2005, Health Canada co-authored a report that established a national framework for action to reduce the harms associated with drugs and alcohol in Canada. The authors wrote,

At the core of this document is a collective conviction that a national framework for action to reduce the harms associated with alcohol and other drugs and substances is necessary, practical and – most of all – achievable. These goals can be attained through dedication and the sharing of expertise, experience, ideas and perspectives. (Health Canada and Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse [CCSA], 2005:3)

Shortly after releasing this report, the Conservative government withdrew their support for the initiative (Webster, 2012). Just two years later, in October 2007, Canada's Drug Strategy was replaced by the new (but arguably not improved) National Anti-Drug Strategy (NADS). The NADS is comprised of a three-part action plan focusing on prevention, treatment, and enforcement (Government of Canada, 2011). However, in none of these areas is harm reduction included in the plan. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH, 2008) has criticized the federal government for this omission, arguing that through this shift in policy the federal government is out-of-step “with drug strategies across Canada”, and that, “[s]everal cities and provinces in Canada, including Victoria, Vancouver, Edmonton, London, Toronto, and Ottawa,” have implemented harm reduction programs and in many cases included harm reduction in their municipal and/or provincial drug strategies.

This chapter argues that in order to align itself with many of these municipal approaches, Canada's federal government needs to return to the days when harm reduction was a national priority. As a public health initiative, harm reduction is a particularly important approach to promoting the safety and well-being of marginalized substance users, and especially those who are young, homeless, and/or otherwise street-involved. I begin this chapter by briefly discussing harm reduction and identifying some of its defining characteristics. I then shift the focus to a study conducted in Ottawa, Ontario, in which street youth and social service providers were asked to share their views on the harms associated with substance use among homeless young people. I end by arguing that addressing these harms requires a harm reduction approach. Therefore, I call on the federal government to reinstate harm reduction as one of the pillars of its national drug strategy.

The Key Characteristics of Harm Reduction

Harm reduction has been a part of Canada's Drug Strategy since 1992 (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2001), but in more recent years support for it has steadily declined at the federal level under Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government (Webster, 2012). In Canada, as in other parts of the world, harm reduction remains a controversial issue (Erickson & Hathaway, 2010). While harm reduction has many supporters, as a strategy that does not rely strictly on abstinence, it faces resistance from those who fear it will lead to widespread drug legalization (Wodak & Saunders, 1995) and those who feel it is condoning and/or facilitating substance use (Single, 1995). Hwang (2006) argues that these reservations might be lessened if there were greater recognition that harm reduction strategies are meant to complement and not replace more traditional approaches.

Part of the resistance to harm reduction also emerges, at least in part, from the lack of a universally agreed upon definition. As researchers at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2009) note, harm reduction is too dynamic and broadly applied to allow for (or require) the creation of a standardized definition. Yet, through the efforts of researchers, community activists, and policy makers, some defining features have remained relatively stable. For instance, in an early (and well cited) definition, Single (1995) writes that harm reduction involves, “[a] policy or programme directed towards decreasing adverse health, social, and economic consequences of drug use even though the user continues to use psychoactive drugs at the present time” (289). In 2002, seven years later, researchers offered a similar definition that focuses on reducing the personal and social harms caused by drug use regardless of whether the person continues to use substances. These researchers define harm reduction as,

...a set of strategies and approaches aimed at reducing the risks and harmful effects associated with substance use, and addictive behaviours, for the person, the community and society as a whole. While helping users abstain from substances or addictive behaviours is one appropriate long-term goal for some, harm reduction strategies place the emphasis on the most immediate achievable and positive changes whether or not they are shown to reduce use. (Anne Wright and Associates Inc., 2002:4)

Today this definition of harm reduction remains relatively stable. As researchers note, most people would agree that at the core, “[h]arm reduction is any program or policy designed to reduce drug-related harm without requiring the cessation of drug use” (CAMH, 2009:n.p.).

In Canada, members of the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse's National Policy Working Group have come together to establish specific criteria that researchers, activists, and policy makers can use to define harm reduction. Through their efforts they identified five principles, including: pragmatism (being realistic and practical), humane values, focus on harms, balancing costs and benefits, and the priority of immediate goals (Beirness et al., 2008). Harm reduction, while originating in the long tradition of public health, has also more recently become recognized internationally as a social justice issue, based on demanding respect for substance users (Stimson & O'Hare, 2010). To this end, significant progress has been made internationally in adopting harm reduction initiatives (Pauly, 2008).

However, while harm reduction has been embraced by many nations worldwide (including Canada for a period), in recent years Canada has begun to revoke national support for these policies and programs (Webster, 2012). Just

two examples are the recent (unsuccessful) attempt to withdraw funding for Vancouver's safer injection facility, Insite, and the (successful) removal of funding for safer tattooing programs in federal prisons (Webster, 2012). This lack of support is harmful for individuals and communities who rely on and benefit from harm reduction initiatives. Not least among those affected by this decreased support are street-involved youth, who often engage in substance use with harmful effects. The rest of this chapter discusses a small qualitative study in which homeless youth and social service providers in Ottawa were asked to share their views on the harms associated with substance use by homeless youth and the need for harm reduction programs to help lessen these effects.

Methodology

The interviews for this study were conducted in the summer of 2006 in Canada's national capital region, Ottawa, Ontario. This context is significant. Exactly one year prior, in the summer of 2005, the Mayor of Ottawa brought together a large network of service providers, academics, business leaders, media representatives, and special interest groups to develop a comprehensive drug and alcohol strategy within the City of Ottawa (Community Network for the Integrated Drugs and Addictions Strategy [CNIDAS], 2006). The result, the Ottawa Integrated Drugs and Addictions Strategy, was designed as a reflection of the existing national drug strategy, founded on the four pillars of prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and enforcement (CNIDAS, 2006). However, while there was support for harm reduction at the city level, the year 2005 was also when the conservative federal government withdrew support for harm reduction initiatives following the national framework report co-authored by Health Canada (Webster, 2012). While still recognized as a part of Canada's Drug Strategy, harm reduction was quickly losing support and would be removed as a national pillar just one year after the interviews, in 2007 (Government of Canada, 2011).

The participants in this study all lived (at least temporarily) in the Ottawa region and were very aware of the political tensions surrounding harm reduction initiatives. As part of a broader study, ten homeless youth and nine social service providers participated in structured interviews that lasted approximately 30 to 90 minutes. The participants were selected through a convenience sampling method, as each either worked at or was a client within a particular social service agency that offered harm reduction programs. The six male and four female youth were all self-identified substance users between the ages of 16 and 24. At the time of the interviews they were all living either on the street, in shelters, or temporarily with friends. The majority had been without stable housing on-and-off for several years. The three male and six female social service providers were selected based on their range of experience and positions within the agency.

Three had advanced degrees and relatively extensive experience working with street youth, having been employed at the agency from five to ten years. The remaining six providers were less experienced with homeless and at-risk populations, having worked for the agency between one and ten months. All providers actively administered the harm reduction services offered through the agency.

The purpose of the project was to examine the substance use behaviours of homeless youth in Ottawa and to better understand at what point they – and social service providers – believed substance use became problematic. Throughout the interviews, the nineteen participants discussed the most common substances used by homeless youth living in Ottawa, the reasons for using, and the harmful effects substance use can have for the user, as well as for others. Based on this data, I argue the importance of harm reduction initiatives for reducing these negative consequences.

Substance Use in Ottawa

According to Paul, a 23 year old homeless man living in Ottawa, he and his friends use drugs and alcohol, “morning, afternoon, and night.” “Street youth,” he continues, “we do it whenever we can get it. If it’s four o’clock in the morning, we do it. If it’s four o’clock in the afternoon, we do it.” While not all homeless young people use drugs and alcohol, research has consistently shown that a sizable portion do, at least on occasion (Baron, 1999; Boivin et al., 2005; Karamanow, 2004; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Roy et al., 1998). In a multi-year, multi-site study with homeless youth, the Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC] (2006) found that in 2003, 26.9% of participants reported drinking alcohol more than once per week and 36% reported alcohol intoxication in the previous 3 months. Additionally, more than 95% reported injection and/or non-injection drug use in their lifetime (PHAC, 2006).

More recent research conducted in Toronto shows that youth often have preferred substances (Barnaby et al., 2010). In Ottawa, marijuana was generally considered to be the preferred substance, which is not surprising given that the PHAC (2006) study also found that 78.3% of street youth in various Canadian cities reported marijuana use. The regularity with which it was used meant that service providers and youth alike had become used to it and regarded its use without alarm. For instance, Dawn, a service provider with ten years’ experience, stated that,

Clearly practically all of them use marijuana and I almost think in this day and age that marijuana isn’t so much of a problem or an issue. It isn’t something that has to be addressed with any sort of strength. It’s just the bottom line for most young people and certainly for many people on the street.

Alcohol was also recognized as a commonly used substance in Ottawa, as similarly found in other Canadian research studies conducted around the same time (Agboola, 2005; Bodnarchuk et al., 2006). Like marijuana, alcohol use in itself was not considered problematic, but rather a socially acceptable and legal option for these youth (even though many were under the legal drinking age). When asked why young people choose to use alcohol, Lisa, an experienced social service provider said, “I think that it’s easier to obtain. It’s a very socially accepted thing to do, to get drunk.” Karen, a young homeless woman, added that, “Some people don’t want to do drugs because they think it damages your mind and everything, and you still have to fill that space with something. So, like, everyone has their addiction and alcohol is a legal one.”

In addition to marijuana and alcohol, participants also noted that crack-cocaine, ecstasy, and morphine were preferred substances of street youth living in Ottawa. In the PHAC (2006) multi-site study, these substances were reportedly used by a minority of respondents as well. Of the participants who reported non-injection drug use 5.8% used crack-cocaine and 5.1% used ecstasy in the past 3 months (PHAC, 2006). Additionally, 34.4% of injection drug users reported morphine use in the 3 months before the study. Also mentioned, but believed to be less commonly used in Ottawa, was crystal methamphetamine. Conversely, other Canadian studies have found methamphetamine to be more commonly used than crack and ecstasy by street youth (Bodnarchuk et al., 2006; PHAC, 2006).

Many adolescents, whether housed or homeless, experiment with substances (Adlaf et al., 2005), often for entertainment (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997) and because they like the way it makes them feel. In the interviews these reasons arose frequently. For instance, social service provider Natalie stated these youth, “really like the buzz,” and Paul, a homeless young man noted that he and his peers use drugs, “because it feels good.” On the street, as among housed youth, there may be peer pressure to conform. For instance, Chris, a young homeless man, admitted, “Sometimes I do it because everybody else is and I don’t want to be the outcast.” This pressure is something the social service providers have noticed as well, with Susan and Dawn respectively saying, “I’ve seen some youth sort of wanting to fit in,” and “They just want to be part of what’s going on, part of the youth scene.”

However, while many young people use substances because of their social nature and pleasurable benefits, those who are homeless also often report using them to cope with the pressures and loneliness of street life, to add meaning to their days, and as a means of self-medicating against mental illnesses (Karabanow, 2004). The unfortunate outcome is that underlying issues such as loneliness, boredom, and mental illness are not addressed and the substances used to cope with these stressors can actually contribute to making them worse. The worse the problems

become, the more the youth may turn to substance use to cope. This can lead to a pattern of on-going – and potentially increasingly harmful – substance use.

The Harmful Cycle of Substance Use

The harmful effects of substance use will often vary depending on the specific substance used (Barnaby et al., 2010). In this study, however, participants were asked to speak about the harmful effects of substance use more generally. Among the Canadian population, substance use related harms have primarily been recognized in three ways – loss of workplace productivity, economic and social burdens on the health care system, and the financial costs of law enforcement (Rehm et al., 2006). In 2002, the overall cost of substance abuse in Canada was estimated to be \$39.8 billion dollars, with productivity losses accounting for 61% of this cost, health care for 22.1%, and law enforcement for 13.6% (Rehm et al., 2006). The harmful effects of substance use for homeless youth, while specific to this population, can also be categorized in these three ways.

Loss of Productivity

The loss of productivity was found to be the greatest economic harm among the general Canadian population, accounting for a loss of \$24.3 billion in 2002 (Rehm et al., 2006). As many homeless youth are not employed in the formal economy (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; Gaetz et al., 1999) the loss of productivity cannot be measured in the same way. According to Natalie, a social service provider, homeless youth “don’t have those responsibilities yet and they can just go out and be frivolous and drink up a storm and be hung over the next day and still function.” However, while they may be able to function in some tasks, like squeegeeing and panhandling, the use of substances may interfere with the achievement of longer-term goals such as obtaining stable housing, continuing their education, and/or securing formal employment¹.

According to a recent study in Vancouver, street-involved youth who use substances reported feeling unsupported in their efforts to find housing (Krüsi et al., 2010). For many homeless youth, the use of drugs and alcohol can make it difficult to move off the street. Joe, for instance, a young homeless man, stated that substance use “becomes a big circle of not being able to get anywhere. It’s just a cycle of stuckness because you’re using, you’re all high and you’re obviously not on topic or not

1. It should be noted that the use of drugs and alcohol is not the only barrier to the realization of short and long term goals among homeless youth. Many lack the education, stability, and resources needed to obtain formal, well-paying employment. For many, the only alternatives are low wage, menial jobs that are undesirable and may offer little or no benefit to youth above what they gain from the informal economy. For more detailed arguments, refer to Gaetz & O’Grady (2002) and Karabanow et al., (2010).

on the ball.” The use of substances other than alcohol or marijuana has been linked to housing instability (Tevendale et al., 2011), as has injection drug use (Rhule-Louie et al., 2008). Substance use can be harmful for youth because, as social service provider Helen stated, long-term use often “starts interfering with obligations.”

On-going substance use can impair judgement and reduce the motivation needed to achieve long term goals like obtaining housing, returning to school, and/or finding employment. However, it can just as easily interfere with the fulfilment of more immediate and pressing needs like finding food. This is especially troubling given that research consistently shows homeless individuals, including youth, suffer from nutritional deficiencies (Dachner et al., 2009; Gaetz et al., 2006; Khandor & Mason, 2007; Tarasuk et al., 2005; Tarasuk et al., 2010). The youth in this study noted that money that could be spent on essentials like food and clothing often goes toward substance use instead. Max, a 17 year old homeless man, explained,

Every pay cheque you get \$200 bucks, you’re buying, you know, a half ounce of weed. There goes \$180 bucks and then you’re spending the last \$20 on some more weed...And that goes every week and you’re still doing it and every penny you get, you’re spending it on weed... You stop caring what’s in your fridge, what you need to eat. It’s just pure weed.

Karen, a homeless young woman, conveyed a similar message. When asked how she would define problematic substance use, she suggested it occurs when drugs become a substitute form of financial currency. Karen stated,

Actually for me, it’s when everything that you see, like a soda would be like, “I could buy a joint with that. That’s a joint.” When you start to use drugs as currency. Everything that you could buy or spend your money on, you see it as, like, how much drugs you could buy for it, you know. Yeah, if I can spend \$10 on something I’m like, “Well that’s a whole length.” I’ll see that as ‘not-drugs’.

What these comments show is that some young people trade their labour for the ability to purchase drugs. In this sense productivity is directed away from the achievement of long term goals and the fulfilment of daily human needs in order to engage in substance use. Unfortunately this can perpetuate a dangerous cycle. Many young people find life on the street boring, which makes working toward affording drugs and alcohol a fulfilling task. Most, or all, of the money they earn goes toward purchasing drugs and alcohol, leaving them unable to fulfil short and long term needs. Once the substances are gone the cycle begins again. Shane, a young homeless man who was caught in this cycle, discussed how people can become dependent on it for survival. When asked why he uses drugs he responded:

To add meaning to life. ‘Cause if you don’t have a job or like, goals in the future, you need to at least have a goal...make money for something, like, short-term. So, everyday you need to make like \$20 to get [drugs]... so there’s, like, some strive for life, maybe if you’re lacking a reason to live.

The use of drugs and alcohol shifts the kinds of productivity young people engage in from more formal economic activities to the pursuit of substances and substance use. The outcome is often a cycle in which time, money, and energy are directed away from longer-term goals like obtaining housing and employment and shorter-term needs like purchasing food, while furthering the need to pass one's days with something else – a void often filled by substance use.

Health and Mental Health Care

In 2002, substance abuse cost Canadians \$8.8 billion in health care spending (Rehm et al., 2006). Even without the use of substances, homelessness has consistently been linked to poor physical and mental health. Common problems that have been documented include foot problems, scabies and body lice, dental diseases (Hwang, 2001), hunger and food deprivation (Dachner et al., 2009; Gaetz et al., 2006; Khandor & Mason, 2007; Tarasuk et al., 2010), post-traumatic stress disorder (Bender et al., 2010), and loneliness (Rokach, 2005), among others. The immediacy of meeting daily needs like obtaining food, shelter, and safety often takes precedence over health (O’Connell, 2004). Even when health problems do become pressing, those who are homeless often experience difficulty accessing health care, due to the lack of a health card (Khandor & Mason, 2007), a sense of being unwelcome in health care settings (Wen et al., 2007), and an inability to pay for and/or store prescribed medication (Hwang & Gottlieb, 1999).

The use of substances can compound existing problems and make the physical and mental health of homeless individuals even worse (Karabanow et al., 2007). Their inability or reluctance to access health care services may suggest they are not burdening the health care system (Rehm et al., 2006), but deteriorating physical and mental health can be particularly problematic for individuals who experience them. Joe, a twenty-four year old man who had been on the street since age sixteen, suggested that “ill health” is “a major thing” in relation to substance use, adding, “especially when you start getting close to my age there, [and into] your late twenties. You start getting really unhealthy to the point where it’s time to stop, or you’re not making it out of your thirties.” Inadequate coping strategies and perceived poor health have both been linked to high drug use among homeless youth (Nyamathi et al., 2010). These negative effects may be worsened by high risk substance use behaviours, such as sharing needles (PHAC, 2006; Roy et al., 2002) and/or unsafe sex practices like forgoing condom use (Halcon & Lifson, 2004; Tucker et al., 2011).

Many young people on the street suffer from mental health disorders such as depression, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, and bipolar disorder (Bender et al., 2010; Boivin et al., 2005; Merscham et al., 2009). Street youth often meet the criteria for dual or multiple diagnoses, and in particular concurrent or overlapping disorders (Johnson et al., 2005; Kirst et al., 2011; Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005). For many young people on the street substance use is a way of coping with the effects of these disorders through self-medicating instead of seeking professional treatment (Karabanow, 2004; Karabanow et al., 2007). Max, a young homeless man in Ottawa, explained, “You’re depressed, you get drunk, and it just takes everything off your mind.” Likewise, Molly, a young homeless woman stated, “I use drugs to hide the pain...because when you use drugs you don’t feel the pain.”

There is a sense of stigma attached to being both homeless (Thompson et al., 2006) and a substance user (Singer, 2006). This stigmatization increases the risk that these young people will experience low self-esteem, loneliness, thoughts of suicide, and feelings of being trapped (Kidd, 2007). Substance use can help decrease the intensity of these feelings, as Natalie, a social service provider, suggested, “A lot of drug use is a coping mechanism to deal with their life as it is right now.” However, there is again the risk of getting caught in a cycle. As Susan, another service provider, noted about her agency’s clients, “We have a lot of youth that their drug consumption has led to mental health issues, which becomes a vicious circle...because they just end up using more and then the problem gets worse and they’re not getting treated.” Young people may choose to use drugs and alcohol in order to cope with their poor physical health and the psychological difficulties of living on the street. However, this approach often results in greater harm, as the substance use only masks the problems instead of addressing them and may even lead to a worsening of the conditions themselves.

Law Enforcement

The third largest cost associated with substance abuse in Canada in 2002 was the financial burden on law enforcement agencies, accounting for \$5.4 billion (Rehm et al., 2006). In order to survive on the street young people sometimes engage in illegal activities (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997) and the participants in this study suggested that substance use contributes to such behaviour. Jeff, a social service provider, observed, that

Street violence is on the rise, there's no doubt about it. Does alcohol or drugs have something to do with this? I don't know for sure, but I think it'd be stupid to say it doesn't. Something is going on with drugs and alcohol and violence.

Jeff's suspicion is confirmed by research that shows that homeless youth who meet the criteria for substance abuse disorders (i.e., alcohol abuse, alcohol dependence, drug abuse) may be more likely to engage in violence (Crawford et al., 2011). This study also indicated that men are more likely to be involved in violence than women (Crawford et al., 2011), which supports the observations of Beth, a sixteen year old runaway who stated, "Fights happen. When guys drink, not all of them, but I find that most of them become violent...They're happy until someone says, 'get out of my way'...then it's like, 'excuse me' kind of thing and they get violent."

When under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol homeless youth may engage in violent behaviour, but the use of these substances also increases the risk that they will be victimized. In one study, Kirst et al., (2011) found that street-involved youth with concurrent or overlapping mental health problems were nearly four times more likely to have been victimized in the previous twelve months. Laura, a young woman in Ottawa, told of her experience of victimization while under the influence of drugs. She stated, "Back in the summer I was beaten-up by drunk kids for no reason. So, after that I had a new view on drugs and alcohol and I started to get off of it. At the time I was on ecstasy." In this incident both Laura and the offenders were under the influence. Unfortunately, research indicates that homeless youth are a highly victimized population and that they are unlikely to report incidents to the police (Gaetz, 2004; Gaetz et al., 2010).

The financial cost to law enforcement generally does not arise from youth reporting substance-related crimes committed against them. Rather, these costs emerge from ticketing these youth and from calls initiated by the general public. A recent study conducted in Toronto highlights the degree to which homeless youth are treated as disorderly persons and subjected to zero-tolerance measures like ticketing and criminalization (O'Grady et al., 2011). The use of substances in public is a common reason young people come into contact with the police. Lucas, a social service provider in Ottawa, explained, "If numerous people are consuming drugs or alcohol in a public place, because most of them are homeless, that's against the law so a lot of times people are issued tickets." The resulting costs are financial (to the youth, but also to the law enforcement agency), legal (as youth are threatened with jail or other action if the tickets go unpaid), and social (as these young people become burdened with outstanding debt that interferes with their ability to get off the streets and obtain credit for long term goals like housing) (O'Grady et al., 2011).

Law enforcement officials may also become involved with homeless youth as a result of calls placed by the general public. Young people under the influence of substances may commit crimes directed at housed persons, as when property is stolen to pay for drugs and/or alcohol. Paul, a young man in Ottawa, suggested

that substance use becomes harmful, “when that’s all they think about. When it’s all they want to do...They want to break into housing to steal nice items to pawn, to get the money.” The general public may also call emergency services out of concern for the welfare of substance users. According to social service provider Jeff, “When Joe Citizen sees someone passed out, their natural reaction is to call 911...This generates a 911 call, which means fire, ambulance, and police [will show up]...which costs about \$1,600...It’s a lot of money.” Although the figure Jeff offers is unverified, his point remains valid. At a cost of \$5.4 billion (Rehm et al., 2006), a substantial amount of Canadian funds are being directed toward law enforcement efforts that address problematic substance use.

Harm Reduction in Canada: Back to the Future

Many homeless youth use drugs and/or alcohol, often with harmful consequences for themselves and others. Frequently these harms are part of a cycle in which substance use becomes the way of coping with stressors on the street while at the same time contributing to, and possibly worsening, them. Because youth get caught in this cycle, where substance use fulfils an important role in their daily lives, quitting does not feel like a viable option. Marlatt and Witkiewitz (2010) suggest that harm reduction can act as a safety net for substance users like these youth. In the course of their lives, they write, users will come to an intersection marked by a traffic light. More traditional approaches, like rehabilitation centres, may treat the light as though there were only two settings: red (stop using) or green (keep using). However, traffic lights also have a third option, Marlatt and Witkiewitz (2010) note. They may be yellow, signalling the person to slow down, take precautions, and notice the potential harms that may arise from crossing the intersection. In their analogy, harm reduction is the yellow light that keeps users relatively safe when they are unable or unwilling to see the light as red.

In the introduction to this chapter I presented a quote from a Health Canada report that outlined a national framework for addressing the harms related to alcohol and drug use. It stated that a framework of this kind was “necessary, practical and – most of all – achievable” (Health Canada and CCSA, 2005:3). The authors of this report wrote that programs that recognize the realities of adolescent substance use and that focus on reducing the potential for harm are more likely to succeed than programs that focus on abstinence alone (Health Canada and CCSA, 2005) because they recognize that substance use may fulfil many roles in the user’s life. In the time since this report was published there have been significant changes to national drug policy. Canada’s Drug Strategy has been replaced by Canada’s National Anti-Drug Strategy (NADS).

The findings of this research study show the harms that can result for homeless

young people, and others, as a result of substance use. Many rely on drugs and/or alcohol to give their days a sense of purpose, to pass the time, to provide entertainment, and to cope with the stressors of life on the street. For these reasons, it may be difficult for young people who are homeless to stop using altogether. These findings point to the need for some pressing policy-based decisions. First and foremost is the need for harm reduction to be reinstated as a national priority. If refraining from using is not a possible option for all young people, then something must be done to lessen the harmful effects.

The National Treatment Strategy Working Group (2008) has called for a population-informed response, in which services and supports are tailored to the risk factors, prevalence and severity of use, and the unique characteristics of substance use among specific populations. For homeless youth, this could include services such as the distribution of supplies like clean needles, crack kits, and condoms both in service agencies, as well as through outreach to locations where young people spend time. Further, young people should have access to education, through pamphlets and posters, workshops, and informal discussions, about how to use more safely. This education could include factors such as not sharing needles, not using while alone, identifying the signs of an overdose, and always practising safe sex, even while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. As a strategy for homeless young people, harm reduction has many benefits because it acknowledges, and addresses, the many complicated reasons these youth use substances.

Increasingly, harm reduction has become a staple in the management of problematic substance use for high-risk populations (Erickson & Hathaway, 2010) and in particular for young people who are on the streets (Poulin, 2006). Marlatt and Witkiewitz (2010) note that “The primary goal of most harm-reduction approaches is to meet individuals where they are at and not to ignore or condemn the harmful behaviors, but rather to work with the individual or community to minimize the harmful effects of a given behavior” (593). As such, harm reduction is largely about having respect for the user. Pauly (2008) notes that within a harm reduction context, respect for persons stands in sharp contrast to the disrespect often associated with the stigma of drug use. Unlike moral arguments that may enhance the user’s sense of shame, guilt, and stigmatization, harm reduction is humanistic and based on principles of acceptance (Marlatt & Witkiewitz, 2010). Harm reduction aims to empower individuals by treating them with respect and acceptance as they currently are, and not based on an idea of what others think they should be.

Harm reduction programs promote a non-judgemental and non-stigmatizing environment while also offering a way for homeless youth to work collaboratively with one another (Poland et al., 2002; Weeks et al., 2006) and with so-

cial service providers (Merkinaite et al., 2010). Their involvement can create a community of practice (a process of sharing information and experiences that allows members to learn from each other, and have an opportunity for growth and development) centred around harm reduction (Buccieri, 2010). Such a community may build relationships between young people and social service providers that are more balanced and empowering for the youth (Rogers & Ruefli, 2004). Equally important, accessing harm reduction services can bring hard-to-reach and marginalized youth into contact with social service agencies and provide them with access to treatment and other essential supports, like health care and meal programs (Laurie & Green, 2000; Poulin, 2006).

The costs of substance abuse in Canada are high (Rehm et al., 2006) and the federal government should be applauded for trying to create a strategic response. However, the omission of harm reduction as a key piece of this response is striking (CAMH, 2008). When it comes to addressing the substance use practices of homeless youth, the National Anti-Drug Strategy falls short. The prevention and treatment action plans state that the federal government will enhance, provide, and enable treatment and support programs for young people who are at risk for drug use while supporting research on new treatment methods (Government of Canada, 2011). Rather than funding a search for new treatment methods, federal resources would be better spent on funding harm reduction-based research and program initiatives. This kind of action would be a step forward in supporting our nation's homeless youth, who, as high-risk substance users, are arguably among the most in need of a strategic, organized response. In order to send a clear message of support, the federal government of Canada needs to take a step back in time, to when harm reduction was a priority, in order to create a better future.

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13

Mental Health and Youth Homelessness: A Critical Review

Sean Kidd

Defining Youth Homelessness

It has proven extremely challenging to accurately describe the young people whose unstable and impoverished living circumstances have left them spending large amounts of time homeless and otherwise disengaged from the ways and places of living that are associated with mainstream values and norms. Nonetheless, it is generally understood that these young people represent a distinct population with definable needs, and in response there are services and policies directed towards them. The ambiguity surrounding the definition of youth homelessness is reflected in the many terms used to describe the population. The term “runaway” was in frequent use up to the 1980s although has since fallen out of favour, possibly due to an increased recognition that nearly half of these young people did not “run away”, but were in fact thrown out of their homes (Adams et al., 1985). “Homeless youth” is a frequently used term, although it is often used interchangeably with “street youth” or “street-involved youth,” since many of these young people do not fall under strict definitions of homelessness (i.e. being without any form of shelter). Accurate definitions are made more complicated by the different age ranges that are applied, ranging from 12 to 24 and in some service sectors even higher. This ambiguity around the description further complicates the already difficult

task of determining accurate estimates as to the number of homeless youth. The only clear point regarding the number of homeless youth is that it is large, with a conservative estimate of the number of homeless youth in Canada being 150,000 (National Homelessness Initiative, 2006). While the lack of a systematic count strategy in Canada prevents a meaningful commentary on trends, figures from the United States suggest that the number of North American homeless youth is likely increasing (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2010). For the purposes of this chapter I will use the term “homeless youth” in a manner intended to be inclusive of youth who are living out of doors or otherwise lacking adequate stable housing with appropriate shelter and amenities (U.S. Department of Education, 1989).

Aside from the understanding that there are large numbers of homeless youth on Canadian streets and those numbers are likely growing, the only other relatively clear fact is that the health trajectories of most homeless youth are poor and mortality rates are strikingly higher than those of housed youth. Estimates of up to 40 times the mortality rate of housed youth have been found (Shaw & Dorling, 1998), with primary causes of death identified as suicide and drug overdose (Roy et al., 2004). This chapter builds from the latter observation – that of the profound impacts of poor mental health among homeless youth – and reviews our current understanding of the impact of homelessness on the mental health and well-being of this population, and discusses future directions for research and practice.

Homeless Youth and Mental Health

In considering the mental health and addictions literature for homeless youth it becomes immediately apparent that much of our current understanding is built upon assumption. The vast majority of these studies do not use longitudinal designs (studies that gather information at more than one point in time to see what causes certain outcomes) and this greatly limits our knowledge base. We have yet to clearly understand the relationship between homelessness and mental illness and, in turn, how they are accounted for by risks and resources present in pre-street and homeless circumstances. Despite this limitation it is clear that, in a general sense, the mental health of homeless youth is poor, and across the lifespan of most homeless youth they are immersed in environments characterized by substantial risk.

In considering the social factors that impact health, this is clearly a population that has faced, and faces, numerous and severe forms of adversity. There is considerable evidence that for many young people, these challenges – which have a significant impact on mental health – begin well before they experience homelessness. Considering family contexts before youth become homeless, high rates of parental drug and alcohol abuse and criminal behaviour are consistently found (Hagan

& McCarthy, 1997; Maclean et al., 1999). The experience of poverty is another significant factor, with a high percentage of young people coming from families in precarious financial situations and with high rates of divorce (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). Homeless youth frequently report histories of domestic violence and a greater than average number of household moves leading to frequent changes of school (Buckner et al., 1999; Dadds et al., 1993; Karabanow, 2004). Reports of childhood physical and sexual abuse are many times that of the general population, as are histories of emotional abuse and neglect (Karabanow, 2004; Kidd, 2006; MacLean et al., 1999; Molnar et al., 1998; Ringwalt et al., 1998). A further source of adversity is apparent when considering the child welfare placement histories of a large proportion of homeless youth. Many identify these placement experiences as the major reason for their entry into street life (Karabanow, 2003; 2004; 2008; Kurtz et al., 1991), and characterize placement settings as uncaring, exploitative, and unstable (Michaud, 1989; Raychaba, 1989).

It is not surprising, given the extent of adversity reported in the lives of youth before they become homeless, that the majority of those who report mental illness on the streets describe it as having begun prior to their leaving home (Craig & Hodson, 1998; Karabanow et al., 2007). Such a trend can be directly observed in the rate of youth suffering severe mental illness who ultimately become homeless *after* the onset of their mental illness. Embry and colleagues (2000), for example, found that among the participants in their study, 15 of 83 youth with severe mental illness and who were released from residential psychiatric treatment became homeless following discharge from services.

While there would appear to be general agreement that poor mental health often occurs before homelessness, it is also clear that adversity associated with life on the streets seems to worsen existing mental illness if not cause its onset. Not only do homeless youth regularly lack shelter and go hungry (Tarasuk & Dachner, 2005), they face constant and pervasive threats to safety and well-being in the form of physical and sexual assaults and other types of victimization (Karabanow et al., 2007; Whitbeck et al., 2000). The link between these forms of adversity becomes clear when one considers the heightened suicide risk of youth engaged in the most extreme forms of street survival, including sex trade involvement (Kidd & Kral, 2002) and among youth who demonstrate difficulty coping with discrimination and stigma on the streets (Kidd, 2007).

Studies of mental illness among homeless youth demonstrate that the many forms of adversity occurring on the streets worsen, and sustain poor mental health. Homeless youth in general have been found to have a similar psychiatric profile to adolescents in psychiatric treatment (Shaffer & Caton, 1984), with one study finding mental illness present among homeless youth at a rate that is

three times that of housed youth (Craig & Hodson, 1998). The profiles of mental illness likewise would seem to differ substantially, as evidenced in findings such as that of Thompson and colleagues (2011), who found greater rates of depression among homeless males compared with females – the opposite of what is found in the general youth population (Canadian Psychiatric Association, 2001).

Rates of mental illness commonly found among homeless youth populations include, 31% presenting with major depression, 27% with bipolar disorder, 36% with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and 40% with alcohol and drug abuse-related disorders (Chen et al., 2006; Merscham et al., 2009) and of those with mental illness, 60% have been found to present with multiple diagnoses (Slesnick & Prestopnick, 2005a). Though findings range from comparable (McCaskill et al., 1998; Slesnick & Prsetopnick, 2005a) to rates many times that of the general population (Cauce et al., 2000; Merscham et al., 2009; Mundy et al., 1990; Kamieniecki, 2001), it is also clear that psychoses such as schizophrenia are likely more prevalent among homeless youth especially among those using methamphetamine (e.g. crystal meth) (Martin et al., 2006). Finally, thoughts of suicide and suicide attempts, another clear indication of poor mental health and one of the leading causes of death for this population, are consistently found to be present at rates many times that of the general population (Kidd, 2006).

The role street adversity plays in worsening mental illness is supported by findings that indicate that older homeless youth experience greater depression and more severe substance abuse compared to younger homeless youth (Hadland et al., 2011). Such findings are common, with many studies noting a link between the extent and severity of pre-street and street adversity with mental illness and addictions (Craig & Hodson, 1998; McCarthy & Thompson, 2010; Merscham et al., 2009; Mundy et al., 1990). Indeed, as Goodman, Saxe and Harvey (1991) proposed, homelessness itself is, for many, a process of traumatisation. As it has been repeatedly demonstrated (more so in adult homeless literature), homelessness is characterized by a repeated exposure to traumatic circumstances and chronic stress (e.g., Schuster et al., 2011). Given what is known regarding the dynamic relationship between traumatic stressors and mental health, the high rates of mental illness seen among homeless youth are not surprising, even if those linkages have yet to be clearly addressed in research.

In terms of accessing services, it is clear that the majority of youth experiencing severe mental illness are not receiving any form of treatment (Kamieniecki, 2001; Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005a). The barriers to accessing care, though not studied thoroughly, are readily apparent in the low capacity of community service agencies to provide care for individuals with more severe forms of mental illness and the many barriers to accessing psychiatric care for homeless youth. Barriers highlighted

by Canadian providers have included a lack of identification, having no formal diagnosis, substance use, unstable housing, and long waitlists (Eva's Initiatives, 2012).

One point that frequently arises in conversations with providers, though is not accounted for in the research literature, is in regards to a perceived rise in the number of homeless youth with severe mental illness. While the literature consistently shows high rates, there is no clear evidence of an increase. This does not mean that such a trend is not occurring but, rather, could quite possibly be a phenomenon that is not being captured due to differences in study designs and locations. It is also possible that providers are becoming more aware of and sensitive to the presentation of mental illness among the youth they serve. This is certainly a point that warrants further attention as it has clear implications for the need for improved collaboration between community-based service providers and psychiatric care providers. While not widely studied, the author has received positive feedback from community service providers about strategies such as (i) education of staff regarding the signs and symptoms of major mental illnesses and effective strategies for assessing and managing short-term risk (e.g., regarding suicidal behaviour and self-injury), and (ii) education of staff about the pathways to accessing psychiatric care. Nonetheless, it is clear that the current systems and services poorly address the mental health needs of marginalized groups such as homeless youth. There is also a pressing need for the identification and creation of more effective collaborative models of care (Kidd & McKenzie, *in press*).

Putting Mental Health in Context: A Dynamic Process

Relative to the extensive body of work examining risk, there does exist a small segment that examines resilience and coping among homeless youth. The coping literature highlights several themes, including the importance of self-reliance, the support of other youth, spirituality, and caring for others (Karabanow, 2003; 2004; 2008; Kidd, 2003; Lindsey et al., 2000; Rew & Horner, 2003; Williams et al., 2001). There is also some emerging work that examines the deeper identity and cultural shifts that determine how homeless youth understand and experience their world which, in turn, defines and drives their coping efforts and mental health (Karabanow, 2006; Visano, 1990). In a large study examining the experiences of youth in New York City and Toronto, Kidd and Davidson (2007) studied the manner in which coping efforts were framed within youth's testing, adopting, and rejecting the various messages they are exposed to via mainstream and street interactions and cultures. The particular version of "normal" used – be it homelessness as normal or not – had important implications for both their trajectories on and off the streets and the amount of distress they experienced due to their circumstances. For a youth whose identity is one of street entrenchment, a physical assault might be considered normal and, while painful, cause little emotional

distress. For a youth whose identity is grounded in mainstream values, the same assault might prove to be severely traumatizing. For youth who did not adopt street value systems and norms, the risks of surviving on the street proved to be harsher and these youth were more likely to try to get off the street. For those who took on one or more of the value systems/subcultures available to them on the streets, they might experience less distress in the street context, but also greater exposure to risks (e.g., youths for whom sex trade work has become the norm). These youth are also less likely to seek help in getting off the street. In the face of any number of contradictions, such street identities and value systems were typically challenged many times over the course of a youth's time on the streets: friends they thought "had their back" proved untrustworthy, serious criminal charges arose, health failed, serious assaults occurred, addictions worsened, and caring and respected supports described other ways of living that seemed healthier and more meaningful. However it was described by youth, be it a shift in worldview, value systems, or culture, it was the youth's view of his or her world that set the nature and parameters of their coping and framed how context impacted their mental health.

Intervention

The formal literature on mental health and addictions intervention for homeless youth is extremely limited, as is the intervention literature in general. While this section will present the intervention literature addressing mental health and addictions there are three important qualifiers. First, given that most homeless youth have a very difficult time addressing basic needs (food, clothing, shelter) and the meeting of basic needs is closely associated with mental health, one must consider tying basic needs interventions to mental health and addictions interventions. Second, due to the varied needs of this diverse population, there is a need for commentary at a service system level on the need to combine services to provide care tailored to the individual needs of a given youth. For example, youth who work in the sex trade have quite different service needs than traveller youth (i.e. youth who travel, hitchhiking or by rail, who typically panhandle and sleep out of doors). The existing literature provides minimal guidance in this area. Third, while the severity of the circumstances of most homeless youth does indeed suggest that they are a distinct population with distinct needs, the lack of literature addressing effective treatments for this group should not prevent the use of interventions that have been proven to work for broader populations. For example, given the high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder among homeless youth it would seem relevant to consider providing treatments for trauma that have proven effective with general adolescent and young adult populations (e.g., Foa et al., 2009).

The literature on interventions addressing the basic needs of homeless youth along with studies examining physical health interventions, such as the body

of work focusing on HIV, are beyond the scope of this chapter and have been summarized elsewhere (Kidd, 2003). The overlay with mental health interventions, however, is readily apparent in some instances, such as the recent work of Slesnick and colleagues, which demonstrated that a cognitive behavioural intervention¹ that focuses on skill building and education was more effective than treatment as usual in increasing condom use (Slesnick et al., 2008).

Looking specifically at interventions that address mental health and addictions, most advocate for the use of approaches that address both areas of concern at the same time. Slesnick has done a considerable amount of work in the area of family therapy. She has found that ecologically-based family therapy², with both family and individual sessions focused on decision-making, emotion-regulation or other intrapersonal factors, leads to greater reductions in substance use compared with treatment as usual (Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005b).

Several studies have also discussed motivational intervention as a model for working with substance-using street youth, though the results suggested only modest improvements (Baer et al., 2004; Peterson et al., 2006). Slesnick and colleagues have also provided evidence that the Community Reinforcement Approach (CRA), which uses a cognitive behavioral approach to address the systematic challenges faced by youth, showed good outcomes across a number of areas including internalizing problems, social stability, and substance use (Slesnick et al., 2007).

Next Steps

Overall, the literature on the mental health of homeless youth suggests that they are a group experiencing serious mental health concerns. Further, while it is not possible to comment on the accuracy of service providers' beliefs that rates of mental illness are increasing, it would seem safe to say that they are certainly not declining in any noticeable way given similar rates observed over the past 20 years. Where the research body as a whole has done a disservice to this population is in the lack of attention given to evaluating the effectiveness of interventions.

There would seem to be four key directions available in the effort to address the high rates of mental illness and associated death among homeless youth. First, is the need to greatly expand the effort to examine the effectiveness of interventions. Therein lies a considerable challenge. For example, the criticisms of randomized

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1. The premise of cognitive behavioural therapy is that changing dysfunctional thinking leads to change in effect and in behaviour.
 2. Treatment developed to address immediate needs, to resolve the crisis of running away, and to facilitate emotional re-connection through communication and problem solving skills among family members.

clinical trials (studies in which participants in a treatment are compared with those who are not) are all the more applicable to homeless youth due to the severity of their circumstances. An intervention might only prove to be effective if it is provided in a program that effectively addresses other key needs such as housing, legal support, and medical care. For example, cognitive behavioural therapy will likely not be effective if the youth is living under a bridge and being victimized every other day. I have, anecdotally, observed that the positive effects of psychotherapy rapidly unravel in the face of negative circumstances such as a sudden loss of housing or a rape. As such, studies are needed that account for the programs that encompass the interventions and how they affect outcomes. For instance, the effectiveness of a psychotherapy intervention cannot be understood unless its impact is considered in light of the other services attached to it such as medical care, leisure, and employment programs.

The second area of focus should be on the ways in which services might collaborate in a given city to improve the outcomes for this population. This could include an examination of the impacts of training youth workers in mental health assessment and intervention, creating more streamlined points of access to mental healthcare in community and hospital-based services, and highlighting current practices that are working. It is a consistent challenge in community mental health sectors that highly innovative and effective practices emerge and are not clearly evaluated, articulated, or communicated such that they might be taken up in other settings (Kidd & McKenzie, *in press*).

The third area that would benefit from further development is that of trauma-informed care. Trauma-informed care involves the provision of services within a framework that acknowledges and understands the relevance of trauma in the lives of individuals who have faced adversity and provides access to interventions that address those issues. While service provision to homeless individuals presents unique challenges in providing care within this framework (*i.e.* persistent exposure to re-traumatization), there is increasing recognition of its value and relevance (Hopper et al., 2009). Regardless of whether a given homeless youth was victimized before leaving home, homelessness leads to frequent exposure to violence and chronic stress and presents a context in which trauma is a key consideration. Indeed, recent research demonstrating that the rate and severity of psychosis are directly impacted by experiences of marginalization and victimization (Bebbington, 2009) make trauma-informed care relevant beyond the more commonly understood impacts of trauma such as anxiety and PTSD.

Finally, over-emphasis on interventions geared towards individual youth is itself problematic (Kidd, 2012). Youth homelessness and the mental illness and addictions of homeless youth clearly grow from systemic problems as they flow

through failed child protection efforts, inadequate screening and prevention frameworks in schools, and criminal justice involvement. While there is certainly a need for intervention research at the individual level and, as Slesnick and others propose, family level, neglecting the systems that lead to youth homelessness will do nothing to address the task of bringing down the number of youth on the streets and the cascade of risks that are to be found in street contexts. Indeed, such work in isolation runs the risk of further stigmatizing youth, suggesting that their situation and problems are due to individual failures rather than the myriad factors that cause homelessness and mental health problems. In sum, it would seem that the task of identifying the problems of homeless youth is done. We now need to focus our efforts on generating and evaluating the solutions.

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14

The Need for Early Mental Health Intervention to Strengthen Resilience in Street-involved Youth

Elizabeth McCay, Andria Aiello

Background

Street-involved or homeless youth face dramatic threats to their physical and mental health: they are at increased risk for suicide attempts (McCay, 2009; McCay et al., 2010; Roy et al., 2004), substance abuse and injection drug use (Steenisma et al., 2005), and unwanted/survival sex, as well as a wide range of other health concerns, compared to housed youth of a similar age (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002; Kelly & Caputo, 2007). Further, it is well known that mental health challenges are extremely common among youth who are street-involved (Adlaf & Zdanowicz, 1999; McCay et al., 2010; Yonge Street Mission, 2009). These youth have very high levels of mental health challenges compared with young adults who are housed (Boivin et al., 2005; McCay et al., 2010; Saewyc et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2007; Rhode et al., 2001). There is evidence to suggest that providing housing, combined with supports, for individuals who are living with severe mental illness may be effective in improving their well-being (Goering et al., 2011). Even so, it has been observed that the mental health challenges of youth who are street-involved may interfere with their ability to access services that will improve their overall circumstances. Improving the life circumstances of street-involved youth requires a broad range of social services, including a much needed focus on housing. Further, improving the mental health of these youth is a critical factor in enabling them to participate in available services and programs that are designed to support adaptation to challenges and re-integration into society.

In response to the profound level of mental health need among street youth, our research team carried out a comprehensive assessment of mental health challenges. It was expected that a more in-depth understanding of the mental health challenges of street-involved youth could help to identify appropriate approaches to address these needs (McCay, 2009; McCay et al., 2010). This study used both quantitative (numeric questionnaires) and qualitative (interactive interviews) methods, and also engaged participants in individual and group discussions (see below) throughout the study to ensure their voices were heard. Seventy participants were recruited from four agencies serving homeless youth in Toronto. The participants completed a series of questionnaires to evaluate mental health symptoms such as depression, self-harm, suicide risk, alcohol and substance use, and experiences of physical and sexual abuse, as well as resilience (ability to overcome challenges) and self-esteem. Nine of these youth also participated in individual qualitative interviews to discuss views of their own mental health challenges and strengths. Youth were also recruited from two community agencies to participate in two focus groups to discuss mental health needs and resilience.

Our results indicated that these youth (ages 16–24) had extremely high levels of mental health symptoms when compared with studies involving youth adults who were housed (Meyer & Hautzinger, 2003; Brausch & Muehlenkamp, 2007). These results were comparable to findings from other studies of the mental health symptoms of homeless youth (Boivin et al., 2005; Fisher et al., 2005; Whitbeck et al., 2004). Specifically, the youth in our study exhibited extremely high levels of depression, anxiety, hostility, paranoia, psychotic symptoms, and emotional sensitivity. Sixty-one percent of participants in our study had experienced physical abuse, while just over 25% reported being sexually abused, and 31% expressed some form of suicidal thinking. Forty-one percent of the participants engaged in some form of self-harm and virtually all identified issues with drug and alcohol use. Even with these exceedingly severe levels of mental health symptoms and emotional distress, our participants displayed moderately high levels of resilience and self-esteem (McCay, 2009; McCay et al., 2010).

Overall, the themes that emerged from the interviews with the youth illustrated their resilience and determination, and included: *Surviving life on the street* (negotiating street-life); *Living with mental health challenges* (wide range of mental health problems and stress of being homeless); *Finding strength in the midst of challenges* (striving for a better life, despite obstacles) and *Seeking supportive relationships* (positive connections with family; understanding peers; and relationships with staff). In the next phase of the study, participants suggested that they would like to take pictures (photovoice) (a research method that combines photographs and verbal descriptions) to illustrate what it meant for them to be mentally and emotionally healthy. Underlying themes were derived from discus-

sions with the youth and guided the focus of the youths' photographs. These themes reflected the value of positive mental health from the youth's perspective and included: 1) knowing yourself; 2) recognizing self-worth; 3) being stable, adaptable, positive, and balanced within society and among other people; and 4) trying to cope and get through every day, knowing that you will be okay.

Overall, the qualitative findings mirrored the quantitative findings, specifically regarding the high levels of mental health symptoms. Participants described a number of mental health issues, which they identified as either a consequence of being street-involved or as related to pre-existing illness or challenges. Despite the challenges and sadness experienced by these youth, they also frequently talked about their determination to strive for a better life. It was striking that despite the challenges they faced, the goals of the youth who participated in the study included attending college or university or finding a job, as is typical of the developmental phase of young adulthood (McCay, 2009). Their determination to strive for a better life translated into a number of practical coping strategies to deal with emotional distress, such as thinking positively, learning from past mistakes, helping others, and pursuing goals in order to move ahead, as illustrated by the following quotation from one young male participant.

I found out my things the hard way, right, and I'm still young. I've learned from my mistakes. And I find that even though it's the hard way I'm kinda glad I learned that way you know. Because I learned about my mistakes and I'm not going to make those mistakes again now you know. Well [I was] just goin' down all the bad roads... and with the wrong people, doing the wrong things, wrong mentality... Now I'm like wow, wait a minute what am I doin' here, you know. If I would have just smartened up, buckled down and just focused on just a few short term goals I would have my life set up the way I wanted to right now.

Previous studies have also found high levels of resilience among street youth (Adlaf & Zdanowicz, 1999; Rew et al., 2001; Rew, 2003). In addition, without exception, all of the youth who participated in qualitative interviews identified the central importance of supportive relationships in becoming mentally healthy and strong. Indeed, recent findings have encouraged researchers to move beyond simply describing mental health problems among street youth to focusing attention on developing and evaluating approaches that strengthen positive relationships and build resilience (Karabanow & Clement, 2004; Kidd, 2003; Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Johnson et al., 2005).

The Urgent Need for New Effective Approaches

Despite the dramatic level of mental healthcare need, these vulnerable youth are far less likely to access mental health care, healthcare and/or social services for a variety of complex reasons, including issues of stigma and discrimination associated with homelessness and mental health problems, as well as other barriers to accessing services (Hughes et al., 2010; McCay, 2009; Slesnick et al., 2001). Understandably, street-involved youth are frequently suspicious of adults, authority and social structures (Karabanow & Clement, 2004; Meade & Slesnick, 2002), posing significant challenges to care providers who are responsible for intervening with these youth to support positive change. Although it is accepted that there is a profound need for more effective interventions with homeless youth, strategies for effective intervention must accommodate all factors that prevent youth from accessing supports that can help them in their journey to achieve more stability, secure housing, and ultimately to lead satisfying and successful lives.

The selection of approaches to address the mental health needs of street youth is problematic, since so few interventions have been specifically designed for this population. As yet, there is a lack of evidence regarding interventions to address the specific mental health needs of homeless youth (Altena et al., 2010). Kidd (2003) reviewed the mental health literature and located 42 articles from 1987-2003 that could be considered relevant to intervention programs for street youth. Although the articles reviewed highlighted issues to be considered in the design of mental health intervention programs, such as early intervention and the need to assess mental health issues, virtually all of the studies reviewed were descriptive and focused on symptoms of mental illness, with little attention given to intervention approaches based on research evidence (Kidd, 2003).

Few studies have evaluated the impact of mental health programs on street youth. An early study by Cauce and Morgan (1994) compared the effects of an intensive mental health case management program with a standard case management model. Standard case management is a collaborative process intended to address the youth's needs for service and support. In addition to standard case management, intensive case management allows for: smaller caseloads resulting in increased time with youth; higher educational requirements for case managers; along with scheduled supervision for case managers with experienced experts. Participants who received intensive mental health case management showed lower aggression and greater life satisfaction than those receiving standard case management, benefits which the authors attributed to a positive therapeutic relationship with the case manager. Slesnick et al.'s (2007) study compared regular treatment, which included an average of three to four case management sessions, with an intensive community reinforcement approach which involved 12 individual therapy ses-

sions designed to meet a range of health, social and occupational needs, along with four educational HIV sessions. Youth participating in the 12-week intervention reported reduced substance use and depression, as well as increased social stability, as assessed by the degree of stability in housing, education, work and health. The authors concluded that, for street youth, interventions must be able to disrupt a downward spiral of behaviours and interactions, while providing support and skills to further positive relationships (Slesnick et al., 2007). Both of these studies demonstrate the importance of positive social relationships for the participants' outcomes. Further, Slesnick et al., (2009) reviewed community-based treatment interventions for homeless youth and concluded that, in order for interventions to be effective, it is essential that community agency staff be trained in the therapeutic relationship skills necessary to keep youth engaged in interventions over time.

It is evident from this review of available research literature that there is a large knowledge gap related to research-based interventions to reduce emotional distress, promote positive relationships, and support overall positive functioning among street youth. A pilot study conducted by our group (McCay et al., 2011) suggests that a relationship-based intervention for street-involved youth may be promising. Youth who participated in a 6-week relationship-based group intervention experienced higher levels of social connectedness (a sense of belonging and fitting in) and experienced less hopelessness (a core symptom of depression), compared with youth who did not receive the intervention. This finding is important since it reinforces that there may be benefits to providing psychologically-based interventions for street youth that are directed toward strengthening resilience and, in this case, positive relationships, rather than focusing on mental health symptoms. Addressing the mental health problems of street youth, including their very high levels of psychological distress, should enable youth to engage in opportunities for social re-integration through the transition to stable housing and/or employment programs.

An extensive qualitative study of 128 street youth and 50 service providers (Karabanow & Clement, 2004; Karabanow, 2008) has been used to create a theoretical model to describe the process of exiting the street and finding stable housing. Central to successful "exiting" were characteristics such as personal motivation and positive self-esteem. These observations are consistent with the findings of Kidd and Shahar (2008), who found that self-esteem was the strongest factor protecting against thoughts of suicide and loneliness amongst a similar group of street-involved youth in New York City. Taken together with our study findings, it seems that interventions that concentrate on strengthening mental health and resilience, as well as self-esteem, hold great promise in supporting street-involved youth to achieve independent, healthy and successful lives.

Critical Periods for Intervention

The longer youth spend on the street, the greater the chance that they will engage in high risk behaviours, such as survival sex, suicide attempts (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992), substance use, and injection drug use (Steensma et al., 2005), and the less likely they are to seek regular healthcare (O'Toole et al., 1999). As youth spend more time on the street, the risk of chronic homelessness increases (Goering et al., 2002) suggesting that there is a critical window of opportunity for intervention (Auerswald & Eyre, 2002). By far the largest barrier to improving the circumstances of street-involved youth is the profound difficulty of engaging marginalized youth in helping relationships and services (Slesnick et al., 2000). Although difficult to define, engagement can be thought of as the degree to which youth are able to access and trust in the relationship with their primary service provider. It is evident that for street-involved youth, challenges associated with engaging in healthcare and social services are linked to mental health. Accessing mental health services, as well as health and social services, requires a capacity for effective engagement. There is an overwhelming need to meaningfully engage youth who are at critical periods in their journey in order to end their homelessness. Two critical periods for intervention include: 1) first engagement/contact with service providers and 2) transition to independent housing.

Initial Contact as an Optimal Time for Engagement: Engaging Youth through Motivational Interviewing (MI)

It is generally accepted that overwhelming mental health issues, such as those described earlier, frequently prevent youth from fully engaging in a range of healthcare services (including mental health services), as well as educational or employment programs that could ultimately lead to independent and healthy lives. Difficulties engaging in health and social service programs can be attributed to highly complex psychological needs (e.g. trauma) and the associated lack of trust necessary to engage in helping relationships. As well, challenges associated with life on the street, such as substance use, also interfere with the formation of trusting relationships and engagement in programs (Darbyshire et al., 2006; Slesnick et al., 2008). A study examining the participation of at-risk youth in mental health services highlights the need to understand the demanding nature of engaging vulnerable youth (French et al., 2003). These authors emphasize that rigid practices are likely to limit youth's engagement, and advocate for participatory processes that clearly place youth's concerns at the centre of relationships with service providers. Further, an extensive literature review by Paterson and Panessa (2008) concludes that surprisingly little attention has been paid to engagement processes in harm-reduction strategies and argues that youth engagement is a critical factor in supporting youth to make healthy behavioural choices. Given the

profound problems of engaging youth so negatively affected by life on the street, there is a need for intervention strategies to enable care providers to: develop trusting relationships with youth; motivate youth to adopt healthy behaviours for change; and to ultimately engage youth in services to obtain stable housing and achieve life goals. An effective strategy for engaging youth in making positive changes in their lives is an approach called Motivational Interviewing or MI.

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a highly interactive and client-centred counselling style for supporting and motivating clients who may be interested in changing their health behaviours (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). MI is particularly effective when working with individuals who are not yet thinking about change or who are unsure about whether they want to change (SAMHSA, 2010), and, in this way is well suited to street-involved youth. Peterson et al., (2006) argue that MI is “well matched” for working with homeless and marginalized populations who may find it especially difficult to think about and follow through with changes given all of the challenges and barriers they face. MI recognizes that therapy can be used to strengthen an individual’s personal motivation and abilities, resulting in behavioural change and positive health outcomes (Frey et al., 2011; Naar-King et al., 2009). The role of the service provider is to work collaboratively with clients in order to help them begin to understand and put into words how they feel about their own behaviour, how motivated they are to change their behaviour, and when ready, to consider specific steps towards changing behaviour. Creating a safe setting, so that the client can share their true feelings and motivations regarding a specific behaviour, is one of the most important characteristics of the service provider’s role in MI.

MI follows four guiding principles: (1) expressing empathy, (2) developing discrepancy, (3) rolling with resistance, and (4) supporting self-efficacy (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). Expressing empathy involves communicating support and acceptance of clients as they are, regardless of the choices they make, which builds clients’ trust in the counsellor and in themselves and, in turn, facilitates change. Developing discrepancy aims to help clients recognize that their current behaviours are in conflict with important personal goals or personal values, thereby helping clients identify their own reasons for change. By rolling with resistance, the provider lets the client know that uncertainty about changing is natural. Finally, to support self-efficacy (one’s belief that one is capable of making changes), the provider communicates confidence that change is possible and helps the client develop the necessary skills to achieve such change (Jackman, 2011).

The benefits of a trusting and accepting bond between client and counsellor have been recognized in the research for decades (Angus & Kagan, 2009). MI emphasizes the need for care providers to communicate non-judgmental, unconditional

acceptance to highly vulnerable youth, while at the same time inviting youth to consider the need for change, such as moving away from harmful behaviours and toward life goals. MI has been shown to be effective in addressing the different kinds of mental health problems experienced by homeless youth, such as substance abuse, anxiety and depression (Arkowitz et al., 2007; Westra & Dozois, 2006), and eating disorders (Arkowitz et al., 2007; Burke et al., 2003). It also shows promise for addressing non-suicidal self-harming behaviour (Kress & Hoffman, 2008), as well as for conditions like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, by building commitment to treatment (Rusch & Corrigan, 2002). In the same way, MI helps to overcome the basic difficulties in engaging street-based populations, as limited client engagement and lack of follow-through continue to be the major factors limiting the effectiveness of current interventions, holding back positive behavioural change. In this way, the bulk of the current evidence points to the value of MI in the treatment of a broad range of mental health problems by increasing engagement with treatment and improving outcomes overall (Arkowitz et al., 2008). Recognizing the potential of MI, a resilience- and strength-based approach, which focuses on moving toward client-centred goals, while respecting where clients are, at any given moment in their journey, our research group is currently engaged in a study funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). The study's aims are to develop, carry out and evaluate an innovative intervention, which includes motivational interviewing, to meaningfully engage youth who are at the beginning of their journey to end homelessness. Through meaningful engagement, we hope to help youth adopt healthy behaviours for change and ultimately support them in becoming healthy, independent young adults.

Mental Health Intervention to Support the Transition to Independence: Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)

As youth continue on their journey towards independence, there is a need for services and programs to support them in building the skills and experience necessary to become independent young adults. The need to engage in career-oriented activities, such as education or employment programs, is particularly urgent when youth are preparing to transition to independence. Programs such as transitional housing, which support youth's transition to independence, can be found in most large urban centers. Within these programs, youth live in stable, independent housing and are provided with support to acquire skills (such as money management and cooking), as well as the opportunity to engage in education or employment-related opportunities, all necessary for independent living. Despite the availability of these transitional programs, experience suggests that youth are often unable to stay engaged in these programs. Frequently, profound mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicidality, as well as issues related to drug abuse and other self-defeating behaviours, dramatically harm the young person's capacity

to engage in opportunities for social re-integration. Transitioning to independent living is another critical period where mental health intervention may maximize youth's capacity to stay in transitional programs to achieve successful independence.

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) (Linehan, 1993) is supported by research evidence and includes both individual and group components and is well suited to street-involved youth experiencing a range of mental health challenges. Originally, DBT was developed to reduce self-harming behavior common among individuals with severe challenges in coping, such as those with borderline personality disorder (Linehan, 1993). Over the past number of years, DBT has been adapted for a wide range of mental health challenges, specifically suicidal and non-suicidal self-harming behaviour, addictive behaviour, and other impulsive behaviours, as well as mood disorders in adults and youth, all of which are common in street-involved youth and involve problems with emotion regulation (Katz et al., 2009; Goldstein, Axelson et al., 2007; Harley et al., 2008; Linehan, 1993 & 2000; Miller et al., 2007). Emotion regulation refers to the individual's capacity to have control over their emotions (e.g. – limit emotional outbursts), particularly in social situations, and is thought to be related to overall emotional well-being, including the quality of relationships (Lopes et al., 2005). DBT is based on the understanding that a lack of emotion regulation (aggressive behaviour in response to anger) is related to a range of difficulties in coping with life challenges. Emotional dysregulation or extreme emotional sensitivity may be a result of biological vulnerability (emotional sensitivity) and/or traumatic interpersonal relationships (Koerner & Dimeff, 2007). It is recognized that individuals who struggle with emotional regulation also have profoundly negative perceptions of themselves, to the point of self-loathing. DBT intervention emphasizes the need for therapeutic unconditional acceptance of the client, as well as the need to focus on changing ineffective coping mechanisms, such as self-harm and/or addiction, which are frequently used by street youth to avoid painful emotions and perceptions of themselves.

As a multi-component intervention, DBT is designed to enhance individuals' capacity to cope with challenging circumstances (such as past & current traumas) in their lives by learning to regulate their emotions, cope with emotional distress, be more mindful of strengthening the core self (genuine sense of self), and become more effective in interpersonal relationships. Thus DBT offers promise in improving the mental health and overall functioning of street youth in two important ways: 1) DBT is directed towards actively engaging youth in weekly individual psychotherapy and group skills training sessions focused on learning to cope with emotional distress, thus decreasing the intensity of emotional distress and ineffective coping mechanisms over a relatively short time frame, which often can take many months or years; and 2) DBT emphasizes problem-solving and relationship skills, which youth are able to transfer to other life situations. Given the poten-

tial of DBT to reduce emotional distress, build emotion-based coping skills, and increase interpersonal skills for street youth, our research group (funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research) is currently providing and evaluating the adolescent version of DBT (Miller et al., 2007) to street youth aged 16-24. The adolescent version of DBT is closely aligned with Linehan's model (1993) and addresses core issues such as unstable moods, impulse control, intense relationship issues (coping with feelings of abandonment), and identity disturbance (confusion regarding the core self) (Rathus & Miller, 2002), all common problems during the transitional phase of adolescence, particularly for street-involved youth.

Our 12-week adolescent version of DBT addresses each of the mental health challenges described above through individual psychotherapy, skills training in a group setting, development of a 24-hour crisis plan, and staff training to enhance therapists' DBT capabilities. Currently, staff working within two community agencies in Canada are administering the DBT intervention. Staff received DBT training using a variety of methods which included the following: (1) online DBT training; (2) a series of eight DBT training sessions/webinars led by a DBT expert; and (3) a written manual outlining the 12-week DBT program. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the DBT training methods listed above, staff were asked to complete pre- and post-training questionnaires testing their knowledge of DBT. DBT individual and group therapists in this study also participate in ongoing weekly one-hour consultation meetings via teleconference during which they receive support and consultation regarding the implementation of DBT. The consultation team meetings help to ensure that the therapists are following the DBT model. To assess the effectiveness of the intervention, participants are asked to fill out a number of questionnaires, which measure mental health challenges and strengths, as well as overall functioning at different points in time. Some of the participants will also be invited to participate in interviews to discuss their views of the DBT intervention. The study is ongoing, and recruitment and youth engagement in the intervention is encouraging. Informal feedback from youth and staff alike indicates that this is a promising intervention for youth who are transitioning to independence.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

Overall, there is an urgent need for increased access to mental health services for street-involved youth. Research findings from our study, designed to gain a deeper understanding of the mental health challenges and strengths of street-involved youth, illustrates that despite their high level of mental health care need, they are far less likely to access mental health care, healthcare and/or social services for a variety of complex reasons, including stigma and discrimination (McCay et al., 2010). Accessible mental health services should be non-stigmatizing, which may be accomplished by offering these services at sites that

youth already frequent, such as shelters or drop-in programs. Mental health services for street-involved youth need to be offered in a non-threatening environment where help is offered in a non-judgmental and accepting manner, so that youth can readily trust providers and be willing to engage in services. It is clear that youth are unlikely to use traditional mental health services.

In addition, our findings suggest that multi-component mental health programs and interventions are needed to address youth's strengths and challenges in order to better help street-involved youth achieve social re-integration and improved quality of life (McCay et al., 2010). Emerging findings indicate that youth may benefit from participating in interventions focused on their mental health. Specifically, street-involved youth who participated in a 6-week relationship-based intervention experienced higher levels of social connectedness, along with decreased hopelessness, compared with youth who did not receive the intervention (McCay et al., 2011). Such interventions and programs have the potential to build youth's resilience and capacity to cope with challenging circumstances, to cope with emotional distress, and to build on existing strengths to pursue practical, personal goals towards an improved quality of life. The mental health challenges of street-involved youth are severe and complex. Skillful intervention requires working from both positive and negative perspectives, emphasizing positive self-acceptance and resilience while focusing on the need to move away from negative coping strategies, such as self-harm and/or addiction, toward more effective strategies, such as building positive relationships. Providing evidence-based mental health interventions on-site within agencies providing services to street-involved youth (like the two studies in progress described in the chapter), is an approach that promises to increase access and suitability to youth of much needed interventions to address their profound mental health needs.

From a policy perspective, it is essential to recognize that evidence-based mental health interventions have the potential to help youth negotiate critical crossroads on their path to recovery, specifically when they first enter or seek services, as well as during their transition to independence. These are ideal times to provide effective mental health interventions within the context of services for street-involved youth. Early data from our study that looks at providing and evaluating DBT for street-involved youth suggest that it is indeed possible to engage these youth in services, as well as in helpful relationships with service providers. These interventions are complex and require that training be accessible for service providers to attain adequate training and support to sustain effective implementation. There is an urgent need to recognize the mental health needs of street-involved youth and for policy makers to direct their attention to the implementation of evidence-based mental health interventions and practices in youth friendly settings in order to support these youth to achieve health and independence.

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EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION & TRAINING

15 Why Don't You Just Get a Job? Homeless Youth, Social Exclusion and Employment Training

Stephen Gaetz, Bill O'Grady

When I was an outreach worker with a health clinic for street youth, I often encountered young people sitting on the sidewalk while panhandling¹. One of the things that struck me most was how passers-by – people who essentially looked like me – felt perfectly free to direct negative and disparaging comments at these youth. It was not unusual for people to say: “Why don’t you get a job?” Often the comments were much worse.

When people pose such questions today, I usually ask them to reflect on what it takes for any young person to get a job, and then show up day in, day out. Of course, having an education is an obvious factor, followed by talent and motivation. But one needs to go a bit deeper. While acknowledging that across Canada there are great differences in terms of privilege and opportunity (where wealth, education, discrimination and regional difference play a role), it is safe to say that people who are stably housed experience distinct and significant advantages when moving into the labour force.

Having a home means that many of your basic needs are met: it is a place where one can eat, rest, sleep and recover from illness or injury. More than

1. Author Stephen Gaetz worked at Shout Clinic, a community health centre for homeless youth in Toronto, between 1993 and 1999.

merely a physical space, a home means having an address and a telephone, all of which help when looking for work, and at a minimal level, makes a young person more attractive to employers.

Perhaps more importantly, many, if not most teenagers can also count on a broad and diverse range of social supports – including parents and family, friends, neighbours, teachers and counsellors, etc. – to nurture and mentor, to provide emotional support and encouragement AND in some cases, the connections needed to get work.

Being healthy, having adequate shelter, food, and transportation, all make holding down a job easier by providing structure, security and the ability to rest and recover so that one can get up and go to work day in, and day out. Given all of this, it is *still* not easy for many young people to get a job, and it may take years – and a long history of work experience – before they are able to move out on their own, live independently and support themselves. We also know that in recent years, this transition period has grown longer (Côté & Byner, 2008).

For young people who are homeless, the challenges of obtaining and maintaining employment are that much greater. We know that young people who are homeless are likely to have left school at a younger age compared to most housed youth. We know that homeless youth lack key resources – such as income, housing, and food – that enable most people to work. Some homeless youth suffer additional challenges associated with mental health problems and/or addictions. These factors are important to understand if we want to help move youth off the streets in a safe and sustainable way.

In this chapter, we ask a key question: What is the role of employment training programs in helping young people move off the streets? More and more communities struggle with how to enhance the employability of homeless youth, often knowing that traditional employment training programs and supports have not always successfully engaged the most marginal of youth populations.

Our understanding of youth homelessness and employment is drawn from what we have learned from three major research studies (1999, 2002, 2009)², as well as other research on street youth and employment (Karabanow, Hughes, et al., 2010; Gwadz et al., 2009; Robinson & Baron, 2007). It is our contention that if

2. The following analysis draws from our research on street youth conducted in 1999, 2002 and 2009 (Gaetz, O'Grady & Vaillancourt, 1999; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Gaetz, 2002; Gaetz, O'Grady & Buccieri, 2010; O'Grady, Gaetz, & Buccieri, 2011). In each case a large cohort of street involved youth were surveyed and interviewed about a broad range of issues relating to their background, current situation, income generating activities and employability. This article synthesizes our learnings from each of these studies.

employment really *does* have the potential to help end youth homelessness, then we really need to understand what factors enhance the success of such efforts. We argue that this challenge begins with a clearer understanding of the factors in lives of street youth that make it so difficult to obtain and maintain work. Drawing on what has been learned from innovative programming in Canada, we conclude by presenting a clear and robust framework for developing effective employment and training supports for homeless youth. Here we outline key components that should be considered when developing programs and focus on social *inclusion* rather than the exclusionary factors that limit the prospects for street youth.

Thinking About Homeless Youth and Social Exclusion

A homeless youth staying in a shelter or living in an abandoned building may not be visible to the average person. If they are working at a regular job, it may not even occur to anyone that they are homeless. Even a homeless person sitting on a sidewalk or on a park bench may not draw our attention. But when a young person is panhandling or squeegeeing they become difficult to ignore, as our engagement with them – indeed, our engagement with homelessness – becomes direct, personal, visceral and to the chagrin of many, unavoidable. When someone extends their hand, stands in front of us, speaks directly to us, looks us in the eye, homelessness is no longer invisible – it becomes something we are forced to deal with.

These experiences may lead us to question how and why young people become homeless in the first place, and why are they not in school or working? To some, the sight of a panhandling youth is interpreted as evidence that the young person is lazy or unwilling to work. While not exactly new, perspectives that seek to explain poverty in terms of individual choices, motivation and morality have been gaining traction in recent years. Neoliberal theories³ have entered popular culture and have provided a popular, if problematic, narrative for explaining why some people succeed and others do not, and underlie a belief that social issues such as poverty, unemployment, addictions and mental health are personal, individual and private issues, best addressed by individuals and families, rather than government or the broader society (Navarro, 1998; Fourcade-Gourinchas & Babb, 2002; Kus, 2006).

The underlying thesis of neoliberal theorists is that at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy exists a group of people – people different from you

3. Neoliberalism is an ideological orientation that has had a huge influence on social policy over the past several decades. Neoliberalism supports a radical notion of individualism, arguing that shared social and economic resources and supports should be reduced, state services should become privatized, and that there should be a greater reliance on the ‘marketplace’ to distribute goods and services. Informed by the neo-liberal critique of Beck (1992) and Foucault (1991), the neo-liberal citizen is the ‘manager’ of his or her own risk; one who contributes to the economy while at the same time caring for his or her family.

and me – who have willingly opted out of a range of mainstream social institutions (Murray, 1994; 2012; Herrstein & Murray, 1996). ‘They’ are not interested in getting jobs or going to school. ‘They’ flout laws and disrespect authority. ‘They’ readily take advantage of handouts. Moreover, there is an implied contagion effect: that by grouping such people together, there is the potential for the destructive ideas and values that underlie poverty to spread not only outwardly, but between generations, as well.

Additionally, neoliberal critiques suggest that government interventions, such as social programs and income supports, are an ineffective and counter-productive response to the bad and immoral choices that individuals make, and may actually contribute to the problem by encouraging laziness, immoral conduct and urban decay. That is, people will avoid getting a job if they are able to ‘take advantage’ of benefits, and people would rather be on welfare than work. Following this logic, a key remedy to unemployment is to make employment more attractive than living off ‘the taxpayer,’ and cutting back or eliminating state support is seen as the solution to the underclass problem. This logic suggests that homeless people should pull themselves up by the bootstraps. It is also the logic that frames some people as ‘deserving’ of support, and others as the ‘undeserving poor’.

Lest we imagine that such theorizing is somehow disconnected from the ‘real world’, it is worth looking at the results of a poll taken by the Salvation Army in 2011. The report, “The Dignity Project”, found that many Canadians “hold opinions that perpetuate the idea that “the poor are the problem” and that “their decisions and choices led them to a life of poverty”” (Salvation Army, 2011). Some of the results indicate:

- Nearly half of all respondents agree with the notion that if poor people really want to work, they can always find a job.
- 43 percent agree that “a good work ethic is all you need to escape poverty.”
- 41 percent believe that the poor would “take advantage” of any assistance given and “do nothing.”
- 28 percent believe the poor have lower moral values than average.
- Nearly a quarter believe that “people are poor because they are lazy.”

Homeless Youth and Work

So, what do we know about homeless youth and employment? There is considerable literature that attests to the challenges that homeless youth experience in obtaining and maintaining employment (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; O’Grady & Gaetz, 2004; O’Grady et al., 1998; Karabanow, Hughes, et al., 2010; Baron &

Hartnagel, 2002; Keenan et al., 2006; Robinson & Baron, 2007). In our recent report, “Surviving Crime and Violence”, 77% of our sample were unemployed (the rest having part-time or full-time jobs), and few were engaged in school, with over 65% having failed to complete high school (Gaetz et al., 2010).

A lack of traditional jobs does not necessarily mean that homeless youth are not *working*. Because homeless youth face considerable barriers to employment, many of those we surveyed engaged in what are referred to as “informal” economic activities outside of the formal labour market, some of which were technically legal, for example ‘under the table’ jobs, or ‘binning’ (collecting bottles for refunds). Others engaged in more risky illegal or quasi-legal activities, including the sex trade, panhandling (begging), squeegeeing (cleaning car windshields), and criminal acts such as theft and drug dealing (O’Grady et al., 1998; Gaetz et al., 1999; Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; O’Grady & Gaetz, 2003).

A defining feature of such informal money making strategies is that they are socially patterned. That is, certain social characteristics (background factors such as age one left home, history of abuse, and education level, or situational factors such as addictions or mental health) have a direct impact on what is possible, and what moneymaking strategies one engages in. Young people who come from the worst backgrounds – who suffered physical, sexual and emotional abuse at home, who left home at an early age and dropped out of school, and who have addictions challenges – are less likely to get regular jobs. This group is the most likely to rely on illegal and quasi-legal forms of making money, including prostitution. Those who stayed in school for longer periods, left home at a later age and have fewer addictions or mental health issues, are more likely to report having a job currently or sometime in the past. The diverse backgrounds and experiences of homeless youth are thus important when considering employment as a pathway off the streets. For some homeless youth, this pathway is shorter, straighter and less littered with obstacles than it is for others (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002).

Another feature of informal work is that it is highly flexible, and may in fact be key to economic survival on the streets. The young people in our studies were able to point out some advantages of this kind of work – you make your own hours, you select your colleagues and there is companionship (in some cases). In terms of contributing to the development of labour market skills, it has been pointed out by several researchers that many of the skills and routines learned through this work – including teamwork and collaboration, strategic thinking and a consideration for ‘consumer satisfaction’ – are transferable to work in the formal economy (Hurtubise et al., 2003; Karabanow, Hughes, et al., 2010). The most obvious reason, however, for engaging in such work is that it produces income – cash in hand – on a day in, day out basis. For people leading chaotic lives, who are hungry, have no

savings and who live in extreme poverty, this latter point is particularly important.

While there are positive benefits to such work, it is important to note that street youth also recognize the downside, including risk of criminal victimization (theft, sexual assault), trouble with the police, humiliation when recognized by friends, and abuse by passers-by:

"I find panhandling degrading. Here I am panhandling and the next day I go for a job interview and the guy who's interviewing you I asked for money the day before, or I meet the parents of my old friend from public school, people you don't want to know and they know you and see you and treat you like a sympathy case, to want to take you for food." (Seamus, 19)⁴

There is ample research that suggests that homeless youth are much more likely than housed youth to be victims of crime including assault and robbery (Gaetz, 2004; Gaetz et al., 2010). Generating income in highly visible settings, lacking access to safe places to retreat to after work, and strained relationships with police (O'Grady et al., 2011) – meaning they are unlikely to report crimes – means they make attractive targets for other criminals.

So why do homeless youth engage in these activities instead of just getting a regular job? A common assumption is that rather than get a real job, street youth panhandle or squeegee just for kicks or because it is easier than real work. This interpretation of 'lazy' and/or 'delinquent' street youth is quite enduring, and is often the underlying theme of scornful comments by the media, politicians and police. Indeed, Gordon (2004; 2006) has argued that panhandling and squeegeeing are typically framed not as a strategy for those living in poverty to earn money, but rather as a reflection of the character of a homeless population presumed to be lazy, uninterested in waged labour and lacking self-discipline.

Can we really consider street youth's money making practices as simply a 'choice', or is something else going on? Is this more about circumstance and meeting subsistence needs in the face of poverty? Our past research (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002) has addressed this question, exploring whether youth preferred panhandling, squeegeeing or illegal work (drug dealing) over having a regular job. Approximately 80% of males and females indicated that they do not like to be squeegeeing, stripping, selling drugs, etc., on a steady basis. When asked, "Are you interested in finding paid employment?" an overwhelming 83.4% of males and 87.8% of females said "yes". Street youth do not appear to be a group that is avoiding work.

4. Quotes from young people who are homeless are reproduced from Gaetz et al., 1999.

"I like having the ability to bring in my own money and not be depending on welfare. I want to be off welfare. Every time I've gotten a job I've cut myself off welfare, I haven't screwed the system. I hate not working. I deal with an employment counselor twice a week trying to find work." (Brian, 22)

Other researchers, such as Gwadz et al., (2009) identify the degree to which informal work is considered demeaning and humiliating to many youth. These young people, rather than 'aspiring' to such work or opting out of the formal economy, as some theorists would have it, typically have very conventional aspirations and dreams regarding employment, obtaining a career and financial independence.

There is no clear evidence, then, that homeless youth lack motivation and/or are opposed to, or are actively avoiding mainstream employment. Rather, most homeless youth *do* have records of employment, and have had more than one job, though their employment histories are precarious. When they do get jobs, it is usually low-wage, part-time, dead end work at the margins of the economy (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Robinson & Baron, 2007): employment that rarely provides a living wage, or an opportunity for future upward mobility (Côté & Bynner, 2008; Standing, 2011). In fact, because of the marginal nature of the jobs street youth are able to obtain, many report unfair treatment by employers, including racism, sexual harassment, and in some cases, not being paid for work done (this is more often the case when payment is under the table) (Gaetz, 2002). For many, then, the experience of mainstream employment is not necessarily a positive one.

"What skills did you learn at these jobs? It depends on what point of view you have. At my last job I think I learned that people really don't have any morals and the world truly sucks. I was starting to be optimistic for a while but that whole experience taught me otherwise." (Johnny, 22)

Clearly, informal money making strategies such as panhandling, binning, squeegeeing and prostitution are not the primary employment choices of street youth, and neither are dead end jobs. The question then becomes what keeps street youth from obtaining and maintaining suitable employment that would allow them to sustain themselves and move off the streets?

Is Employment Training the Solution?

The ability to obtain work in a competitive labour market is linked to 'human capital', which entails, "the abilities, skills, and knowledge acquired by an individual through various channels such as inheritance, education and/or training. Human capital is the currency people bring to invest in their jobs" (Robinson & Baron,

2007:38). It is this lack of human capital experienced by some marginalized populations (such as homeless youth) that provides the ‘logic’ for employment training.

There are three main approaches to enhancing the employability of youth that are generally embraced in Canada. The first is the informal learning that comes from family and community. On a material level, families provide shelter, income and resources (including food) while young people stay in school and/or acquire their first jobs. It is also within the home that young people gradually learn how to look for work, what to say during an interview, the importance of punctuality, how to deal with the challenges of work life (difficult bosses and colleagues), and budgeting. Wealth and privilege provide many additional advantages to young people, including access to better schools, supports and resources for achievement or, conversely, support when young people face challenges.

The second approach to enhancing youth employability is related to education, and key here is the desire to get young people to stay in school as long as possible, and obtain education and training that meets the needs of the labour market. Statistics Canada describes education as a ‘gateway’ to higher earnings (Statistics Canada, 2008). The evidence that the higher one’s level of education is, the better one’s employment outcomes will be, is so overwhelming that it is hardly worth reviewing (Low, 2006). Minimally, a high school diploma increases one’s chances of work, and expands one’s opportunities. Moving on to college or university only enhances these opportunities, and the rise in ‘credentialism’ only increases the need for more post-secondary education (Côté & Bynner, 2008).

Finally, there are employment training programs, designed to enhance the employability of the long-term unemployed, social assistance recipients and other marginalized populations that face challenges integrating into the labour market (Greene, 2003; Lafer, 2002; Robinson & Baron, 2007). These programs have as their goal to improve the ‘human capital’ of such persons by providing them with the necessary skills to prepare them to successfully compete for and keep jobs; in a sense, to “work their way out of poverty” (Lafer, 2002:94). Such training usually involves a combination of “hard skills” – technical skills for jobs, such as computer training, trades etc., – and “soft skills” – that focus on work readiness including job search and interview strategies, or how to manage conflict with other employees or managers.

The best employment training programs are effective in that they meet their objective of improving the employability of marginalized youth by providing them with the supports necessary to transition into the world of work. Such programs move beyond a narrow neoliberal orientation (focusing on skills development and ‘motivation’) and incorporate strategies to overcome many of

the challenges faced by young people who experience social exclusion. Special efforts are made to recruit and support sympathetic employers who are willing to hire marginalized youth who are perceived (correctly or incorrectly) to be a ‘risk’. There are many excellent job shadowing, coaching and/or mentoring supports designed to help young people keep their jobs and deal with the challenges that work can bring, including, ironically, the successes.

When such programs target street youth, there is a larger goal. That is, employment training becomes framed as a *response* to homelessness, in that assisting young people to obtain and sustain employment represents a pathway off the streets. This goal recognizes that traditional approaches to youth employment training may not work with street youth, and that few homeless youth actually successfully participate in such training. To understand why homeless youth do not succeed in such programs, one needs to consider from an institutional perspective the ways in which most employment training programs are organized, and how this may clash with the lived experience of young people who are homeless. A highly structured program with a set number of required hours of attendance on consecutive days or weeks might work for young people with shelter, food and supports, but not necessarily for street youth. Lack of money for transportation, food and necessities, combined with the inherent instability and unexpected crises of their day-to-day lives may make participating in such programs particularly difficult for street youth. Unfortunately, for those delivering employment training, there is not necessarily much room for flexibility, as the terms and conditions of programs are often dictated by funders.

All of this raises an important question: ***Do employment training programs offer a solution to street youth unemployment?*** As will be seen, our argument is that employment training must be integrated into a broader web of supports – the kind of supports that many or most housed youth have access to. Stand-alone employment training that is divorced from other necessary supports including safe and appropriate housing, income, nutrition, social and health supports will generally not meet the needs of most homeless youth.

An Alternative Perspective on Poverty: Social Exclusion

To truly understand why a person – or group of people – faces challenges in obtaining work, we need to look at the multiple factors that have an impact on employability beyond skills and ‘motivation’ levels. The concept of social exclusion provides an effective means for understanding the range of factors that reduce people’s access to opportunities and shape what is possible for them. Social exclusion describes the circumstances and experiences of persons who are shut out, fully or partially, from the social, economic, political and cultural institutions of

society (Byrne, 1999; Mandianapour, 1998). Such an account begins with the recognition that it is not unusual for marginalized groups and individuals to be socially, economically *and* spatially separated from the people and places that other citizens have access to within advanced industrial societies (Sibley, 1995).

Social exclusion allows us to make sense of the degree to which individual experiences and histories overlap with certain social, political and economic conditions (including poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, racism, sexism and homophobia) that restrict young people's access to spaces, institutions and practices that increase opportunities and reduce risk. The link between such structural factors and personal histories shapes and limits people's participation and engagement in society, and thus impacts the choices individuals make, by narrowing the choices that are available. Finally, social exclusion reveals the degree to which popular societal myths – things such as equality of opportunity, education as an equalizer, equal access to health care, safety and justice – are just that: myths that paper over the degree to which opportunity, access and rights are unevenly distributed.

Much of the literature on social exclusion has focused on the predicament of marginalized youth. Key researchers such as MacDonald (1998; 2004; 2008), Jones (2002) and Blackman (1998) have written extensively on social exclusion (or inclusion) and how it shapes transitions to adulthood, in the areas of education, employment, crime and substance use, for instance. Social exclusion gives us insight into the employability of young people and the role that employment training might play (Macdonald, 1998; 2004; 2008; Hammer, 2003). Key institutions such as family, schools, the labour market, the education system and the legal system influence this process, and can help (or hinder) young people's navigation towards adulthood and the world of work. A measure of social inclusion is the degree to which such institutions support young people's transitions and enable them to obtain and maintain employment, or on the other hand, whether the absence of such institutions creates unique challenges and/or barriers to opportunity.

This makes sense in the context of youth homelessness, where social inclusionary factors that most of us take for granted – having a home, address, adult support and time to grow into adulthood, as well as access to income, food, recreation and transportation – are shortened or largely absent. To truly understand the limited employability of young people who are homeless – and the challenges for employment training – it is necessary to consider the degree to which they experience social exclusion in complex ways across a number of related areas, in a way that is cumulative in nature. In the following section we explore the key dimensions of social exclusion faced by homeless youth, including inadequate housing and shelter; lack of income; educational disengagement; compromised health; weak social capital; chaotic lives; and finally, an

interrupted adolescence. These are the barriers to employability that homeless youth experience: factors that must be taken into account when employment, and in particular employment training, is considered as a pathway off the street.

Housing and Shelter

Perhaps the most obvious example of the social exclusion faced by homeless youth is their inability to secure housing, because of their young age, inexperience and most importantly, their poverty. Street youth spend much of their time moving between shelters, friends' places, squats and the streets. When they do obtain rental housing, it is often temporary (in low rent motels or boarding houses) and/or at the margins of the housing market, where accommodations are poorly regulated and dishonest landlords are waiting to take advantage (Gaetz, 2002).

Being without secure shelter has a profound impact on people's ability to exert greater control over their lives, as shelter in fact underpins any person's efforts to work. It is at home where one rests and recovers so that one can work the next day, where one creates stability and organizes one's world, maintains hygiene, eats and stores food (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Karabanow, Carson, et al., 2010). Lacking secure and stable housing means having no address to put on a resume (which is not exactly a confidence builder for potential employers), and a limited ability to present a nice, clean appearance for job interviews and to maintain interview clothes. Perhaps more importantly, inadequate housing has an impact on one's ability to keep a job once one is secured.

"My housing situation has never been stable. I'd be there (at work), sometimes with no place to go at night, then I'd be exhausted at work. I didn't think it was cool to tell the boss I had nowhere to live. A lot of times I would just not be able to go back to work." (Angus, 23)

The importance of being able to 'disappear' behind a secure door cannot be underestimated. When young people are homeless, they are much more likely to be victims of crime (Gaetz et al., 2010; Gaetz, 2004). Safety is compromised when one does not have a secure home to retreat to (though it is acknowledged that not all homes are safe). Likewise, having the ability to recover from illness, injury, fatigue or from the influence of alcohol or drugs is more difficult without a safe and secure place. The alternative is either over-crowded social service environments where health and safety are endangered, or public and semi-public spaces, where control and security are nearly impossible.

As a reflection of social inclusion, most people rely on their housing to enable them to work. This is something few street youth can count on.

Income

It may sound strange to talk about income as a necessary condition for employment, or even training. However, for all of us, it is key. Adequate income allows us to pay for our housing. It means we can purchase the clothing and hygiene products necessary to be presentable for a job and interview, but also for specific types of work (the need for work-boots, dress clothes, etc.). Money is necessary for transportation to and from work. It also pays for food, ideally three meals a day. If one gets a job or enrolls in a training program, income is needed to ensure all of these things are in place before their first pay cheque arrives, which for many people may be two weeks or even a month away. One cannot work for weeks without food, for instance. Thus, not having an income contributes to the exclusion of young people who are homeless from the workforce.

Education

At a time when youth unemployment rates in Canada are particularly high (17.2% in the summer of 2011⁵), young people and adults alike generally recognize the link between a good education and the ability to compete in the job market. People have become increasingly aware that shifts in the economy require a more educated workforce, and the rise of ‘credentialism’ has resulted in a steady decline in dropout rates in Canada, reaching a low of 8.5% in 2009-2010⁶.

It is well known that the dropout rates for young people who are homeless are extremely high. In two studies we conducted, the dropout rate ranged from 57% to 65%, with an even higher rate among those who engage in prostitution, squeegeeing or panhandling (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; Gaetz et al., 2010). Low rates of high school completion are typically due to a combination of factors, including (often undiagnosed) learning disabilities and mental health problems, trauma, and addictions issues (either their own, or family members’) that may have resulted in poor school performance and disengagement before becoming homeless. However, this is not the case for all young people, and for many it is the *experience* of homelessness that leads to dropping out. Becoming homeless means not only the loss of home, family and friends, but disengagement from school and the adult supports that go with it.

Unfortunately, while there are programs across Canada that support young people who are homeless in their efforts to pursue their education, these are the exception rather than the rule. Most emergency services focus on meeting basic

5. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/story/2011/09/27/pol-finley-g20-youth-jobs.html>

6. Statistics Canada: <http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.lt.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=32>

needs, and supports for independent living more often focus on skills development, rather than on education. That ongoing participation in education is obviously difficult for homeless youth and is not a top priority for service providers, is one of the clearest manifestations of social exclusion of homeless youth.

Compromised Health

Life on the streets is incredibly challenging and research overwhelmingly suggests it has a negative impact on health and well-being. This includes greater incidences of illness and injury (including upper respiratory tract infections such as colds, laryngitis, and sinusitis), higher rates of sexually transmitted infections, higher mortality, as well as an increased future risk of diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and muscle and joint problems (Kulik et al., 2011; Frankish et al., 2005; Boivin et al., 2005). The inability to maintain personal hygiene can result in lice, scabies, fungal infections, sores and dental and gum disease (Kulik et al., 2011). Being homeless also makes recovery from illness a challenge, since while most people who are sick like to recover at home, this is generally not an option for people living on the streets or even those staying in emergency shelters. The inability to take steps to prevent and recover from illness is a reflection of social exclusion.

Compromised health can have an impact on one's ability to obtain and maintain work, even for a person who is young. For young people with growing bodies, inadequate nutrition becomes a problem. In spite of charitable food provision (shelters and soup kitchens) in many Canadian cities, there is strong evidence that young people who are homeless suffer from food deprivation and malnutrition (Tarasuk et al., 2005; 2009). Not only that, the inability to store food and a lack of income mean that even if one has a job, one may not have access to food on a daily basis necessary to allow one to continue working.

It is well established that homeless populations in general suffer from higher incidences of mental illnesses including post-traumatic stress disorder, psychiatric disorders (such as schizophrenia) and mood disorders (such as depression and bipolar) (Kulik et al., 2011; McKay, 2009; Kidd, 2004). In this volume, both Elizabeth McKay and Sean Kidd report that street youth exhibit very high levels of depression, anxiety (obsessive/compulsive and phobic), hostility, paranoia, psychotic symptoms and suicidal thoughts. While teen years are difficult for many young people – whether housed or not – the degree to which many homeless youth suffer from mental illness, disorders and depression is a key factor that will impair their ability to work (Lenz-Rashid, 2006).

Addictions, like mental illness, can be both a cause and a consequence of homelessness, with street youth populations showing higher rates of sub-

stance use and addictions than housed youth (Adlaf & Zdnowicz, 1999; Haley et al., 2004; Roy et al., 2009; Dematteo et al., 1999). The health consequences of increased drug use and addictions are well known, and include higher incidences of HIV, Hepatitis A and C, and other diseases.

Substance use becomes a problem for anyone when it impairs one's ability to carry out daily tasks, maintain relationships and obtain and retain a job. For homeless youth, higher rates of substance use and addictions can be traced to their response to the challenges of life on the streets – having to deal with depression, trauma, violence, unresolved issues from their past, and in many cases, emerging mental illness – which leads many to greater risk-taking behaviours and the tendency to self-medicate with illicit drugs. For some, substance use is the outcome of the struggle to survive:

“(Prostitution is) incredibly degrading - I became a serious alcoholic and drug addict because of it. Because it was so degrading it was my only way of dealing with it and that’s why I don’t do it anymore, both jobs, stripping and escorting. I was always incredibly high or incredibly drunk or both and ended up in the detox. I wouldn’t do it again, it was a bad time in my life and I didn’t care about myself or anybody else. I figured I was going to end up dead.” (Monica, 21)

The health consequences of homelessness present considerable barriers to someone's ability to move forward with their life. This is particularly true for young people with acute mental health and/or addictions challenges (not to mention learning disabilities) and for whom finding work will be extremely difficult without ongoing support. Research suggests that having housing can play a big role in reducing the most negative effects of mental illness (Forchuk et al., 2011).

Chaotic Lifestyle

The ability to think ahead and exert some measure of control over one's daily life is a measure of inclusion; one that we rarely think about, but one that is so central to our ability to work. Those who are gainfully employed must have some structure in their lives. Days are organized around work, transportation, eating, recreation and sleep. Obtaining work or employment requires the ability to think forward, to plan and prepare, and understand the consequences of erratic behavior or unexpected events. Unfortunately for young people who are homeless, chaos and instability are in many ways the defining features of their lives.

One of the consequences of the chaotic lifestyle of street youth is that long-term thinking and planning become almost a luxury, as attention is focused on

meeting immediate needs. Maintaining a job becomes difficult, and money-making is often focused around meeting immediate needs. Keeping track of time (both during a given day, but also week to week) is challenging without clocks and calendars. Food security and the ability to plan and control one's diet is difficult without a refrigerator and storage areas. Creating regularity in one's day – in terms of controlling when one eats, sleeps, has visitors (or not) – becomes a challenge, and what we would normally consider routine activities become very unpredictable. The immediate priorities of food, shelter and security, for instance, loom much larger than is typically the case for mainstream teenagers, who are generally more able to focus on longer-term goals (education, career) because they have more adequate supports.

This short term thinking, accentuated by the chaos and instability of life on the streets, means youth do not have the luxury of considering the longer-term consequences of their behaviours (for example, engaging in unprotected sex, drug use, involvement in criminal acts). It also means that they may make compromises that are not in their best interests, or give up advocating for their own rights, if there is no obvious short-term benefit. All of this undermines the efforts of homeless youth to look for work, to consistently attend employment training, or to keep a job.

Weak Social Capital

The concept of having an effective and responsive support system is highlighted in the theory of social capital, which considers the *value of relationships*. Social capital refers to those important and valuable social resources (knowledge, abilities, connections, etc.) that family, friends, and others can draw on to support one's life chances and challenges (Portes, 1998; Shier et al., 2010). Social capital theory allows us to understand the different human resources that people draw on and the degree to which some individuals and groups are disadvantaged in this regard.

Many young people grow up relying on a broad range of social supports to help them move into adulthood, beginning with family, but also including friends, neighbours, teachers and counsellors. These relationships ideally provide support in the form of love, guidance, encouragement and models of adult behaviour. In the best case scenario, these supports enable young people to learn the skills for day-to-day living, and to nurture dreams of adult life that include family and occupation. These supports also are key to helping many youth find and maintain work.

The scope and nature of homeless youth's social capital is profoundly limited. Once on the streets, their connections with extended family, school and communities of origin are weakened, and their network of social supports is diminished to the point that they may come to rely more and more on their circle of street

youth friends. This network, often described by street youth as their “street family”, may provide them with precious knowledge (‘street smarts’) and resources for surviving on the streets, (money, food, clothing, etc.). Such networks may also provide some degree of safety – particularly important for young women.

While the social capital of street friends may give youth resources to survive the harsh life of the streets, its value for helping them move forward with their lives is much more limited. In terms of employment, street youth networks do not effectively prepare youth for a job search (help with resumes or interview preparation), or commonly provide the useful “connections” that so many young people rely on to get work. Finally, the demands of street relationships – which are rooted in an unstructured and chaotic lifestyle – may invariably undermine one’s ability to keep a job once it is obtained.

Adolescence Interrupted

It is the loss of adolescence (or at best, its early end) that perhaps most clearly defines the social exclusion of homeless youth. Theories of adolescent development often describe the transition from childhood to adulthood as one that can be challenging and potentially problematic, even in an environment that is relatively stable. The developmental tasks⁷ associated with “becoming” an adult are many, and are distributed across a range of social, psychological and biological domains, including for instance, the growth of adult bodies, as well as the assumption of legal rights and responsibilities, as defined by the state.

From the early teen years on, young people develop new capabilities and take on new responsibilities bit by bit, over an extended period of time, in the areas of education, income, housing, social relations, health and mobility. All of this is typically accomplished with lots of adult supervision and support both within and outside the home, with a commitment to education as a central institutional support. And in recent years, the period of adolescence has lengthened, as shifts in the job market and housing affordability, as well as pressures to continue with education, make living independently more and more difficult for teens.

Unfortunately, the experience of homelessness typically means that young people are shut out of the normal process of adolescent development that so many of us consider essential for a healthy transition to adulthood. Rather than being granted the opportunity of adjusting to adulthood and its responsibilities and challenges over an extended period of time, street youth experience an adolescence interrupted, where the process of moving into adulthood is accelerated.

7. Developmental tasks are achievements considered necessary for a successful transition to the next stage of life (e.g., finding a job as a sign of becoming an adult).

In spite of the trauma resulting from becoming homeless and the inevitable instability produced by profound poverty, these young people simultaneously are charged with the task of effectively managing a diverse and complex set of tasks and risks. In some ways, they are thrust into adult roles and responsibilities almost immediately – having to obtain shelter and run their own household, generate income (and manage money both effectively and responsibly) and take care of their nutritional needs. They must navigate their institutional relationships (school, health care, government benefits, and employment) with minimal support, and often without basic identification documents. They are also exposed to early sexual activity, personal safety concerns and substance use challenges in a much shorter time frame than is typical. All of these challenges may be faced rapidly, within the first several months – or even weeks – of becoming homeless, at a time when young people are still suffering from the trauma of leaving their homes, families and communities.

All of this suggests that for young people who become homeless, the challenge of moving from childhood to adulthood is qualitatively different than for most teenagers. Young people in this situation are typically denied access to the resources, support, and perhaps most significantly, the time that we allow for a successful transition to adulthood. They are therefore excluded from the process of gradually increasing independence that is widely held to be crucial to human development.

How Does All This Help Us Think About Employment and Training?

In Canada, employment training programs are designed to provide support for those facing barriers to employment. Through the development of soft skills (job readiness) and hard skills (marketable skills), they expand people's human capital and make them more competitive in the labour market. While we are not suggesting there is no need for skills development within the street youth population, at its worst this "technical" approach to employment training can be seen as treating street youth merely as empty vessels into which hard skills and soft skills are poured, with the expectation that they will have greater knowledge and motivation to enter the competitive job market. One must be wary of a neoliberal perspective that champions training programs as a simple and straightforward solution to homeless youth unemployment. The failure of street youth to participate in, and stick it out in these programs may unfortunately reinforce the neoliberal focus on their individual failings and inadequacies, and the inaccurate perception that they are lazy or simply "lack motivation".

This raises a fundamental question: can employment training help street youth move off the streets, and into gainful employment? Surprisingly, there is not a

lot of research on the effectiveness of employment training programs. Much of the research is inconclusive as to whether such programs do increase employment rates of participants, whether housed or not (Lerman, 2000), or have a real impact on post-program earnings (Lafer, 2000; Orr et al., 1996).

One of the only studies on street youth and employment programs shows mixed results (Robinson & Baron, 2007). In their study, the young people who participated in employment training spoke positively about the skills they learned and developed, improved confidence and the opportunity to gain experience. They also identified key characteristics of staff that were important:

“Staff should be understanding, open, non-judgmental and try to engage with the youth on a somewhat personal level in order to assist them. Even if youth are not actively seeking employment, they may attend such programs for the social support and understanding that is offered, accessing “conventional” forms of support.” (Ibid., 47)

From an experiential perspective, these programs were clearly important to the young people who participated. Whether such programs actually improved the employability – and employment outcomes – of participants is not so evident. Many left the program and did not find work. The hard skills learned were not always in demand, or did not adequately open doors to employment. Overall, they conclude that such training experiences did not appear “to add much in the way of human capital to actually invest in employment. They appear to try and provide an avenue for youth to exploit what limited human capital they have” (Robinson & Baron, 2007:43).

So, while employment training is certainly important and may contribute to the development of skills for young people who are homeless, it must be considered in a broader context: one that responds to the social exclusionary factors that undermine their ability not only to participate in training programs, but more generally in the labour market. The failure to look beyond the stereotypes of street youth and the challenges they face undermines the effectiveness of employment training as a solution to youth homelessness.

Obtaining and maintaining a job is about much more than motivation, skills, hustle and opportunity. The social exclusionary framework we have explored here helps us not only understand the lived circumstances of homeless youth, but how an approach to youth homelessness that includes employment training can be most effective. For young people who become homeless, social exclusion is experienced across several related domains, with the degree of exclusion growing the longer one remains homeless. Solutions to youth homelessness

that emphasize one dimension of social exclusion (job training, or treatment, for instance) may work for some people, but for most, such an approach is likely to be of limited value. In fact, it is the complex interaction between the different dimensions of social exclusion that points to the need for a broader and more comprehensive intervention in order to truly achieve long lasting success.

Starting with *Social Inclusion*: A Framework for Training and Employment

There is a role for employment training in strategies to address youth homelessness. We argue that employment training is most effective when integrated into a broader system of supports – supports that address social exclusionary factors. It is when we enable the social inclusion of marginalized young people that employment training can have a sustainable impact. Two examples of ‘promising practices’ presented in this volume (“BladeRunners”, and “Train for Trades”) demonstrate ways of designing employment training experiences for marginalized young people that are effective, and produce desired and long lasting outcomes.

Drawing from these examples, and from our analysis of the social exclusionary factors that present barriers to street youth employment, we provide a framework for employment training. Here we identify key factors related to program design that contribute to the social inclusion of homeless youth. This framework supports effective outcomes that will not only help young people obtain and maintain work, but will reduce the chances that they remain in poverty or become homeless again. Key elements include:

1) Program Philosophy

An employment training program for homeless youth must demonstrate fidelity to three principles: a) activities must be designed to support the needs of the developing adolescent; b) programming must address socially exclusionary factors that make participation in employment and employment training a challenge; and c) young people need to leave the program with access to better jobs (and higher wages) than they would have if they did not participate in the program. Other key features of a successful program include:

- The development of a mission, goals and objectives that are clear, attainable and broadly agreed upon by diverse stakeholders.
- A willingness to support the most marginalized of street youth, as they will have the most difficulty in participating in mainstream employment training.

- Adoption of a ‘harm reduction’ philosophy and approach that accepts substance users as they are, while at the same time promoting healthier lifestyles.
- Adoption of inclusive, anti-discriminatory philosophy, policies and practices that are sensitive and relevant to youth of different social and cultural backgrounds, and address the needs of young people additionally marginalized by racism, sexism and/or homophobia.

2) Structural Supports

Stand-alone employment training is not likely to work for young people who are homeless. Homeless youth are in the end *adolescents*, and their physical, cognitive, emotional and social development is occurring in a context of social exclusion where they lack traditional supports to navigate these changes. Without key structural supports, many young people will be unable to participate, complete and succeed in such programs.

- **Stable housing** – This is perhaps the key component. If young people are absolutely homeless (on the street or in shelters), their chance of obtaining work or successfully completing employment training is greatly restricted, and this is even more so for those with mental health problems or addictions. Longer-term transitional housing or independent living is ideal, as this gives people more flexibility, stability, privacy and personal control over their circumstances. Staying in emergency shelters likely increases challenges for those engaged in training, especially if young people are not safe, are not getting adequate food (including food to take to work), have restrictive curfew policies (making work outside of 9-to-5 problematic), or lack privacy and the ability to store clothes and other resources.
- **Income** – No youth can work, or even successfully participate in training, unless they have income or financial support. This allows them to purchase necessary clothing and equipment as well as personal hygiene products. It enables them to purchase food so they can eat every day, and pay for transportation. In addition, many young people will benefit from financial literacy training, as well as assistance in setting up a bank account. For young people who are not used to having money (and especially those who are also dealing with addictions issues) necessary supports also include ensuring that the good fortune of ‘payday’ does not become a disaster.
- **Access to appropriate health care and social supports** – Being healthy is important for anyone who wants to work. Proper nutrition,

sleep and a reduction in stress are key to ensuring health, making the adequacy of housing and income supports health issues. Some young people face additional health challenges relating to mental health problems and/or addictions. They can succeed in employment training and/or obtaining work if they have proper supports in place.

3) Program Components

In addition to enhancing soft skills and hard skills, those establishing training programs for homeless youth should include the following program components:

- **A focus on the development of real, marketable skills** – Employment training is not considered to be effective if the skills learned merely enable young people to better compete for low-wage, dead end jobs. Training should focus on developing marketable skills, and ideally be based on an analysis of labour market trends. Both Train for Trades and BladeRunners train young people in skilled trades, and open doors for higher paying, and in some cases unionized, jobs.
- **Client driven case management** – An individualized case management approach is important to ensure that the needs of young participants are addressed, and that young people are assisted in navigating the challenges, opportunities and crises that go with the experience of training, getting a job and earning money. Key here is ensuring that good staff are hired, have proper training and values that align with the program goals, and can therefore ensure program fidelity.
- **Targeting and supporting special needs** – Not all street youth will experience the same challenges – there will be differences in health and mental health status, for instance. Some young people will be dealing with the challenges of addictions, while others will not. The key point is that the more likely an individual is to experience any or all of these barriers, the more complex their transition to adulthood, and their transition from the instability of homelessness to the stability of housing, adequate income, good health and healthy relationships.
- **Mentoring and job shadowing** – For marginalized youth whose social capital is weak and who lack strong relationships with adults, coaching is key. Job coaching helps young people stay in the program, or stay on the job, in the face of emerging challenges and crises. Coaching provides support in cases where there is conflict on the job, where participants lose confidence, or when incidents

outside of the work/training experience interfere, including occasional ‘binges’, problems with friends, uncontrolled payday spending, etc. The best job coaches are on call 24 hours.

Mentoring provides young people with an opportunity to learn from people with experience. Mentors can be volunteers with work experience – program graduates often are the best mentors, because as ‘peers’ they have a deep understanding of the challenges that young people face.

- **Opportunities for educational advancement** – A focus on employment training without also paying attention to educational needs may lead to a lifetime of low-paying, dead end jobs, in a highly competitive job market. Given the rise of credentialism and the recognized importance of education, efforts should be made to integrate opportunities to re-engage with school, and as a minimum, to complete high school. A focus on education builds a training program on principles of social inclusion.

4) Institutional Components

For a program to achieve its goals and objectives, key institutional components must be in place, including:

- **Ongoing core funding** – Effective training programs of the sort described here cannot be delivered without appropriate financial investment. Many community agencies working with people who are homeless struggle to obtain necessary funding to deliver their programs. At the same time, government funding for employment training is often structured on the assumption that participants have housing, food and money for transportation. Operating an employment training program for homeless youth according to the framework we are describing requires what some might consider to be a significant investment of resources (for instance, “Train for Trades” estimates its cost per participant is around \$10,000 annually). However, this is an intelligent investment that arguably saves much more money in the long run, if it reduces the risk that participants will remain homeless, end up in the correctional system, or have health conditions that worsen. Moreover, it is an investment in the economy.
- **Strategic partnerships** – Successful employment training programs – especially ones using the framework outlined here – nec-

essarily require strategic partnerships with service providers, the public and the private sector in order to meet the needs of the program and the participants. These partnerships will involve services outside of the homeless sector where necessary, in order to put in place housing, education, addictions and mental health supports. Training support may include colleges, as well as contractors and trades people, who have the skills to work with young people from difficult backgrounds. Creative and strategic partnerships are the hallmark of an effective program. Both BladeRunners and Train for Trades worked effectively with local trade unions to enable their participants to learn on the job, and to gain credentials that would eventually allow them to become union members.

- **Commitment to ongoing program evaluation** – In order to assess whether the program is actually creating real and sustainable changes, the program must incorporate evaluation, following up with participants to assess the impact of the program in their lives. We need to know what works and for whom.
- **Strong corporate engagement** – One of the key challenges of employment training for marginalized youth is finding employers willing to take a chance on youth they may – rightly or wrongly – perceive to be problematic. Establishing effective relations with employers, understanding their concerns and needs, and providing the right kind of support for young people based on this understanding, can lead to positive experiences for young people and for employers as well. The article by Noble and Oseni in this volume outlines effective corporate engagement strategies as part of a project by Raising the Roof.

Conclusion

Young people who are homeless experience considerable barriers in obtaining and maintaining regular jobs that provide sufficient wages and hours to allow them to move off the streets. Lack of access to the labour market leads many young people to engage in unconventional – and sometimes illegal – money making activities in order to support themselves.

Employment training programs have long been promoted as an effective solution to the challenges marginalized youth face in getting good jobs. However, traditional approaches to employment training programs are generally not suited to the life circumstances of homeless youth, and not surprisingly, participation by homeless youth is low.

We have argued that the barriers to employment are best understood through an analysis of the social exclusion of street youth that impacts on labour market participation. It is not simply a lack of skills or motivation that keeps street youth out of the formal labour market. A lack of housing, income and education, combined with potential health challenges (including mental health problems and addictions), a chaotic lifestyle associated with homelessness, weak social networks and a shortened adolescence all shape the context in which homeless youth try to earn a living.

Understanding the different dimensions of social exclusion requires that we look at not only the circumstances of being young and homeless, but also (and importantly) at how our response to homelessness may in fact increase social exclusion, and create additional barriers to finding work, moving off the streets and long-term stability.

Employment training programs can provide support for homeless youth, but only if they are designed to move beyond the development of hard and soft skills. It is beyond the scope and mandate of employment training to address youth homelessness when underlying social exclusionary factors such as lack of shelter, income, food, etc., become the real barriers to participation. We have proposed a social inclusionary framework for effective employment training for street youth that is designed to address their developmental needs, and that recognizes the degree to which social exclusion can block access to the labour market.

There are solutions to youth homelessness, and employment training can play a role when integrated into a program that addresses other basic needs of the young people involved. The problem is not that homeless youth are lazy or simply “lack motivation”, but rather that, as for any adolescent, the best outcomes are achieved when a social inclusionary environment supports their engagement in learning and helps them move forward with their lives.

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16

Resilient Outcome: Academic Engagement by Youth with Histories of Homelessness¹

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Youth homelessness is a concern across Canada. Unlike other groups within the homeless population, homeless youth may not be visible on the street or in shelters. Homeless youth commonly ‘couch surf’ back and forth between the homes of various friends, or live in otherwise crowded, unaffordable, or unsuitable housing. Those who do access shelter services may not be forthright about their age (Canada Mortgage and Housing Association, 2001). While we do know that in Ottawa, approximately 400 youth aged 16 to 19 used an emergency shelter in 2010, making up 6% of the overall shelter population, these numbers are surely an underestimate (Alliance to End Homelessness in Ottawa, 2011). In the United States, where more comprehensive national data are available, yearly estimates of youth homelessness are staggering. Research indicates there are between 1.6 and 1.7 million homeless youth aged 12 to 17 in a given year (Burt, 2007). For older youth, aged 18 to 19, annual homelessness estimates are between 80,000 and 170,000.

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Most homeless youth do not have a high school diploma. In Ottawa and Toronto between 63% and 90% of homeless youth have not graduated from high school despite being of age to have done so (Canada Mortgage and Housing Association, 2001). Lack of a high school education, alongside a history of homelessness, places youth at risk of long-term social exclusion (Commander et al., 2002; Grigsby et al., 1990; Wurzbacher et al., 1991; Zlotnick et al., 1999). Without a high school diploma, youth are more likely to experience unemployment or under-employment, and as a result, poverty during their adult lives. A consistent finding of the Labour Force Survey conducted in Canada is that quality of life improves with increased education (Statistics Canada, 2007). A high school diploma is a critical first step when it comes to ensuring that youth have access to continuing education opportunities (such as college or university), which increase future employability (Bowlby, 2005).

Attending high school is a generally accepted standard for adolescents living in Canada. Expectations that youth attend school are reflected in legislation; Canada requires high school enrolment until the age of at least 16 in all provinces. The provinces of New Brunswick and Ontario require high school enrolment until the age of 18 (New Brunswick Department of Education Services, 1998; Ontario Secondary School Teacher's Federation, 2006). Not only is a high school education considered the norm, increasingly so is post-secondary education. As Baker has described, our current society encourages a "pervasive culture of education," where formal credentials are given social value and status, and are recognized in the labour market (2011:10). While it is now common for young people to live at home well past their teen years, and to continue to rely on their parents for financial, material, and emotional supports, homeless youth are frequently left to do it all on their own (Chau & Gawliuk, 2009). It is not surprising then, that homeless youth report fewer plans for post-secondary education than do youth who have never been homeless (Rafferty et al., 2004).

There are numerous barriers that make it difficult for homeless youth to remain in school, or to return to school following a period of absence. One such barrier is the transient nature of homelessness itself, which leads to interruptions in schooling, and lost classroom time due to moving and enrolling in and adjusting to a new school (Murphy, 2011). For homeless youth living in shelters, conditions within the shelter environment may also pose a barrier to education, depending on whether the shelter is close to schools, as well as factors such as crowdedness, privacy, and the ability to leave behind belongings during the day (Buckner, 2008). Further barriers may be related to experiences of family separation and conflict, involvement with child protection agencies, and mental health issues arising from the multiple stressful life events that are often associated with unstable housing (Hernandez et al., 2006; Masten et al., 1993).

Predicting Educational Outcomes among Youth Who are Homeless

Considering the scope of youth homelessness, and the many barriers facing homeless youth when it comes to staying in school, it is clear that a problem exists. One line of research focuses on factors protecting homeless youth from dropping out of school. In other words, the focus turns to an examination of “resilience” with respect to school participation, that is, staying in school despite the experience of homelessness. Luthar et al., defined resilience as “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (2000:543). This view of resilience includes two main parts: the presence of a risk or threat, and normal developmental outcomes despite the risk or threat (Luthar et al., 2000). In the context of examining academic resilience for youth who are homeless, the risk or threat would be the experience of homelessness, while the normal/resilient outcome is participation in school.

In a study of resilience, Hines, Wyatt and Merdinger (2005) considered attending college or university to be a sign of academic resilience among a group of 14 former foster youth. The authors conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with the youth to try to understand what factors might contribute to the positive outcome of attending college or university. Results indicated that feeling able to make conscious changes for oneself, having a flexible and adaptable self-image (i.e. feeling as though it is possible to be whoever one wants to be at a given time), and being goal-oriented and persistent were associated with resilient educational outcomes. Further, relationships with parental figures were important, as was involvement in supportive systems (such as the education system and foster care), which provided opportunities to form relationships with safe and supportive adults (Hines et al., 2005).

Other research has focused on the factors that predict negative academic outcomes, such as poor achievement or dropping out of school, rather than the predictors of resilient outcomes. In their study, Rafferty et al., (2004) found that housing instability and extreme poverty were two factors that predicted negative academic outcomes. These authors observed that being held back a year in school (“failing”), academic under-achievement, and school dropout were all more common for youth living in poverty, whether homeless or housed. The authors of the study reported that academic achievement is shaped by ongoing interactions between a young person’s housing situation and their experiences in school.

Both the study by Hines et al., (2005) and the study by Rafferty et al., (2004) illustrate an ecological perspective on youth homelessness. Put simply, ecological thinking considers the multiple levels of a person’s environment

(family, school, community, society) that affect individual-level outcomes. As Tickett and Rowe (2012) describe, ecological approaches involve looking beyond the individual, and instead adopting a broader perspective that focuses on the influence of various factors in the individual's environment. According to Nooe and Patterson (2010), taking an ecological perspective is a way of ensuring a complete view of the complex issue of homelessness.

The Present Study

The present study builds upon previous research in the field. Using an ecological perspective, we examined academic resilience among youth who have experienced homelessness. At the beginning of the study, all of the youth participants were homeless. Homelessness thus represented the risk or threat required in the definition of resilience (Masten, 2001). Educational engagement (that is, participation in school at the two-year follow-up point) was the sign of positive adaptation, or resilience, examined in this study (Masten, 2001). Ultimately, this research was intended to explain how some adolescents with histories of homelessness are able to participate in school (showing academic resilience), despite their difficult circumstances.

In order to identify predictors of participation in school, we examined predictive factors at multiple levels: individual, social, and community. This multi-level approach is consistent with an ecological perspective. The choice of which factors to examine was based on existing research in the fields of resilience, high school dropout, and youth homelessness. At the *individual* level, the predictors of academic resilience that we investigated were:² a) longer duration of re-housing, b) higher levels of empowerment, c) higher levels of active coping, and d) gender³. At the *social* level, the potential predictors of academic resilience that we examined were a) having a positive mentor, b) having larger social networks, and c) reporting higher levels of satisfaction with social support. Finally, at the *community* level, the potential predictor of academic resilience that we examined was greater use of supportive community services.

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2. Descriptions of how each predictor was defined are in the *Measures* section of this chapter.
 3. Gender was included as a predictor of interest because previous studies had identified that some sub-groups of vulnerable male youth are at greater risk of high school drop-out than female youth (Greene & Winters, 2006). We wished to examine whether this finding held true for homeless male youth in our study.

Method⁴

Participants

The study was conducted as part of a larger research initiative, known as the *Panel Study on Homelessness in Ottawa* (Aubry et al., 2003). The objective of the *Panel Study* was to examine people's pathways into and out of homelessness. This was achieved by identifying groups of people who were homeless and then following them for a period of two years to track how their housing status and life circumstances changed over time. The present study is based only on the Panel Study data that was collected specifically from youth participants.

To be eligible for the study, youth participants had to be between the ages of 16-19 at the beginning of the study, be homeless at the outset of the study (i.e., not have a permanent place in which to live), and not be a new parent at any point in the study⁵. We refer to the beginning of the study as Time 1. During this time, the initial round of interviews with participants was conducted. The follow-up to these initial interviews took place with the same youth participants approximately two years later, and is referred to as Time 2. The final sample of participants for the present study was made up of 82 youth (45 males, 37 females).⁶

Measures

The self-report measures used in the study were well established in previous studies, and were supplemented by a small number of single-item questions, such as those asking about school attendance. Education items at Time 1 were: "Are you still in school" (Yes or No), "Approximately how many hours per week are you attending school?" (#), "Is it part-time or full-time?" and "What is the highest level of schooling you have completed?" At Time 2 this series of questions was asked again, with an introductory question "Have you gone to school or taken any courses since our last interview, about two years ago?" (Yes or No).

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4. Detailed Methods for the study are presented elsewhere (Hyman, Aubry & Kłodawsky, 2010).
 5. Youth with children less than four years old at the end of the study were excluded because we expected that the experience of new parenthood would significantly change their developmental paths, making them a unique sub-group that could not be readily included alongside other youth in this study.
 6. At Time 1, 157 youth were interviewed (79 males, 78 females). At Time 2, 99 youth were interviewed (49 males, 50 females). Thus 63% of the original Time 1 sample was retained at Time 2. A total of 17 of these 99 youth were excluded from the present study because they had children less than four years old at the time of the Time 2 interview. The only significant difference found between respondents at Time 2 and non-respondents at Time 2 was in terms of age, such that respondents tended to be younger at Time 1 than non-respondents. No significant differences were found between respondents and non-respondents on any other variables of interest, including gender, educational status, mental health status, or empowerment.

Duration of Re-housing. At Time 2, participants in the study were asked to describe all of the places they had lived between Time 1 and Time 2. Duration of re-housing was determined by adding up the total number of consecutive days a youth had spent housed leading up to the Time 2 interview, based on the dates they indicated they had come and gone from various addresses. Consecutive days housed (as opposed to non-continuous days housed and un-housed) was counted for the purpose of establishing “housing stability” of the youth. It was assumed that a period of 90 days of continuous housing reflects some permanency, as rent has been paid for three full consecutive months.

Active Coping. At Time 2, participants were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with different items measuring active coping, such as “I’ve been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I’m in” (Carver, 1997).

Empowerment. At both Time 1 and Time 2, participant empowerment was measured by assessing the degree to which participants felt in control of their life situation⁷. Examples of items on the empowerment scale are “I generally accomplish what I set out to do,” and “People are limited only by what they think possible.”

Presence of a Positive Mentor Relationship. At Time 2, participants were asked whether or not they had a positive mentor in their lives. For the purposes of the study, a positive mentor is defined as “an adult who is older than you, who has had more experience than you, and who has taken a special interest in you” (Klaw et al., 2003:226).

Social Support. Social support was measured at both Time 1 and Time 2. The size of participating youths’ social networks was measured (N), as well as their satisfaction with the support received from the people within the network (S)⁸. Participants were asked to list who provided them with five distinct types of social support, with N being the average number of different individuals listed. For each of these five types of support, S was measured by asking participants “How satisfied are you with this level of support?”

Social Service Use. To measure their level of social service use over the course of the study, participants at Time 2 were shown a list of different types of social and community services, and asked how frequently they used each one over the past two years (Aubry et al., 2007). Types of services listed included homeless

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7. The 15-item version of the measure of empowerment created by Rogers, Chamberlin, Langer, Ellison and Crean, (1997) was used. Response alternatives range from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (4).
 8. The 5-item Social Support Questionnaire created by Sarason, Levine, Basham & Sarason (1983) was used.

shelters, community resource and health centres, addictions programs, crisis counseling, religious organizations, housing services, drop-ins, First Nations/Inuit/Métis organizations, supportive housing services, legal services, disability organizations, and food banks. A total score was created by adding up the frequency of each participant's self-described use of these services.

Procedures

Research methods used in the study were approved by the Research Ethics Board for the Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Ottawa. Participants for the study were recruited from two emergency shelters serving male and female youth, a single men's shelter, a drop-in centre for youth, and a social service agency that helps homeless youth return to their families if they wish to do so. Staff at these agencies who were familiar with the *Panel Study* and with the youth using their services invited potential participants (who satisfied the previously described eligibility criteria) to meet with a member of the research team if they were interested in participating in the study. After providing informed consent, participants were interviewed in a private area in the emergency shelter or drop-in centre. Youth were paid \$20 for their participation in the Time 1 interview, which lasted about 80 minutes.

To facilitate eventual follow-up with a Time 2 interview, youth were asked at the Time 1 interview to provide contact information on as many individuals in their social and care-providing networks as possible. E-mail addresses were useful in tracking youth over time, as many of them had free online accounts that they checked regularly.

Youth were invited for follow-up interviews approximately two years after the first interview. These Time 2 interviews were conducted at a secure and private location in community agencies near to where participants were living at the time. Participants were paid \$30 for Time 2 interviews, which lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Results

The results of the present study are organized into two sections. The first section contains results that describe the housing and educational situations of youth over the course of the two years of the study. The second section provides an overview of the results from the statistical analysis computed to determine which of the individual, social, and community factors predicted whether or not youth were participating in school at the follow-up interview⁹.

9. For a more detailed description of prediction model testing and results, please see Hyman, Aubry & Kłodawsky (2010).

Housing and Educational Status

Of the 82 youth in the study, 65 (79.3%) were living in stable housing at the Time 2 follow-up interview. Stable housing was defined as living in a residence for which they paid rent, and had lived in for 90 days or longer. Significantly fewer male (71.1%) than female (89.2%) respondents reported living in stable housing at Time 2. In terms of duration, male respondents had been re-housed for significantly fewer days on average (348.58 days) than female respondents (430.70 days) at Time 2.

A minority of youth reported participating in school at Time 1 (34 participants; 22%), and at Time 2 (28 participants; 34%). At Time 2, the highest level of completed education for the majority of participants was grade 9 and 10 (completed by 53% of participants). Considerably fewer youth had completed grade 11 (22%). Ten percent of youth reported grade 8 as their highest level of educational attainment, 5% reported completing high school with a diploma as their highest attainment, and 4% reported completing high school without diploma (i.e. earning a high school equivalency certificate) as their highest attainment. Six percent had some post-secondary education (e.g. at a community college, trade school, or university) as their highest level of attainment. There were more than twice as many female youth as male youth participating in school at Time 2.

Testing the Model of Predictors

The main purpose of the present study was to identify which factors (at individual, social, and community levels) predicted academic resilience (i.e. participation in school at Time 2) for youth with histories of homelessness. As described previously, the individual-level factors of interest that we examined were duration of re-housing, active coping, empowerment, and gender. The social-level factors were the presence of a positive mentor, size of social network, and satisfaction with social network. The community-level factor was use of social services. Empowerment, size of social network, and satisfaction with social network were also measured at both Time 1 and Time 2.¹⁰

To determine how well each of the factors predicted academic resilience, the factors were entered as variables in a statistical model, and the model's ability to predict educational outcomes was tested. Based on the outcomes of these tests, it was possible to determine which factors were significant predictors of school attendance. Two models were created and tested, the second of which measured changes

10. For a description of the mean scores and standard deviations on each of these factors, please see Hyman, Aubry & Klodawsky (2010).

in scores from Time 1 to Time 2. Results from that model are described here¹¹.

The tests confirmed that both duration of re-housing and gender were significant predictors of participation in school at Time 2, such that youth who were housed for longer durations of time, and youth who were female, were more likely to participate in school. In addition, change in satisfaction with social support between Time 1 and 2 was also a significant predictor of participation in school at Time 2. Youth who were participating in school at Time 2 showed no change in satisfaction with social support over the course of the study. In contrast, youth who were not participating in school at Time 2 reported an increase in satisfaction with their social support over the course of the study. The factors of empowerment, active coping, having a positive mentor, size of social network, and social service use did not emerge as significant predictors of school participation.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to gain an understanding of how a small proportion of youth do manage to participate in school (demonstrating academic resilience), despite experiencing the adverse circumstances of homelessness. Understanding the factors that contribute to academic resilience is important. If we are aware of the specific factors that promote participation in school for some homeless youth, we may be able to design programs and policies that provide these supports for all homeless youth. Finding ways to increase the school attendance of homeless youth is critical, given that educational achievement is so closely tied to future employability and quality of life (Bowlby, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2007).

In our examination of academic resilience in homeless youth, we adopted an ecological perspective, meaning that we considered factors at the individual, social, and community levels. The factors that we chose to investigate at each of these levels were drawn from previous research into resilience and youth homelessness. Only a handful of the factors that we investigated were shown to significantly predict whether or not youth would be participating in school by the end of the study. However, we believe it is important for future research to continue to examine youth homelessness ecologically, whenever possible. Toro, Dworsky and Fowler (2007) research supports an ecological perspective, and cautioned against focusing on individual problems that contribute to or sustain youth homelessness. To do so is to risk stigmatizing homeless youth by holding them responsible for vulnerabilities and difficult life events that they have not chosen for themselves.

11. Statistically the analysis involved running two sequential logistic regressions, with variables entered into the regression equation in three blocks – individual-level variables, social-level variables, and community-level variables.

In discussing the results of the present study, we will begin by exploring the three factors that were found to be significant predictors of school participation among the youth in the study, as well as those factors that were not found to be significant predictors. After discussing these findings, we will explore the various program and policy implications that could follow from this research.

Individual Predictors of Participating in School

Gender. An important contribution of the study was the finding that gender played a significant role in predicting educational engagement within our sample of youth with histories of homelessness. This finding builds upon previous research that has shown that male youth experience significant barriers to participation in school. Male youth are reported to have less positive school experiences, are more likely to be disciplined, are more frequently held back a grade or more in school, and are more likely to dropout (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). A study conducted with housed adolescents demonstrated that some groups of male youth (such as youth of certain ethnic minority groups) are at a higher risk of high school dropout than female youth and reported a substantial “gender gap in graduation rates with female youth being more likely to graduate than male youth (Greene & Winters, 2006:1). Similarly, our results indicate that when followed over time, female youth with histories of homelessness were more likely to participate in educational programs than were male youth.

We do not debate that both female youth and male youth who are homeless are vulnerable to high school dropout and social exclusion, and that special efforts are required to engage all youth with histories of homelessness in continuing their education, particularly once their housing situation becomes stabilized. However, given the findings of past research, and now our own, it appears clear that male youth with histories of homelessness will require additional efforts to involve them in school.

It is possible that some male youth did not participate in school because they are out working. Little is known about the working conditions of male youth with histories of homelessness. Further information regarding the specific factors that lead male youth with histories of homelessness to drop out of school, as well as an understanding of the relationship between homelessness, employment, and education for male youth is required. Early entry into the workforce would be expected to limit the future work opportunities and economic mobility of these youth if they do not return to school or receive additional training.

Duration of Re-housing. Longer durations of re-housing were also found to predict participation in school at the follow-up interview for the youth in our

study. This is to be expected, given that the uncertainty and lack of structure associated with being homeless would clearly make it difficult to attend school on a regular basis. It is logical that the security provided by stable housing liberates youth to focus their energy and resources on stabilizing other areas of their life, such as education. Previous research has also established that homeless youth who become housed experience positive educational outcomes. In a study conducted by Hong and Piescher (2012), homeless youth who received supportive housing stayed in the same school for longer, attended school more regularly, and improved their academic performance, compared to homeless youth who did not receive supportive housing.

Research demonstrating that disengagement and social exclusion can arise from prolonged homelessness is also consistent with the findings of the present study. In Grigsby et al.'s (1990) research, social isolation, which deepened with duration of homelessness, was related to outcomes of increased vulnerability and distress. Votta and Manion (2004) also found homeless youth to be at risk of disengagement coping (using a passive coping style, such as escape or inaction), as well as poor mental health, and thoughts of suicide. The emotional suffering associated with homelessness, as documented by these studies, would be expected to contribute to limited school participation, as was found in the present study. It is useful to consider this broader social and psychological context as it relates to the difficulties in school participation that were demonstrated by youth in the present study.

Considering the important role that housing has been shown to play in promoting participation in school, educational programs and policies meant to engage homeless youth in school cannot ignore the fact that youth need to become stably housed if they are to be expected to attend school. As such, housing assistance must be provided alongside any educational program offered to homeless youth. Strong partnerships and inter-agency task forces and study teams need to be developed between schools and housing agencies, so that youth receive integrated assistance in the important areas of both education and housing (Stronge, 1993). The link between education and housing will be revisited later in the chapter.

Empowerment and Active Coping. Despite the findings in the resilience literature, which suggested that the internal resources of personal empowerment and active coping would protect homeless youth from negative outcomes, these two factors were not found to be significant predictors of educational resilience in our study. It is well known that these two factors are assets, helping vulnerable young people to adapt positively to challenging circumstances. However, it may be that these factors are more important in facilitating other tasks, which were not assessed as outcomes in the present study, such as regaining stable

housing, entering the workforce, or overcoming mental health challenges.

Social Predictors of Participating in School

Changes in Satisfaction with Social Support. Youth who were participating in school at the end of the study reported no change in their levels of satisfaction with their social support over the course of the study, while those youth not participating in school experienced increases in their levels of satisfaction. This is a surprising finding. However, it is important to note that in the present study, the average social support satisfaction for both groups (youth participating in school and youth not participating school) is relatively high, suggesting that youth in the study are generally satisfied with the social support they are receiving from people involved in their lives, regardless of school status.

Size of Social Support Network. No relationship was found between school participation and youths' reports on the size of their social network. This suggests that it is not the number of people in a social network, but rather, the quality of the support received that mattered most to youth in the study.

Presence of a Positive Mentor. The lack of a relationship between having a positive mentor and participating in school at follow-up is surprising. We suspect mentorship was a non-significant predictor of educational participation at follow-up because youth were still involved in the same social networks formed when they were homeless. The study period of two years may not have been enough time for new mentors to influence and support youth's participation in school.

Community Predictor of Participating in School

Social service use. Social service use did approach statistical significance as a predictor. The relationship suggested that greater use of social services was associated with not being in school. A reasonable interpretation of this relationship is that youth who are in school experience greater stability, and have less of a need for social services. Although ultimately the relationship between social service use and participation in school was not statistically significant, this may have been due to a lack of statistical power in the present study, given its relatively small sample size. Future researchers would do well to conduct a further examination of the role of social service use in school participation.

Implications for Program and Policy Development

Education. In response to the school difficulties experienced by a large majority of homeless youth, the government of the United States created the Stewart

B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (renamed the McKinney-Vento Act in 2000). This is a federal initiative that authorizes and funds programs to improve homelessness services, including the education of homeless youth (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006). McKinney-Vento schooling initiatives set out to extend existing efforts to decrease barriers and to facilitate school access and academic integration of homeless young people.

In Canada there are not yet any federally initiated educational programs for homeless youth that would compare to those supported through the McKinney-Vento Act in the United States. We believe that this needs to change. The educational needs of homeless youth must be targeted at both the program and policy levels in Canada in a way that is similar to the McKinney-Vento Act. Federal initiatives that provide resources and infrastructure to develop and improve programs are critical. As argued by Klodawsky, Aubry and Farrell (2006), the current political climate in Canada has left a gap in funding and programs aimed at providing care to youth. Defining youth homelessness as simply an economic and employment issue risks under-serving, or misjudging the scope of services needed for this vulnerable population.

To create sustainable change, governments need to adapt a humane and realistic perspective that acknowledges the complexity of the issues of homelessness, school dropout, social exclusion and poverty among youth. A holistic long-term approach to addressing youth homelessness and school dropout, which targets, in an integrated manner, a host of youth services such as child welfare, secondary and post-secondary education, social and community services, and housing, is required.

Improvement to educational programs for homeless youth was a topic of interest explored through the *Youthworks* project, carried out by the nationwide Raising the Roof (2009) organization in Canada. *Youthworks* is an initiative aimed at examining the experiences of “street involved” youth, consulting with experts in the field of youth homelessness, and creating solutions towards ending youth homelessness. Based on this extensive research, nine recommendations were made about how best to support youth transitioning from homelessness to housing. One recommendation included providing non-traditional educational opportunities that target and support youth who have dropped out of school. Youth interviewed through the *Youthworks* program knew that their future employment would be limited without a high school diploma. Youth did express a wish to return to school, but described barriers to doing so, such as the need to earn money to get by (Evenson & Barr, 2009). Flexibility and outreach were therefore identified as important elements of educational programs for homeless and street-involved youth. Flexibility denotes services and supports that are aligned with the unique needs of individual youth. Outreach characterizes programs that facilitate engagement by bringing services to

the youth, as opposed to requiring youth to come to the service.

Consistent with these findings, we believe it is essential to provide a variety of youth-friendly educational programs that adapt to youths' individual needs, and which are made visible, available, and non-threatening to homeless youth. Educators need to be aware of the complex issue of youth homelessness, so that early interventions can be made. Active outreach to youth who show signs of being homeless or at risk of homelessness (such as poor attendance, frequent moves to new schools, and child-welfare involvement) is necessary to engage youth in programs. Useful programs for homeless youth may include special education or alternative education approaches that accommodate the gaps in knowledge and learning typical of youth whose schooling experiences have been disrupted by homelessness.

A flexible attendance policy to accommodate the schedules of youth who are employed would be helpful, so that youth who need to work to support themselves are not excluded from the school environment or punished for needing to work. To minimize disruptions in classroom time for homeless youth enrolling in a new school, youth should be admitted into a school even if their necessary documentation (such as birth certificates and immunization records) is not immediately available. This is a practice that has been adopted under the McKinney-Vento Act, in addition to providing funding for student transportation, so that homeless youth who have moved can continue to attend their original school whenever possible (Larson & Meehan, 2011). Reducing barriers to education for homeless youth is necessary to encourage youth to return to and stay in school. Implementing youth-friendly educational programs represents a valuable first step.

When asked about important program features, formerly homeless youth involved in a Toronto-based housing initiative emphasized the role of service providers, which in the case of schools, includes teachers, school administrators, and support personnel. Youth in the study stated that it was necessary for service providers to be caring, friendly, persistent, reliable, and prompt, and to provide outreach (Raine & Marcellin, 2007). These recommendations are especially valid because they were generated by youth themselves. We maintain that it is important to involve youth with lived experiences of homelessness in the planning, development, and delivery of educational programs. Promising provincial initiatives (Children's Mental Health of Ontario, 2007) such as the New Mentality, a Youth Engagement Project, exist specifically for the purpose of meaningfully recruiting the expertise of young people to advocate for their own needs within mental health, child welfare, and other systems. This type of collaborative approach would be extremely useful in an educational context, in which teachers could work closely with homeless youth to design and provide programs that best suit youth's self-declared needs.

Housing. Results from the present study showed that once youth were in a stable housing situation, they were more likely to participate in school. This finding lends support to a Housing First approach. Housing First programs originated in New York as an alternative to moving mentally ill, homeless adults through stages from transitional housing to independent living, with each new step requiring that they follow various treatment plans and protocols (Tsemberis et al., 2004). Housing First is based on the belief that people should be given access to housing free of any conditions. Housing and treatment are regarded as separate, and keeping housing does not depend on accessing or remaining in treatment. Individuals are provided with rent supplements and housing subsidies that allow them to obtain housing in the private rental market. In addition to becoming housed earlier, individuals in Housing First programs report feeling a greater sense of choice over their circumstances, and have proven able to maintain their independent housing over time (Tsemberis et al., 2004). In order to implement Housing First programs for youth, inter-agency partnerships between providers of youth services are required to create a sustainable plan that takes into consideration the developmental needs of youth and legal aspects of renting property to youth. Given that youth are able to receive other social and community resources and benefits, including housing among the services available must also be possible. Careful planning, including feasibility studies, program evaluation, and sustained government support are essential to developing a pertinent and effective Housing First approach for youth.

A keynote address from a conference titled *Partners Solving Youth Homelessness* spoke to the need for a prompt, permanent, universally accessible, national affordable housing strategy (Kothari, 2008 in Evenson & Barr, 2009). The Housing First model could be such a strategy. Housing First for homeless youth would move youth away from transitional housing by providing them with independent, stable housing as quickly as possible. This would make it easier for youth to return to school quickly, which would result in a less disrupted developmental path. A combination of both housing and support focused on developing educational and career goals may be particularly relevant for assisting youth as they transition from homelessness back into the education system.

Toro et al., (2007) have summarized a recent initiative geared towards decreasing homelessness among youth leaving the child welfare system in the United States. The Chaffee Foster Care Independence Program ensures that funds are designated specifically for housing youth aged 18 to 21. Early findings indicate that youth engaged in programs receiving these funds were less likely to become homeless and more likely to go to college or university (Burt, 2007; Toro et al., 2007). Similar programs that take the causes of youth homelessness into consideration and quickly provide housing, particularly

for youth who have been homeless for a long time, may effectively prevent a pattern of homelessness that threatens to continue into adulthood.

Future Research

The present research represents one of the only studies that has focused on school attendance among youth who have experienced homelessness in Canada. Further research on this issue is needed. Moreover, we recommend that future research continue to examine resilience in homeless youth using an ecological model that takes into account multiple aspects of youth environments. Another recommendation for future research is to design studies with a longer follow-up period and multiple follow-up assessments, which would enable a more thorough investigation of how youth exit homelessness, and how their development unfolds over time. Involving homeless youth in the development of interview questions is recommended, as youth are the ideal candidates to point out the issues that affect them (Children's Mental Health Ontario, 2007).

The reality that a majority of homeless youth do eventually become housed has been observed at a national level in the United States (Burt, 2007). This finding was repeated in our sample of youth who were followed for a two-year period. Yet despite these positive housing outcomes, only a minority of our sample of youth was participating in school at the two-year follow-up. It would also be useful to examine at which point in their exit from homelessness it becomes relevant and realistic to focus on education. Results of our study suggest that activities focused on the future, such as participating in school, are best started after youth have attained stable housing.

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17

It's Everybody's Business: Raising the Roof's Private Sector Engagement Project

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Solutions to homelessness are often considered the responsibility of NGOs, various levels of government, and the individuals experiencing homelessness. Homelessness, however, affects everyone in society – morally, socially, and economically. Hence, genuine solutions require action across society, including the private sector. In short, we believe that homelessness is everybody's business. After years of neglect, there is a growing consideration of the ways in which the private sector can play a role in addressing social problems such as homelessness (Porter & Kramer, 2011; Change Toronto, 2010; Street Kids International, 2008; Burnett & Pomeroy, 2008). To date, however, there is little research that outlines successful strategies to engage the private sector in this work. Realizing this gap, Raising the Roof sought to learn more about increasing private sector involvement in solutions to youth homelessness through our "Private Sector Engagement Project", one component of Raising the Roof's Youthworks initiative.¹

1. Raising the Roof launched its Youthworks initiative in 2006, which is aimed at breaking the cycle of homelessness among young Canadians. During the first phase we released the report *Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions*, which gave voice to nearly 700 youth experiencing homelessness. The second phase is aimed at advocating for the recommendations made in this report through a combination of community, government, and private sector engagement, as well as by designing a public education campaign. For more information visit www.raisingtheroof.org.

The private sector can contribute to solutions to homelessness in many ways, including donating money to service organizations and lobbying for change from government. Although these are very important and necessary contributions, we are particularly interested in strategies to engage the private sector in supporting the integration of at-risk and homeless youth into the labour market through training, mentorship, and employment opportunities. There are currently a myriad of community agencies across Canada that work tirelessly to prepare youth for employment by helping them secure their basic needs and develop valuable life and employment skills. While this work is vital, it relies on youth having access to jobs where they can apply their newly learned skills. Everyone, at the beginning of their career, needs someone to give them a break, and this is particularly true for at-risk and homeless youth, who often lack the invaluable connections and supports necessary to find entry-level jobs.

Raising the Roof's "Private Sector Engagement Project" was created with two intentions: first, to learn about the ways community agencies are currently working with the private sector, and second, to use knowledge gained from this 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 across Canada. In this chapter we review the existing literature on private sector engagement, and outline some of the major findings from this project, particularly with regard to strategies that both community agency and private sector participants have recommended for engaging the private sector. We will also discuss the major challenges identified in doing this work. We conclude by discussing next steps for this project, as well as the ways in which homelessness affects all Canadians. We argue that for this reason, all segments of society must work together towards a solution to homelessness; there are important roles that different stakeholders can play in this process.

Existing Literature

While some Canadian research examines the effectiveness of employment training programs for at-risk and homeless youth (see Robinson, 2005; Robinson & Baron, 2007; Karabanow et al., 2010, for example), to date, very little investigates specific strategies for engaging private sector employers. Some authors have articulated the importance of the private sector becoming involved in social concerns in general, such as Porter & Kramer (2011), who suggest that capitalist enterprises can include both social and business goals. The authors argue that the social service and private sectors exist in a mutual relationship where each depends on the other. Businesses require healthy communities made up of citizens who can buy their products, and communities require successful businesses to provide jobs and create wealth. Hence, "shared value" can be created where

both profit-making and healthy communities are of equal importance (Porter & Kramer, 2011:4). Porter and Kramer argue that not only do businesses have an ethical obligation to the community, but by building stronger and more vibrant communities, businesses will also be able to increase their profitability.

Some literature highlights strategies for employers looking to hire youth in general, as well as calls for the social service sector to hire individuals with experience of homelessness. For instance, the City of Toronto (2009) has published a tool kit for the private sector, which highlights the benefits of hiring youth, provides suggestions for working with “generation Y”, and outlines myths about hiring youth (i.e. they will be disrespectful, disloyal, have a sense of entitlement, and lack a strong work ethic). Another report, Change Toronto (2009), outlines strategies to help the social service sector hire persons with lived experience of homelessness. These include developing more inclusive policies and practices and pushing municipal governments to work with organizations to develop social enterprises (businesses focused on providing employment to people often excluded from the labour market). Organizations should also increase entry points so that individuals can get their ‘foot in the door’, including establishing volunteer and internship positions, holding job fairs, and hiring people with lived experience of homelessness for relief positions. Additional support should be provided once an individual is hired, including a lengthy orientation and frequent supervision so that employees can speak directly to employers about their needs (Change, 2009).

In terms of outlining specific strategies to engage the private sector in solutions to homelessness, the literature is very scarce. Two exceptions exist. Street Kids International (2008) identifies seven critical factors necessary for an effective partnership between the private sector and NGOs, including a clear purpose for the partnership, compatibility in terms of mission and values, clear and valuable roles for both organizations, open lines of communication, a process of continual learning, and a commitment from both parties to the relationship.

Burnett and Pomeroy’s (2008) report, developed for the Homelessness Partnering Secretariat, provides seven case examples of programs in Canada where the private sector is involved in initiatives related to homelessness, including hiring individuals with experience of homelessness. Their main focus is to outline the motivation of private sector participants, as well as the benefits they receive as a result. They found that while private sector members were primarily motivated by philanthropic or social reasons, they did in fact receive several bottom-line benefits as a result of their participation, including social branding (a good reputation in the community), new business opportunities and sources of labour, stronger human resources, and safer and more attractive communities.

Burnett and Pomeroy (2008) argue that a two-tiered strategy may be necessary to engage the private sector in solutions to homelessness. The first element requires recruiting ‘corporate champions’ who have experience hiring individuals with current or past experience of homelessness. The second strategy involves building the capacity of community agencies to promote the benefits of hiring homeless or previously homeless individuals to businesses and society as a whole through marketing strategies, as well as assisting community agencies in assessing their local context and opportunities.

Methodology

After initial research was conducted with 25 community agencies and corporations across Canada currently involved in employment/skills-training programs for at-risk or homeless youth, eight community programs were selected to partner with Raising the Roof for a year-long research study. The eight programs include:

- A.C.C.E.S.S. – BladeRunners, Vancouver, BC
- Community Futures Development Corporation of the North Okanagan – EMPLOY! Vernon, BC
- Resource Assistance for Youth (RaY) – Growing Opportunities, Winnipeg, MB
- St. Christopher’s House – Toronto Youth Job Corps (TYJC), Toronto, ON
- Carpenters’ Union Local 27 – CHOICE Pre-Apprenticeship Program, Vaughan, ON
- Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre – Youth Retail Employment Program, Ottawa, ON
- Spectre de Rue – TAPAJ, Montreal, QC
- Choices for Youth – Train for Trades, St. John’s, NL

The agencies were selected to represent a diverse sample geographically (5 different provinces), as well as a diversity of program models and types of training/employment opportunities provided (from retail to construction to ‘green’ jobs). Researchers visited each community agency, and semi-structured interviews were administered with agency staff, their private sector partners, and youth participants. In a few cases, focus groups were conducted with agency staff. A total of 63 youth were interviewed, as well as 31 agency staff and 31 private sector participants ($n = 125$). Agency staff assisted in the recruitment of youth and private sector members, who included both current and past participants. Programs varied according to the criteria youth had to meet in order to participate (for ex-

ample, in some programs the youth had to have housing, whereas in others they did not), as well as their definition of ‘youth’. For instance, programs funded by Service Canada defined youth as individuals between the ages of 15-30. This was the age range used in this sample, although the vast majority of youth were between the ages of 18-25, with a mean age of 20.3 years. Nearly all of the youth were housed at the time of the interview, although most identified precarious housing situations in the past. This most likely reflects the strong need for an individual to have secure housing before they can maintain employment, as well as the assistance provided by agency staff in ensuring that the youth’s basic needs are met. Youth were offered a \$30 honorarium for participating. Unfortunately, due to limitations in scope and the chapter’s focus on engaging the private sector, results from youth interviews will not be discussed in this chapter.²

Strategies for Engaging the Private Sector

Both agency and private sector participants were asked to recommend strategies for engaging the private sector. The most commonly suggested strategies were 1) promoting the agency’s employment program in the community, 2) building relationships based on honesty and reciprocity, 3) choosing the right businesses to approach, 4) initiating contact in a thoughtful manner, 5) pitching the benefits of participating, and 6) keeping the process as simple as possible for private sector partners. Each will be discussed in turn.

Getting the Word Out

Businesses might be looking for innovative ways to get involved in their community, but might not know how to do so. Several agency staff spoke about the importance of promoting their employment program in the community so that potential private sector partners can become aware of opportunities to collaborate. Various methods were outlined, including having an up-to-date website and social media sites, hosting community events, and placing ads in the newspaper. Others adopted more proactive methods of engaging businesses. One participant suggested inviting members of the business and political communities to speak to the youth at the agency in order to raise awareness of the program within the business community, hopefully making those businesses more receptive when the agency goes in search of youth employment opportunities. Other methods to raise awareness included having a ‘meet-and-greet’ night for local businesses to come and learn about the program, and having agency staff attend job fairs, rotary clubs, boards of trade, and monthly trade-related meetings.

2. The full report can be found at: <http://www.homelesshub.ca/Library/View.aspx?id=55210>

When promoting the program, several participants suggested that agency staff bring testimonials from members of the private sector, such as a quote from the CEO of a partnering company who has had a positive experience with hiring marginalized youth. In general, using ‘corporate champions’ or private sector partners who feel passionate about their involvement and are willing to encourage others to do the same, can provide a very powerful peer influence. These findings mirror those reported by Burnett & Pomeroy (2008). Private sector champions can open doors to employment positions in other businesses in a way that most non-profits cannot, as they have vast networks and are better positioned to understand the needs of the business community.

Several agency staff discussed the importance of recognizing and promoting the work of their private sector partners using any platforms available to them, including their website, community events, newspapers, and newsletters. A few agencies have also provided awards to their long-time partners. For instance, BladeRunners has held banquets and award ceremonies to honour their loyal partners, and TYJC paid tribute to a partner who has remained with them for 20 years.

Relationship Building

Most agency staff identified relationship building with business partners as the most important factor in developing a successful partnership with the private sector. While respondents varied in how they described relationship building, most understood it to be a personal, empathetic and long-term process with mutual and practical benefits. Relationship building was described as an ongoing process that can take time to develop (possibly beginning long before a youth is hired), and that continues throughout the employment period, and afterwards if possible. At its very core, relationship building starts with understanding the business. This means doing your research. For instance, Kim from EMPLOY stated:

I think it's about really learning the business...because every business is different, so really finding out what they do, how they do it, what works for them, what's their culture, really finding out what their mission statement is, what their bottom line is, and trying to match a youth who might be best suited for that business.

Most interviewees agreed that basic research on what the company does, who is authorized to make decisions, and the general environment and philosophy of the business is essential. It is also important to understand the context in which the company operates. This includes understanding the sector, and any regulatory or political issues they may be facing. Doing your research before initiating contact, shows that you are interested in not only meeting your own

objectives, but are committed to making the business more successful as a whole; as such, it is a way to invest in the relationship building process.

Honesty is a crucial element in engaging the private sector, so that potential partners are willing and prepared to face the challenges that may occur while working with at-risk youth. While most private sector partners overwhelmingly agreed that their overall experiences with the youth were positive, many did report some challenges. In some cases these issues were resolved with or without help from the agency, but in other cases, the employment placement did not work out in the end.

While every effort should be made to ensure the youth and partner are a good match and are prepared to work together, long-term involvement in the program will likely yield an occasional unsuccessful placement. This is why relationship building is so important. When a long-term plan was in place, or at least when the big picture was emphasized over immediate benefits, and when agencies were honest about some of the challenges that might be ahead, partners appeared to understand the nature of what they were getting into, and were more prepared to face the challenges. They were also less willing to give up on the program if a placement did not work out, and were often quite dedicated to not only addressing problems but learning from them. While some private sector participants expressed that their partner agency could do a slightly better job of ensuring youth were ready for work and truly understood the jobs they were placed in, these concerns did not appear to weaken commitment to the program. Whereas this should certainly be addressed by the agency, it is not always possible to avoid these problems, so having a strong relationship with the business seemed to reduce the damage done by missteps on the part of the agency or youth.

Finally, relationship building requires patience and flexibility. Using the ‘hard sell’ approach to quickly close the deal is not appropriate in this situation. It is important to show enthusiasm, but showing an interest in the needs of the business and highlighting how their organization can improve not only the lives of the youth they take on, but the community as a whole, is a more effective method. This approach, however, may take time. In most cases, commitment to participate in the program did not occur on initial contact but after several meetings, after talking with different levels of staff or after a period of deliberation. Roz from Choices for Youth stated: “Build the relationships. You know you might not get the answers you want right out the door, but leave it open”. It is important that the business take the time to consider whether they can provide the necessary environment and to ensure that they will be in a position to hire the youth after their ‘trial’ period ends, should the placement work out. Also, because every business and youth is unique, it is important to be flexible. A one-size-fits-all approach will not suit every interested business or youth. In addition,

the amount of ongoing support needed will vary. Depending on the size and level of commitment to the program, some private sector partners took on more of the responsibility for supporting youth than others. Some businesses, particularly those where the program was integrated into human resources, were in a better position to provide support to youth, whereas others seemed to rely more on the agencies. This is not to say those that relied more on agencies were less enthusiastic about the program; they simply lacked the capacity to provide support to the same degree as other organizations. A part of the relationship building process is figuring out how much of a role the partner wants to play and adapting to that.

Choosing a Business to Approach

When considering which businesses to approach, it is critical that the needs of both the business and the youth are taken into consideration. Jason from RaY stated:

[We] try to make it a good fit so we're not just throwing kids wherever, they're in a place that makes sense for them to be with a business that understands what the program is and has bought into the program.

Therefore, it is also important to be selective in the types of businesses that are approached. Many of the programs offer practical benefits such as wage subsidies and employee pre-screening services that may attract the wrong type of partners, including those who fail to see the 'big picture' and are interested in securing free or cheap labour alone. It is the responsibility of the agency to ensure that the business is capable of providing the type of support the youth need and that partners are in for the long haul. Businesses must provide a supportive environment where youth receive training in the duties of the job, and possibly also some coaching in professionalism and how to conduct oneself in a business. While this may not be an issue for all youth, some may not be used to basic aspects of work, such as getting up on time, interacting with supervisors, and appropriate workplace behaviour (i.e. not wearing an mp3 or talking on your cell phone during working hours). While it is important for employers to express their concerns over such conduct, without the right approach, youth may feel embarrassed, ashamed, angry, or even victimized. In a truly supportive environment, youth realize that they are not being attacked personally, but are being provided with a learning opportunity and a chance to improve so that these lapses become less common over time. It is important to note that these behaviours are not exclusive to at-risk youth, and may occur with all employees. In fact, many private sector partners expressed facing similar challenges from regular employees, and those who did make comparisons, did not see the 'burden' as being significant, even if more support was needed than with their regular employees.

The process of finding private sector partnerships and ensuring an appropriate fit begins with choosing which private sector partner to approach. Organizations that operate with an explicit socially-conscious mandate were a natural target for agencies. For example, Boon Burger seemed like an attractive target to RaY because they specialize in organic foods and use environmentally-responsible packaging and disposal methods, and thus, appear to be a socially-conscious business environment. While providing socially-conscious products does not guarantee a positive reception, it does increase the likelihood that the owners are mindful of other community issues as well. In most cases, however, private sector partners were not directly in the business of providing a socially conscious product or service. In these instances, agency staff suggested approaching businesses that have a well-defined human resources department, a corporate social responsibility mandate and the capacity to provide a supportive environment.

Social responsibility is a great start, but other factors contribute to a comfortable learning environment for youth. Three of the programs profiled in this study provide training for youth in the trades (Choices for Youth, BladeRunners, and Carpenters' Union Local 27), which is likely a suitable placement, as youth often work alongside people who come from similarly challenging backgrounds or neighbourhoods, yet were able to find success through the trades. Many of the youth interviewed commented on how they felt comfortable around their mentors in the trades, and likewise many of the staff reported that they saw themselves in the youth. For instance, Alex from Choices for Youth stated:

I grew up downtown too, I even know some of the people they hung around with, so at first I think they kind of looked down upon me, but they realized, this is what is going on with him, he's kind of like us and he changed, so I know I can do the same thing.

Although there is some debate on the subject (which we will return to in the discussion section), service environments like Harvey's and Boon Burger may also be appropriate as they often hire other youth who, despite coming from less troubled backgrounds, are similar in age to the at-risk youth hired, and may share common interests and dreams. This type of normalization is important, as it gives youth a chance to identify with their mainstream peers. Mike from EMPLOY also noted that the service sector may be more willing to take on unskilled workers, and that smaller businesses tend to be easier to partner with than larger corporations. This may be because they have more to gain from the benefits (i.e. wage subsidies), or because there is less corporate bureaucracy in their hiring processes. In terms of the construction industry, new developments were often the targets of partnership requests. Garry from BladeRunners described reading the newspaper regularly to see if any new developments were being built in

Vancouver, and then setting up meetings with the developers to ask how they could get their youth working on these projects. He also spoke of a councillor at City Hall (one of the founders of BladeRunners) creating ‘community benefit agreements’ when a new site was approved, requiring development companies to hire a certain number of local employees, which Garry was ready to provide. In addition, new developments were described as ideal as they create new jobs once built and businesses move in, or services, such as janitorial, are required.

Initiating Contact

A diversity of strategies was reported for finding private sector partners. The most common strategy was simply networking. For example, Lambrina at Toronto Youth Job Corps finds contacts from “One Step”, a network of non-profit organizations that deliver training and employment programs in Ontario. She also suggested forming relationships with local Business Improvement Associations (BIAs). Presenting at BIA meetings and networking within these organizations may be a good approach, as members are often sensitive to the needs of their community. Another participant suggested asking the board members of an agency if they have connections in the business community, or even asking business associates to join their board, in order to make contacts.

In most cases, networks were informal in structure but based on the professional experience of agency staff. Networking strategies included working with other community agencies and organizations to build networks, as well as asking existing private sector partners for leads. One participant suggested approaching businesses currently involved with the agency, such as donors. Businesses currently donating funds to an agency might not be aware of other ways they can contribute to their communities. Even personal networking played a role. For instance, Dave from EMPLOY described making contacts through activities such as skiing and golfing, and Shawn from TYJC discussed meeting people on public transit and talking to them about the program.

When contacting a potential employer for the first time, it is important to choose the appropriate person to contact. This is where research becomes important. For smaller organizations, it may be as simple as contacting the store or site owner. When navigating a complicated corporate structure, however, most respondents recommended taking the time to find out who the decision makers are. For some, this meant reaching upper-level executive staff or human resources personnel. Where trades were involved, there was some disagreement on whether developers should be approached initially, or if it was more efficient to contact the subtrades directly. Of those with existing contacts, most used their contact to set up a meeting with the appropriate decision maker. While having

a contact provided a clear advantage, the same concepts of research, relationship building and genuine interest in youth remained important.

In terms of method of contact, the most effective method described was presenting the program in person, rather than over the phone or through email. While one successful partnership did form through email presentation, this type of pitch was usually done face-to-face. Many cited this as important to the relationship building process, but also highlighted the fact that email communications in particular are too impersonal and are often ignored. Most businesses are flooded with various offers and spam, and emails are easy to disregard. Making the effort to come in person makes the program stand out, shows dedication and allows for the relationship building process to begin. Some noted that face-to-face communication is a better way to tap into the moral/emotional benefits of the program. Favoured locations for the meetings were in the business themselves, or in the case of corporate clients, in a relaxed setting like a restaurant.

The Pitch – Highlighting the Benefits of Participating

When making their pitch to potential private sector partners, agency staff highlighted the importance of being honest and up-front about both the advantages and disadvantages of hiring at-risk youth. As previously mentioned, all agreed that nothing is to be gained by sugar-coating the process, as missteps are to be expected and an appreciation for the big picture is needed. Several participants articulated the importance of tailoring the pitch to the company. For instance, does the agency provide a particular type of training, such as WHMIS³, that may appeal to the employer? How does the potential partnership fit into corporate culture, company philosophy or community image?

When participants were asked to identify the most important message to convey to prospective partners, the majority emphasized the benefits that employers receive by taking part in the program (similar to the findings of Burnett & Pomeroy's (2008) research). After all, even the most altruistic business person needs to consider the bottom line. The benefits highlighted included wage subsidies, agency screening and support, access to trained, quality employees, positive public relations, and strengthened communities. With the exception of Choices for Youth and the Carpenters' Union, which pay their youth directly, and TAPAJ, which has employers pay the full wage, all of the programs profiled in this study offer full or partial wage subsidies to employers for a set period of time. The subsidy is provided with the expectation that youth will either get hired directly by the company or be trained in the skills necessary to enter the competitive job

3. Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System.

market. Wage subsidies were a very important motivation for many private sector partners, as they remove the economic risk of taking on the youth. One employer stated that it usually takes 2-3 weeks for a new employee to become productive, and in some cases, given their inexperience and barriers to learning, it could take longer. By lessening the financial risk, both agencies and employers agreed that participation in the program became more likely. Interestingly, Heather from Intact Financial Corporation reported that the wage subsidy was not a factor for her company when they considered partnering with TYJC. She stated:

We really wouldn't feel comfortable taking that. I mean our messaging is that we're trying to give back to the community, but at the same time, how could we take money from a city program or from whatever that is, to subsidize what we would have spent anyways.

Hence, wage subsidies may not be such a motivator for large corporations, particularly if they are not creating a new position for the youth, but filling one that would need an employee regardless of their partnership with an agency.

Another benefit these programs provide is valuable pre-screening and support services that can save employers time. After spending a minimum of several weeks with the youth, agency staff are usually in a great position to select those they feel are ready to hold a job, and are most capable of doing the job. Adrien from RaY articulated this point:

And just making sure that they [the employers] understand that ultimately we're making the placement or the decision about who will be placed there as the result of a sort of selective decision making process. We're not just some employment agency that's just throwing someone their way and hoping it will stick. We're selecting someone whose personality, whose skills, whose interests seem to be a really good fit for your organization. So really identifying that I think helps them to understand that we're not just hoping that whoever will take them... there's some serious thought put into the decision-making process.

This selection process was very important for small businesses, who often do not have a human resources department. While employers still wanted to interview the youth themselves, the referral process was far less difficult than creating job postings, interviewing a large number of applicants, and potentially hiring applicants that do not work out.

In addition to providing valuable HR services, agency staff are available to provide support to both the youth and the employer throughout the duration

of the employment period. If the youth require support for any personal or employment related problem, agency staff are there to assist them. Similarly, employers are not left alone to resolve any concerns that might arise with the youth. Simon, an employer from Natural Cycle Courier highlighted this point:

Just to let them [other employers] know that RaY does a lot of the supporting as well. Like if there's any issues that came up, RaY was pretty responsive in dealing with it right away. So for the workplace to know that you're not on your own hiring someone that has come from a more difficult background. There is support for the workplace in a situation like that.

In addition, because many programs offer pre-employment training and certification, program youth often became attractive candidates as they were better qualified than some other applicants. All of the programs profiled in this study provide a variety of training opportunities, such as WHMIS, fall protection, customer service excellence, and first aid. They also offer valuable life skills and employment readiness workshops. This training is an asset to employers, who would otherwise have to provide it themselves. Every private sector participant interviewed described gaining access to at least one, but often more, high-quality employee through their agency partners. One participant highlighted the importance of tapping into every available resource for skilled workers, particularly as many workers in the baby-boom generation prepare to retire. Several employers discussed the ongoing challenge of finding high-quality employees who would remain loyal to their organization. Rhianon from West Bank Projects Corp. spoke about how her work with BladeRunners helped in this regard:

Well I think when it works, it really works. You get these incredible employees that are very loyal. And you can't buy that, you can't always find that. A lot of times there is huge turnover on a construction site, and there's not a huge turnover for BladeRunners kids.

In all cases, the benefits to companies in terms of employee recruitment, training and retention were highlighted during the pitch. Some agencies went a step further and offered additional services to their private sector partners, which can be particularly useful for smaller businesses. For example, one agency used a staff member who also teaches human resources courses to educate private sector partners on conducting orientations, providing training, and developing HR guidebooks and tools to effectively evaluate employee performance. While not all agencies have the capacity to offer these additional services, where it is possible, it is a great way to demonstrate that the agency understands and is dedicated to the business. It is also a great way to maintain ongoing contact and communication.

Finally, agency staff and members of the private sector, spoke of how businesses can benefit both directly and indirectly by giving back to their communities. Directly, businesses are able to build a positive reputation as an organization that cares about their community, which attracts socially conscious customers and employees. Similarly, companies are able to highlight their partnership in marketing and public relations materials. Indirectly, businesses benefit from having healthy communities full of people who can buy their products and services. Garry, a coordinator from BladeRunners, calls this opportunity “an economic windfall,” as youth who were previously using social services become tax-paying employees, and more skilled workers are added to the workforce.

It should be noted that several participants from the private sector spoke about the importance of giving back to the community whether they obtained any benefit or not. For instance, Thomas from Boon Burger in Winnipeg stated:

Right now, the benefit to me, is the gratification of being able to help someone like Bill⁴ out, which is like, very rewarding, you know, just to think that he has gone through like such hell in his life and to know that he enjoys coming to work here, and you can see how he is making friends here, you know what I mean? It's really nice to see. I know it sounds kind of corny, but you can't really put a monetary value on it.

Keeping it Simple

As a final note, several participants from the private sector expressed the importance of keeping the process as simple as possible for business partners. This involves calling or visiting them at an appropriate time (for example, in retail, not while managers are busy), having all necessary information available for them, and not bombarding them with paperwork. It is important that the pitch be made in an efficient manner, and that agency staff have answers to potential questions or concerns ready. Agencies should make the hiring process as seamless as possible, and be readily available to support employers should any concerns arise.

Challenges in Engaging the Private Sector

While all agency staff appeared very passionate about their work and about the need for the private sector to become involved in their programs, many challenges were reported. The main challenges described were 1) a lack of resources, 2) strong competition with other youth and agencies, 3) a scarcity of quality jobs with adequate pay, 4) the recent economic crisis, 5) difficulties

4. Name has been changed to protect confidentiality.

making contact with decision makers, 6) employer fears, and 7) challenges maintaining relationships with employers if a placement did not work out.

Availability of Resources

The most frequently reported challenge faced by the agencies in this sample related to funding. The availability (or lack) of ongoing funding impacts an agency's ability to seek and maintain partnerships. Without secure, long-term funding, it may be hard to develop a long-term plan or relationship with employers. Dave from EMPLOY described this difficulty: “[funding has] been a real issue with the partnering and the ability to develop long-term relationships. I mean you never know if the program is going to be here next year”.

Ongoing support is also a condition necessary for the comfort of potential private sector partners interested in participating. While all agencies received positive reviews from their private sector partners, some agency staff pointed out the challenge of providing support to partners in the resource-limited environment of the non-profit sector. While agency staff work tirelessly, long-term success may require additional training that the agencies simply do not have the capacity to provide. For example, some private sector partners suggested that additional training in social skills, literacy and numeracy, and support for substance abuse issues would make the experience less challenging, though they recognized that this was not possible.

In addition to being short on resources, agency staff are increasingly evaluated by funders based on the number of youth employed at the end of the program. If numbers are not high enough, agencies run the risk of losing that funding source. While at first glance it makes sense to ensure that agencies are accountable to their funders in this way, this type of pressure can put agency staff in the difficult position of recommending youth for positions that are not an ideal fit, so that they can continue to produce high employment statistics. Funders very rarely require long-term statistics, so while a youth may be employed at the end of the program, this does not ensure that they will be in several months time, or that they are gaining the skills and experience needed to build a career. This pressure to place youth in jobs may also endanger relationships with private sector partners who are counting on agency staff to find appropriate candidates for their organizations. Moreover, while finding employment is obviously a successful outcome, for many of the youth who have faced tremendous barriers in their lives, some of the greatest benefits they receive during participation in these programs are less concrete, such as gaining social support, or an increase in self-esteem. While these benefits will ultimately help youth move forward in their lives, they cannot be captured by statistics and often go unrecognized.

Availability of Jobs/Competition

Finding employment can be challenging for youth in general, including for those who have high school or post-secondary educations. Many of the youth in these programs do not have a high school diploma or a General Equivalency Diploma (GED), and often have little work experience. It can be difficult for agency staff to get employers to take a chance on these youth, particularly if there are more qualified applicants available. Moreover, competition does not only come from the competitive job market, but in some cases from other agencies running employment programs. This appears to be particularly true for those working in large cities such as Toronto and Montreal. Lambrina from TYJC recalls hearing from potential employers, “you’re like the ninth agency that’s called us,” particularly during the recession. Two respondents from TAPAJ also noted that agency competition has been a significant challenge, particularly when the program was first established.

A related difficulty faced by agency staff is finding quality jobs with reasonable pay for the youth. While the definition of a ‘quality job’ may vary from person to person, it should include interesting, challenging work that is within the youth’s ability. The types of jobs offered to youth, excluding those in a specific trade, are often low-skill customer service positions including fast food and restaurant positions, various retail positions, general labour, and in one case, a bicycle courier position. Of course, this is to be expected given the limited education and work experience of the great majority of the youth. There was disagreement among participants as to whether any job is a positive step forward for youth, as they are able to get ‘a foot in the door’ and can develop transferable skills such as social and job maintenance skills (punctuality and attendance, for example). Other participants stood firm on the need to place youth in jobs that they can structure a career around. For instance, Garry from BladeRunners states:

I think the message too that we want to get through to potential funders or private industry... is that we're not just trying to get them a job, it's long-term attachment to the workplace, building careers. It's not just getting them a job, getting them out the door, getting rid of them. We want to see these kids in careers in this industry.

This may be easier for agencies using a training model for a specific trade such as BladeRunners, The Carpenters’ Union and Choices for Youth, which all provide on-site training to prepare youth for a possible career in the construction industry. Unfortunately, however, challenges exist in this model as well. Youth are often given specific, repetitive tasks, and options for employment outside the program environment may be limited.

While it is to be expected that the positions available to at-risk youth are entry-level, the problem is that many of these positions do not provide a living wage. This is important, as poverty itself affects readiness for work. Without adequate income, it can be difficult to keep stable housing so that youth can rest and prepare for work the next day. It may affect food security, and hunger can affect performance. Travelling to and from work can become difficult to afford, and the stress of chronic poverty can also impact concentration, attitude and energy levels. It can also make quick money available through the underground economy more alluring. While small businesses are a good target for agencies due to higher community involvement and less red tape, they may lack opportunities for advancement. Even retail stores and restaurants that appear to offer opportunities for advancement in their administrative offices are unrealistic, as these positions are often given to those with post-secondary education. In fact, like most occupations, the retail and hospitality sectors have become academic disciplines in many colleges across Canada, and most advanced positions within these large companies require some type of post-secondary education, leaving youth without this education stuck in the lowest positions in the organization. To be sure, many agency staff noted entry level positions that their youth are capable of performing well that do provide opportunities for career advancement. Office work, for example, can be a great starting point, as general administrative skills are highly marketable, can be used in any sector, and can be added to gradually. Moreover, several programs assist youth in furthering their education, such as Choices for Youth, which dedicates one morning per week during their program to GED prep or other literacy training. Hence, while employment opportunities are vital to helping at-risk and homeless youth move forward in their lives, it is critical that educational opportunities also be made available to ensure long-term success.

Economic Context

If the availability of quality jobs is a significant challenge for agencies trying to engage the private sector, it is not hard to imagine that the recent global economic crisis has created additional challenges for private sector engagement in youth homelessness. Economic downturns are often associated with layoffs, increased focus on the bottom line and less concern for social responsibility. Employers are also less willing to take what they perceive to be risks. Many agency staff reported that the recent economic downtown created additional challenges for them in their work, particularly in terms of finding employment for the youth. As many Canadians lost their jobs in the recession, competition for available jobs became quite strong. Many Canadians who worked in skilled, well-paying jobs found themselves working in service or general labour positions that are the main target for employment programs. This not only created additional competition with regard to numbers, but also put youth in direct competition with adults with many years of experience,

and in many cases, post-secondary education. Lambrina from TYJC said:

There may be a woman who is working in an office where there have been cut backs and ends up getting a job at Tim Horton's or Harvey's because that is all that that person can get at the time, and they have bills to pay, so you know, so I think the recession has created a little bit of competition in a lot of those jobs.

Similarly, Dave from EMPLOY explained how his small town of Vernon, BC was affected by the recession:

Our forest industry has taken a hard hit, our Grasslands closed, our RV manufacturing they shut, capital foods shut, so lots of big industries with the recession, took a big hit...So I think that's a big challenge. Front Line Global, a big call centre, used to be here, moved out too, I think they took their business off shore, and that employed 300 people. So lots of our industries left.

Even programs with established partners, like the trades prep programs, faced tremendous challenges during the recession. For example, BladeRunners and the Carpenters' Union both faced a shortage of work due to the recession. Very few new developments were created, and current sites were shut down. Staff from both organizations described this as being particularly hard for their youth who face harsh economic realities and need to be working. It was difficult to get the youth to remain positive and motivated during these hard times. On the flip side, one agency respondent reported increased interest in his program during the recession due to the wage subsidies. However, these 'partners' may not be appropriate as they are only looking for short-term gains and may not provide long-term support. As such, an additional challenge for agencies is to take extra precaution in assessing the motives of potential partners during times of economic turmoil.

Making Contact

Making contact with potential partners in the private sector, and specifically with the right person within the organization, can be challenging for agency staff at times. While it was recommended in the previous section that face-to-face meetings be arranged with potential partners, these meetings can be difficult to secure, particularly if businesses are flooded with other requests from non-profits or charities. Several participants, such as Tony from TYJC, stated that it is especially difficult to get the attention of key decision makers in private sector organizations: "You're continually calling the HR departments, being transferred and transferred...waiting and waiting. There are just

so many challenges you have to go through". Speaking to those in authority is important, as several participants described speaking to employees who were very keen on participating in the program, only to find that those in a higher position were not interested. For instance, one respondent spoke about the enthusiasm he often gets from store managers at various locations only to be told later that head office does not wish to form a partnership with the agency.

Employer Fears/Stigma of Youth Homelessness

Several participants described the challenges they face when telling employers that they work for an agency that supports at-risk or homeless youth. A common reaction is that either there is 'something wrong' with the youth, or that they are dangerous. In this sense, it can be a tough 'sell' for agency staff, who not only have to convince employers of the importance of the program, but also educate them about the youth they work with. One participant discussed how he regularly has to give employers background on who the youth are, what kind of situations they may come from, and what kind of barriers they face in gaining employment. Another respondent spoke about how many employers are uninformed about homelessness in general, and how he works to increase their understanding of this issue and of the circumstances youth experiencing homelessness face.

This challenge not only affects employer willingness to hire at-risk youth, but also the types of positions they may offer. For instance, some employers will send youth to the back of their stores where they do not have any interaction with the public, or will refuse to train them in certain tasks, such as handling cash. This can be a barrier to youth learning valuable skills and increasing their confidence. Finally, due to the perceived risk of working with at-risk youth (or any population with barriers), some organizations have policies against working with employment agencies such as the ones profiled in this study.

Burning Bridges

Unfortunately, sometimes the fear expressed by employers is grounded in reality. Although every private sector participant in this study indicated a willingness to continue working with their community agency partners in the future, several agency staff spoke about difficulties in forming long-term relationships with employers after a placement does not work out. The reality is that due to tremendous barriers and the often troubled pasts of these youth, it is likely that some placements will not be successful. One agency stated that some youth may even sabotage themselves once they reach a position of success, perhaps because they feel overwhelmed or afraid. In these scenarios, agency staff reported working to control the damage however they

could, but some employers still chose to withdraw their participation.

One agency staff described how he attempts to prevent this by being up front with employers about this possibility. He stated that in general, if employers do not understand this risk, it is probably best that a partnership does not form. Agency staff also try to provide support to employers when a position is not working out by speaking to the youth themselves, and in some cases firing the youth. Of course, the problems that might arise in these placements are not unique to at-risk youth, and are a risk that employers must take with any employee. Some employers explained that they accept this risk, understanding that by taking a chance they have the potential to help a youth with few other options. For example, Rhiannon from West Bank Projects Corp. stated:

You need partners that really understand that it's about more than getting a person on the site to do a job, it's about changing a life. When you think about it in those terms, you're more willing to roll with the punches of it. And you know having people on site that don't work out, that happens to the best of us. We have, you know, graduates with their MBAs, Master's in Development that don't work out. It's no different than any employee. Not everyone is going to work out.

Conclusion

Many community agencies such as the ones profiled here work tirelessly to ensure that at-risk and homeless youth have their basic needs met and acquire the skills necessary to maintain employment. This work, however, depends on the presence of employers willing to take a chance on youth whose life opportunities may have been limited, and to provide jobs where their new skills can be put into practice. Private sector engagement, therefore, is crucial to providing youth with pathways into the labour market. We are not arguing that increased employment opportunities will single-handedly solve youth homelessness. We are reluctant to contribute to the misguided notion that 'getting a job' is the only barrier preventing young people from escaping homelessness. Solutions to youth homelessness require a holistic approach, one that addresses both individual concerns and broader structural barriers. This involves a well-coordinated strategy including emergency services (shelters, drop-ins), long-term services in areas such as mental health and addiction, and structural changes such as an increase in affordable housing, universal access to post-secondary education, and the availability of quality jobs that pay a living wage. Homeless and at-risk youth face multiple barriers to employment (most notably, finding housing), which must be addressed before they can realistically be expected to hold a job. It is our intention to

address one component in an overall strategy: engaging the private sector, which has traditionally been overlooked when developing solutions to social problems such as youth homelessness.

Increased private sector engagement in itself will not solve youth homelessness. In fact our message is quite the opposite. We believe that homelessness is an issue that affects everyone in society, and thus requires action across society. This includes governments, community agencies, *and* the private sector. Homelessness affects everybody in Canada, and it is therefore necessary that all segments of society work together towards a solution. Engaging the private sector in no way lessens the responsibility of the government to address homelessness. In an era of massive debts and pressure to introduce austerity budgets, there has been increased pressure on governments to withdraw spending on social programs, such as employment programs for homeless and at-risk youth. Agencies are increasingly being asked to seek private dollars to fund their programs, or are provided with short-term funding with the expectation that they will obtain an alternative source for the long-term. This, of course, will only make the problem worse, as the agencies profiled in this study require long-term, stable funding from public sources, *as well* as solid partnerships with the private sector. In this sense, our call for increased private sector engagement assumes that there will be continued, if not increased, public funding.

By bringing various segments of society together, we can begin to develop a more comprehensive strategy to address youth homelessness. While it is only one component of an overall strategy, much can be gained by increasing the involvement of the private sector in training and employing homeless youth (and in addressing homelessness in general). Raising the Roof's research suggests there are many benefits of private sector engagement, including but not limited to:

- 1) Homeless and at-risk youth have the opportunity to participate in meaningful job placements and potentially gain long-term, permanent positions. Increasing opportunities for youth with few options allows them to develop the skills needed to structure a career, and perhaps instils hope for a brighter future when previously there was none.
- 2) Private sector engagement can lead to meaningful collaboration between businesses and the non-profit sector with the goal of addressing important social issues. By engaging a sector that has traditionally been left out of discussions about solutions to social problems, the two sectors can work together towards a common goal rather than being pitted against one another.

- 3) Businesses and their staff have the opportunity to directly contribute to solutions to youth homelessness by changing the lives of the youth they work with.
- 4) Such engagement nurtures and supports a collaborative, community-based response to homelessness – citizens can work together to strengthen their own communities.
- 5) It can lead to the development of new understandings of youth homelessness. As more people have direct contact with youth whose lives have been affected by homelessness, a greater awareness will develop regarding the hardships and barriers to employment many youth face, hopefully challenging common stereotypes and misperceptions.

In this paper, we have identified not only the goals of private sector engagement, but also key strategies for engaging the private sector. In addition, we highlighted some key challenges to consider when engaging the private sector. All of this information is intended to help communities engage the private sector in ways that will benefit the community, and in particular, homeless youth.

Moving forward, the findings from this research will be used to develop a major report and two toolkits: one for community agencies and one for the private sector. We are currently working on a distribution strategy to ensure that our work reaches a large audience of community agencies and private sector companies across Canada. We hope to stimulate further collaboration between community agencies and the private sector, ultimately resulting in increased employment and training opportunities for at-risk and homeless youth. We will use the strategies and suggestions gathered from this research to strengthen the capacity of community agencies to approach and work effectively with the private sector, and to be a catalyst for a change in attitudes and hiring practices within the private sector.

Homelessness affects all Canadians morally, socially, and economically. The only way for society to exist in a peaceful, cohesive, and productive manner is to ensure that *all* of its citizens are taken care of. If we wish to live in a peaceful and relatively crime-free society, we need to address the exclusion and deprivation of some, which leaves them with few options but to turn to alternative, sometimes criminal, means to survive. Homelessness also exerts a financial burden on society. The costs of emergency shelter, social services, health care, and the use of the criminal justice system to ‘address’ homelessness is extremely expensive, much more so than putting money into preventive measures such as affordable housing and income security (Wellesley Institute, 2010; Gaetz, 2012). By ensuring that all of our

citizens have access to housing and employment, not only are the costs of services drastically reduced, but there are more people to contribute to our tax base and stimulate the economy through increased spending. Furthermore, the costs incurred in terms of the lost potential of these youth are incalculable. With current demographic shifts, such as the mass retirement of the baby-boomer generation, society needs a skilled and knowledgeable population of youth to take their place. On a moral level, how a country takes care of its vulnerable citizens reflects its priorities and values; it is a statement of the kind of country we want to live in. For these reasons, we hope that through our work the most important message of all can be heard – homelessness is everybody's business. Our work has demonstrated that there are ways to increase the engagement of the private sector in solutions to youth homelessness. We have also learned that in many cases, members of the private sector would like to contribute, but do not necessarily know how. Although there are challenges in doing this work, it is ultimately a worthwhile initiative, one that can help tens of thousands of youth reach their true potential.

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18

CASE STUDY

Choices for Youth Train for Trades

Canadian Homelessness Research Network

Choices for Youth's ***Train for Trades*** program creates employment opportunities within the construction industry for at-risk and homeless youth in and around the area surrounding St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. The underlying goal for all of Choices' programs is to help young people obtain housing and give them the support and resources they need to exit homelessness permanently. Not merely a youth skills training program, Train for Trades has emerged as a key program within Choices for Youth. They recognize that training alone would not likely work for the clients they serve, who are generally homeless, lack a high school diploma, and may have addictions and/or mental health issues. The needs of these difficult to serve youth are met with a comprehensive, client-centered approach that combines employment training with several other necessary components: housing, education, and intensive personal support. The program has produced genuine improvements in the lives of the young people who participate, with many obtaining their high school diploma, learning a skill or trade, obtaining and maintaining housing, and, in general, moving towards adulthood with confidence and stability.

Background

In the wake of the closure of the Mount Cashel Orphanage, Choices for Youth was founded in 1990 as a response to an “identified need among youth, the community, and government to have an empowerment-based program available to youth for whom ‘home’ was not an option” (Choices for Youth, 2012a). The mandate of Choices for Youth is to work with youth who have experienced, or continue to experience substantial barriers or trauma in their lives, including homelessness, addiction, illiteracy and other issues relating to education, mental health, isolation, and difficulty finding employment. The name “Choices for Youth” stems from a foundational belief that the appropriate response to youth who are homeless and face hardship is to give them a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Empowerment is key to personal development, helping these youth to realize their goals, achieve personal stability, and most of all, feel that their accomplishments are truly their own. Choices for Youth exists to give these young people the tools and opportunities they need to overcome the barriers that are preventing them from leading healthy and stable lives. This reflects both the client-centered approach of Choices, and the degree to which they build their service model around the concept of youth development. In the twenty-two years that have followed their foundation, Choices for Youth has grown from an idea to a community-serving, not-for-profit organization built upon seven core programs. They have changed the lives of hundreds of young people, while also becoming a major provider of transitional housing for at-risk youth in St. John’s. One of the seven core programs, Train for Trades, expands Choices’ service mandate, offering program participants access to education, personal support, training, and employment in a growing sector: green retrofitting.

Established in 2008, the Train for Trades program was created as a means of providing employment opportunities for at-risk and homeless youth. The idea was to develop an all-inclusive training program to meet the needs and challenges of the most hard-to-serve homeless youth in St. John’s. Research on their client group reveals that the average participant had only completed schooling up to grade 8, 80% of participants had some history of involvement with the criminal justice system, 53% reported experiencing mental health issues, and 65% have or had a self-identified substance abuse issue (Button & Keating, 2011). Most importantly, three quarters of participants were unemployed or receiving financial assistance prior to their entry into the program (Button & Keating, 2011).

The idea of developing a training program that would coexist alongside other services emerged when Choices was in the process of retrofitting an industrial building to serve as a new transitional housing site. Inspired by Toronto’s Eva’s Phoenix program, and Youth Skills Zone, Choices employed

their clients in the refurbishment of the building. The Director of Choices made a decision to learn from Eva's – which likewise integrated employment into their Phoenix housing model, and employed youth in the building of the facility – and bring that approach to St. John's.

Train for Trades thus began as a program that employed participants to renovate the Lilly Building, a warehouse space located in downtown St. John's, which now houses the Train for Trades program and provides housing for participants in Choices for Youth's Supportive Affordable Housing and Employment program. The Train for Trades pilot saw ten participants successfully complete the training, in addition to creating fourteen units of housing. During this period, Train for Trades successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of their program model, and showed that it is possible to successfully use training and employment to help at-risk and homeless youth overcome barriers and achieve positive change in their lives. The first program of its kind in Atlantic Canada the pilot phase of Train for Trades was a success and connected a population in need with opportunities in the construction industry.

Shift to Green Jobs

The pilot phase of Train for Trades proved to be so successful that Choices made the decision to continue the program. The second phase shifted the program's focus from general renovation to green retrofitting, – that is, retrofitting low-income and social housing for greater energy efficiency. The inspiration for this shift came from a growing local interest in energy poverty, and perhaps most significantly, from learning about an innovative green jobs program in Winnipeg.

Warm Up Winnipeg developed a successful model of employment training and job creation for youth and young adults (in this case, Aboriginal persons involved in inner-city gangs) with the goal of retrofitting houses to be more energy efficient. Once again, Choices demonstrated the benefits of adaptation, by applying the program's concepts to St. John's' circumstances. The focus on green jobs made sense for a number of reasons. First, people are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of energy efficiency. Energy prices are on the rise, and the number of households that are devoting ten percent or more of their resources toward energy continues to grow. The concept of 'energy poverty' is quickly becoming a critical issue, and concern, across Canada. Also, as provincial and municipal governments continue to divert large amounts of resources to subsidies as a response to rising energy costs, a case can be made that this money would be better spent on efficiency strategies, such as green retrofitting, which will help reduce consumption and total expenses over the long term.

The decision to shift the focus of Train for Trades to green jobs enabled Choices to link three key social issues: youth homelessness, unemployment and energy conservation. In a province where there is a shortage of people in skilled trades, Train for Trades plays an important role in building the number of skilled labourers within the provincial workforce. This has proven to be an incredibly successful program shift. Not only has the program succeeded in teaching homeless youth a highly in-demand skillset, it also has the added benefit of offering a cost-saving upgrade to qualifying families at a significantly lower rate than the industry average.

In the spring of 2011, ten youth completed Train for Trades' second round of training. These youth were also the first group to complete the refocused, energy retrofit version of the program. This year also marked the beginning of the third round of Train for Trades training, which continues to focus on green jobs. This third round will see an additional ten participants complete the training, 60 units of housing retrofitted, and the renovation of Choices for Youth's Duckworth Street location. Improving upon the program's initial successes, the refocused, green iteration of Train for Trades has demonstrated that the model can be modified and remain successful and effective. The shift in focus to green jobs has created new opportunities for its participants, placing them advantageously in a growing field. Green retrofitting is an extremely desirable skillset, and in today's energy- and cost-conscious world, this program and its lessons will benefit these youth for years to come.

About the Program

Train for Trades and Choices for Youth share a core objective, which is to empower youth through their programming. They transition youth from dependence on income supports and other systems to sustainable, long-term employment by helping them overcome barriers and gain valuable job and life skills. They achieve these goals through a combination of training, employment, support and not insignificantly, stable housing.

It is important to note that Train for Trades made a decision to not simply provide opportunities for the most stable youth. In fact, the program is intended to help the most hard-to-serve youth who experience the greatest barriers to employment. According to Sheldon Pollett, who founded the program: "the higher you score on the risk factors, the more likely [it is] that we're going to accept you into the program, counter-balanced with your level of motivation. If we can get some indication that this youth wants something different, that's the piece we need – motivation. [The motivation] to have a different life. We can work with the rest" (Interview, 2012).

The training model, the foundation of both phases of Train for Trades, is one of the elements that makes the program so noteworthy. Again, this is not simply a training program. For homeless youth, who lack experience, have failed to complete high school, and who may have significant needs for support, it is advantageous that the training component is embedded within a larger system of support and learning. The Choices model achieves this by building their program around four pillars: housing, employment (income), training, and education. Housing is of key importance because obtaining and maintaining work is difficult without the stability and safety that a home provides. Employment is significant because it not only provides income, but gives young people the opportunity to learn “soft skills”, such as workplace conduct and money management, which will allow young people to maintain jobs in the future. Education is also important because if one wants to find genuine solutions to youth homelessness, and to ensure young people have a chance at long-term success, they need, at minimum, a high school education. These four pillars, when collectively implemented into a youth support program, represent a sustainable, long-term solution to youth homelessness.

The training program also incorporates an intensive model of support and case management. Many of the young people who participate have never lived independently, learned how to budget, or how to overcome crises. A large number are dealing with violence, substance use issues and/or mental health challenges. Few have had the chance to learn how to cope with the ups and downs of employment, the good (pay cheques) or the bad (conflict on the job). All young people – whether homeless or housed – need to learn the skills to live independently, obtain a job, and most importantly, maintain it. This program model provides young people with all the skills and supports necessary to achieve these goals. The result of this model is increased youth engagement, improved personal development, and increased housing options and stability.

The Train for Trades training program is comprised of a combination of instruction and real world, jobsite experience. Spanning one year, each round of training includes ten youth participants. The first 3 weeks of the program focus on workplace training, with one week of soft skills and 2 weeks at the Carpenter’s MillWright College. In these opening weeks, participants learn about basic life skills, how to conduct oneself in the workplace, money management, and how to manage their new responsibilities. Following this initial stage, participants are given the opportunity to train at a local carpentry college for 2 weeks and are educated on job-specific skills, including Fall Arrest, First Aid/CPR, Powerline Hazard, Confined Spaces, Back Injury Prevention, Ramset Certification, Tool Handling, Construction Awareness, Insulation Theory and Asbestos Abatement Training, all of which will positively increase their skill base for post-Train for Trades employment opportunities.

Following these in-class training sessions, participants transition to working on real-world retrofit projects. What differentiates Train for Trades from mainstream employment programs is that at this stage, they do not transition their participants into employment within the construction industry. Instead, as a core element of their training, Train for Trades takes on contracts to retrofit a number of housing units, putting program participants to work under controlled conditions alongside externally-sourced general contractors. The great thing about this work is that it is repetitive. Not only are these youth learning a valuable skillset, they are doing so in real-world environments that demand they repeatedly practice these skills, ensuring their understanding and ability is thorough and high-level.

Train for Trades is a social enterprise. They are contracted, by the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, to conduct energy retrofits on social housing units. The work is done at a professional level, and must pass city inspections, to the same stringent standards as any other professional contractor's work. They pride themselves on doing a highly professional job and staying on time, on code, and on budget. The fact that it is at-risk youth who are doing the work makes no difference – Train for Trades does quality work that is on par with any other company in the construction industry. Trades participants exit this program well trained and with real work experience.

Over the course of their training, in addition to the unit retrofits, Train for Trades participants also use their new skills to give back to the community. Past projects have included building an extension to a community center, construction of a stage at a local jazz festival, as well as work with Habitat for Humanity. In addition to allowing participants to further practice and refine their new skills, the additional projects give the Train for Trades program increased legitimacy within the greater community, which serves to alleviate concerns and deter instances of NIMBYism, and increase the visibility and positive perceptions of the program and its participants.

The overall mission of Choices for Youth is to improve the lives of at-risk and homeless youth. Part of this work involves giving Train for Trades participants the opportunity to further their education. This can include GED preparation or, in the case of participants with low literacy skills, participation in Choices for Youth's Youth at Promise program, which aims to, "help participants transition to further educational or employment-related programming" (Choices for Youth, 2012b). Not only does this help motivate participants to increase their education, but it does so in an environment that is supportive, nurturing, and positive.

An additional benefit of Train for Trades, and their lengthy training program, is that the youth, many of whom have experienced significant social barriers in their lives, are given the opportunity to learn new skills in the company of other youth with similar backgrounds. The year-long training program provides an incredible amount of time for participants to build relationships with each other, learn teamwork, camaraderie, and above all, work alongside people who share their goals and challenges – all in a positive, nurturing environment. These relationships are an extension of Choices for Youth's mission of empowerment, as well as a program result that can be nurtured to aid the long-term development of the youth participants.

Train for Trades also provides participants with an “intensive support model”, giving youth access to a support worker at any time for the duration of the program. This means a participant is able to contact and consult with one of Choices for Youth's support workers, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Should they find themselves in need of support, advice, assistance, or aid, they are able to contact a youth support worker directly. These workers are trained in both construction and youth support, which allows them to respond to the needs of program participants, whether it be a personal or professional matter. The intensive support model, although resource-intensive, allows the program to be highly reflexive to the needs of participants, and by helping them work through crises and barriers, reflects Choices for Youth's mission of youth empowerment.

Partnership Model

Key to the long-term success of Train for Trades has been their ability to form lasting, positive partnerships with the construction industry, government, and local partners. Over the years, Choices has developed partnerships with and received support from:

- Provincial Government - Department of Advanced Education and Skills (formerly Human Resources, Labour and Employment)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC)
- CUPE
- Carpenter's Millwright College
- Warm Up Winnipeg
- Eva's Initiatives, Toronto

In fact, it can be argued that without the key three-way partnership between Choices for Youth, CUPE Local 1860, and the NLHC, Train for Trades may not even exist.

Gaining the support of local partners, especially CUPE Local 1860, helps legitimize the program, builds a positive reputation, and lends credibility to the training and its participants. It also helps Train for Trades connect with private funders and gain access to additional resources and projects. Without the support and endorsement of community members and organizations, Train for Trades may not have secured adequate funding for projects beyond their pilot phase. CUPE Local 1860, who “jumped at the opportunity” (CUPE, 2010) to get involved, represent the working unions that youth who complete the Train for Trades program will be looking to join. CUPE’s support of the program, assistance during the training stages, and placement of youth following the program, have been vital to participant success and will continue to factor heavily in the long-term feasibility of Train for Trades.

Partnerships with government agencies, such as the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, have also proven to be important to the operations and structure of the program. The NLHC has been the source of all their contracted green retrofit work to date, and per the terms of their contracts, has supplied them with materials for their projects. They have also signed a memorandum of understanding with Train for Trades, regarding contracting for future social housing construction projects. For Train for Trades, fostering positive partnerships with the provincial government has served as a means of securing funding, as well as contracted work, both of which are crucial for the long-term sustainability of the program.

Program Outcomes

Program staff track participant outcomes at the end of each term, including whether participants secured employment or enrolled in post-secondary education. To date almost half (48%) of participants have secured employment after participating in the program, while one fifth (21%) have gone on to post-secondary education for a total of 69% either furthering their education or accessing employment as a result of participating in the program.

An external evaluation of the program’s first two cohorts was conducted in July of 2011, by post-doctoral students from Memorial University. Similar levels of employment and educational achievement were found and considering approximately 80% of program participants were either without a steady income or receiving financial assistance from the government prior to enrolling in Train for Trades, this is a significant turnaround (Button & Keating, 2011). As well, Train for Trades employs the TOWES test (test of workplace essential skills), as an additional program evaluation tool. Testing applicants in 3 essential skill areas, including literacy, document handling and numeracy, Train for Trades assess ap-

plicants' aptitude in these skill areas prior to training, and then a second time following their completion of the program. These evaluations have shown consistent improvements for participants across all tested areas (Button & Keating, 2011).

During interviews and focus groups, participants have commented that the program has been integral to overcoming the barriers they faced. Approximately 42% of youth who took part in the first two years of the program sought intervention or counseling for addiction (Button & Keating, 2011). Others remarked that the program and its support model helped them learn to better manage their anger, and develop patience (Button & Keating, 2011). It was also found that the personal, "soft" skills that participants gain (e.g., teamwork, problem solving, communication, money management, etc.) have had positive effects on self-esteem and confidence.

The Cost of Train for Trades

Train for Trades targets the most challenging homeless youth: youth who are unemployed, without stable housing, lack education and have other challenges (addictions, mental health) that make obtaining and maintaining employment difficult. The intensive support model of Train the Trades is key to its success. Yet, while immensely successful and beneficial for program participants, it is a resource- and labour-intensive model that requires excellent, dedicated staff to make the program work. In operating a year-long program, there are also operating costs to consider, primarily associated with housing, food, training, supplies, materials, and transportation. Overall, the cost per participant for one year totals approximately \$55,000 (Pollett, 2012).

Train for Trades carefully tracks expenditures, and keeps in-depth accounts and records of the "interventions" conducted for each youth. Essentially a record of the assistance and services provided to each participating youth, these records detail if they had to provide housing, food, help with addiction, and so on. These records give the staff of Choices for Youth insight into what needs are arising from program participants, how effective the program is in addressing barriers that individual participants may be affected by, and the overall effectiveness of training. This allows the program, in future iterations, to be reflexive and adaptive for participants, while continuing to empower youth to achieve long-term, sustainable employment.

Given that Train for Trades is helping the most difficult to serve and at-risk population of homeless youth move off, and stay off, the streets, the operating cost of the program, \$55,000 per participant (which includes 60 retro-fits), is a good investment. There is a considerable body of research in

Canada that speaks to the costs associated with keeping people homeless. These costs accrue not only to individuals, but to communities, as well. The costs continue to accumulate the longer one remains unemployed.

When people remain homeless, they rely on emergency services. The annual cost for one person to stay in an emergency shelter is between \$13,000 and \$44,000 (Pomeroy, 2005). When young people are homeless and unemployed, they are more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system. Their mental health challenges and addictions issues may worsen. The annual cost of such institutional care (prison/detention and psychiatric hospitals) ranges from \$66,000 to \$120,000 (Pomeroy, 2005). Even at an individual level, hospital stays for homeless patients can cost, on average, over \$2,500 more than those of a typical housed patient (Hwang, 2011). Though exact figures can vary from province to province and community to community, the truth is that it can cost up to \$100,000 annually to support an average homeless Canadian (Gallagher, 2010). Again, considering Train for Trades is able to break the cycle of youth homelessness, educate, train, and place their participants on a sustainable employment path, all at a fraction of the cost of keeping someone homeless, there can be no doubt of the program's value and importance.

Conclusion

Poverty and homelessness in St. John's are complex issues. In 2008, it was found that, across Newfoundland and Labrador, construction of new housing units was being conducted at a rate of 64 per 10,000 citizens, slightly higher than the national average of 63 per 10,000 citizens (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012b). Despite this, as of 2009, Newfoundland and Labrador's rental vacancy rate was 1.0%, the lowest in the country (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012b). In 2006, Statistics Canada reported that 15.5% of St. John's families were living in low-income situations (Statistics Canada, 2012). As well, 14.2% of Newfoundland and Labrador's households, accounting for nearly all the aforementioned low-income families in St. John's, were found to be in core housing need, which greatly outpaced the national average of 12.7% (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012a). Given that the population of St. John's was 100,646 in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2012), this meant that approximately 15,600 of those living in St. John's could be seen as living below the low-income cutoff (LICO), which, for that year, was \$33,930 (for a 4-person household in an urban population of 100,000 to 499,999) (Statistics Canada, 2007). Though there is no guarantee that those who are living below the LICO will become homeless, having such a large population living under economically precarious circumstances poses an unnecessary and dangerous risk. In fact, a 2004 report by Human Resourc-

es and Social Development Canada estimated that between 2000 and 2007, St. John's' homeless population increased 400%, from 305 to 1,267, which places increased importance on these LICO statistics (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2007). This same report assessed that 40.2% of St. John's' low-income population were at risk of becoming homeless, representing over 13,000 people (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2007). Of this population at risk of homelessness, 29% were estimated to be under the age of 18 (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2007). Taken together, these facts all underscore the importance of Choices for Youth and Train for Trades, and how their program benefits the greater St. John's area. They help at-risk and homeless youth overcome the economic, social, and psychological barriers that prevent them from achieving successful employment, and break what could become a cycle of homelessness and poverty.

There is no reason the Train for Trades model could not be replicated in other communities, or adapted to improve upon existing program models elsewhere. While the program itself has flourished in St. John's as a result of strong partnerships between Choices for Youth and its community, a byproduct of operating in a small, interconnected community, there is no reason that similar linkages or partnerships could not be forged in other communities. While these have been proven by Choices to be essential for securing funds, projects, post-training employment for participants, and minimizing concerns between the program and local industries, any current or prospective youth empowerment program will have similar partnerships in place to some degree, allowing the Train for Trades model to be introduced into any community context with minimal difficulty.

The cost of running Train for Trades should not act as a deterrent for those considering adopting or adapting the overall program model. Though its Intensive Support Model is resource- and labour-intensive, the benefits of the program and its support structures far outweigh its costs. It demands a high level of commitment and energy from staff, but the resulting level of support and corresponding positive developments in the lives of the young people participating in the program, not to mention the financial benefits that come from keeping these young people out of homelessness, certainly justifies the commitment of resources. The Train for Trades' proven track record and long-term, permanent financial benefits make the Train for Trades model an attractive prospect for private funders and government partners alike. The question remains, then, not whether one can bring the Train for Trades model to their organization or community, but when?

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CASE STUDY

ACCESS BladeRunners

Canadian Homelessness Research Network

ACCESS BladeRunners is an innovative Vancouver-based program that supports homeless and at-risk youth between the ages of 15 and 30 through a comprehensive training and support program that focuses on creating pathways to jobs in the construction industry. The core goal of the program is to provide young people with the support and resources they need to overcome the difficulties and barriers in their lives that prevent them from obtaining, and maintaining, meaningful long-term employment. ACCESS BladeRunners has quickly emerged as one of the key youth assistance programs in Vancouver. More than just an employment placement program, ACCESS BladeRunners provides its participants with education, job training, and access to an extensive and comprehensive support structure. Employing a client-centered, individualistic approach, ACCESS BladeRunners tailors the program to meet the specific needs and challenges of each youth.

One of the key strengths and unique features of ACCESS BladeRunners is the degree to which attention is paid to embedding Aboriginal cultures, practices, and traditions within the program (approximately 90% of participants are of Aboriginal descent). Aboriginal youth face increased barriers to employment, such as inadequate housing, family breakdown, addiction and/or mental health issues, involvement with the criminal justice system, and/or educational disengagement. ACCESS BladeRunners recognizes the role that community and family play in the lives of Aboriginal youth, and thus have structured the program in a way that is simultaneously respectful and supportive. Their model gives Aboriginal youth a chance at establishing a career and a new life, and features an environment that is positive, supportive, and understanding.

Background

The original BladeRunners program began in 1994, when a group of activists observed a growing number of homeless youth in Vancouver, particularly within the downtown eastside area. They dreamt of creating opportunities for at-risk, disadvantaged, inner-city youth by training them to meet the labour needs of the local construction industry. They felt that, if these youth could be trained to work in the construction industry and be provided with the education and supports necessary to manage the responsibilities that arise from this newfound independence, all while maintaining a stable source of income, they could potentially break free of the barriers in their lives and the cycle of homelessness. They saw an opportunity to test this hypothesis in the form of a nearby construction project: GM Place (now Rogers Arena), which was a large-scale arena built to house, among other things, the Vancouver Canucks hockey team. The labour requirements of GM Place were an ideal trial for a pilot project, which would soon become the backbone of the BladeRunners program model. For the pilot, twenty-five job placements were secured, allowing the prospective model to be tested, and for twenty-five youth to gain highly desirable experience in the construction industry.

Following the successful pilot, BladeRunners began working directly with the construction industry in order to provide their participants with potential sustainable careers. One of their greatest successes has been the renovation of Woodward's, a landmark department store in downtown Vancouver, which dates back to 1903. Vacant for over a decade, and with the help of BladeRunners, it was revitalized and now houses retail spaces, a recreational centre, and social housing units. In November 2011 it was announced that BladeRunners will assist with the renovation work being done on Vancouver's former Remand Centre. This project, which will transform a space formerly home to a series of jail cells, will create 95 units of new affordable rental housing, 38 of which will be utilized in July 2014 by BladeRunners to house program participants (BC Housing, 2011).

After 18 years and dozens of successful construction projects, BladeRunners has become a vital tool for ending homelessness in Vancouver and has helped over a thousand youth become stably employed within the construction industry.

Although BladeRunners was originally created as a response to the needs of at-risk youth and has expanded across the province, it became obvious that a large number of Aboriginal youth were benefiting the most from the program. Seventy-two per cent of participants throughout the province in 2012 were Aboriginal youth; 90% of youth served by ACCESS BladeRunners in Vancouver were Aboriginal youth. Aboriginal people make up a large percentage of the homelessness population in Vancouver and are often marginalized from mainstream services and sup-

ports. For the purposes of this case study, we will focus our attention on the ACCESS site in Vancouver (in operation since 2002) and its innovative mission of working with Aboriginal youth who have had considerable difficulty maintaining employment as a result of significant barriers or hardship in their lives, including discrimination, lack of adequate housing, inadequate education, and addictions and/or mental health issues. The program strives to give young people the opportunity to realize positive, long-term goals in their lives. Connecting employment training to housing, educational supports, community-building, and an Aboriginal-focused program, ACCESS BladeRunners is designed to contribute to the social, professional, and personal development of its program participants.

About the Program

ACCESS BladeRunners succeeds because of the all-encompassing nature of their response to Aboriginal youth homelessness. The program addresses the barriers that keep their participants in a state of poverty and unemployment. ACCESS BladeRunners is a low-barrier program that assists young people who are most at-risk, and may be facing housing, addiction, mental health, criminal justice, and/or educational issues. With support from ACCESS BladeRunners, youth are able to obtain, and more importantly, maintain, employment. They provide a level of support that goes beyond the typical employment assistance program, giving participating young people access to housing, education, food, clothing, counseling and other forms of support. Of these elements, housing is of particular importance, as Senior BladeRunners Coordinator Gary Jobin outlines, “ninety-five per cent of the kids we work with are homeless when they first start the program. Our need for affordable, stable housing is unbelievable” (BC Housing, 2011). Though providing young people with employment opportunities is at the core of ACCESS BladeRunners’ mandate, establishing structure in the lives of participants is also an important element of their program model. ACCESS BladeRunners does not provide temporary solutions; participants are provided with the tools, support, and opportunities they need to establish a career, gain confidence, and improve their quality of life. To this end, enhancing the education of young people while they are in training is seen as key to improving their long-term employability.

Participants in the program are motivated; that is ACCESS BladeRunners is looking for young people who are ready and committed to making a change in their lives. Applicants to the program undergo a series of interviews to assess their needs and suitability for the program. The interviews prepare the applicant for subsequent stages of the program, as well as situate them and their needs within the overall structure of ACCESS BladeRunners. As the program is highly individualized, these interviews help ensure that each participant has a support system tailored specifically to their needs. ACCESS

BladeRunners goes to great lengths to assist both male and female youth, and as a result, approximately one in four ACCESS BladeRunners are female (Galway, 2012). Following these interviews, the applicant will participate in the ACCESS BladeRunners' training program and receive a job placement.

For new ACCESS BladeRunners, training is conducted over a period of four weeks. The first week is comprised of life skills and cultural awareness training. During this week participants are educated on basic life skills, including workplace etiquette and expectations, home life and maintenance, and money management. As the focus of ACCESS BladeRunners is to support Aboriginal youth, the cultural awareness units teach participants about different Aboriginal cultures, practices, and traditions. The second week is the health and safety week, where participants complete their WHMIS certification, fall protection training, occupational first aid training, and are generally provided with the knowledge needed to remain safe on the job site. The third week, called the experiential week, requires that participants put the previous weeks' training to use in real-world situations and learn further job-specific skills. Working in a training centre, participants learn basic power tool handling and maintenance and gain insight into the jobs they will be doing. They also work on a series of construction projects in a controlled environment. This week's activities are all done in partnership with the Squamish Nation and certified Aboriginal trades people. The final, fourth week of training is called the enhancement training week, and at this time, participants are given the opportunity to branch out from traditional construction into different roles and learn new skillsets. This includes flagging (traffic control) and forklift training. Following the successful completion of the four-week training session, participants transition to a job placement on an actual job site. Job placements are not short term or temporary positions. These are legitimate positions, where the youth are hired into real positions within the construction industry. Ideally, these placements will set youth on a long-term career path, but in instances where this is not the case, participants are able to return to ACCESS BladeRunners, speak with staff, and try again with another placement.

ACCESS BladeRunners offers a full spectrum of services, and staff ensure that while in the program, participants are fed, clothed, and sheltered. During the four weeks of training, participants are provided with breakfast and a hot lunch ensuring that hunger is not distracting them from their training. To round out the day, dinners are covered by the participants themselves, but as they are given a \$25 daily stipend during these four weeks, they are not left without the means to feed themselves (Galway, 2012). As well, they are given the tools and equipment they need to succeed on the job site. Hardhats, work boots, tool belts, hammers and even work clothes are provided to the participating youth. This ensures that participants are able to show up to their jobs ready to work.

Participants also receive housing supports. During the four week program, if necessary, staff will make arrangements for participants to find housing through local partners. Following training, they are able to take advantage of monetary supports, which assist them in arranging their own, long-term housing solutions. One of these supports is a fund called the “rent bank” (Galway, 2012). This fund exists to provide financial assistance to participants who are attempting to secure housing following the program. Should they need help making rent, or need help putting down a deposit for a new rental agreement, this fund helps ensure that the youth stay housed, so that they in turn, can stay employed. They are given access to this rent bank without contract or interest, or expectation of repayment. The only caveat being that the BladeRunners who access these housing funds are reminded that repayment will afford this same opportunity to future BladeRunners (Galway, 2012).

These supports are all equally important, as they ensure that the basic needs of all ACCESS BladeRunners participants are taken care of. Youths who do not need to worry about food, shelter, or clothing are then able to focus on the training, getting the most out of the program, and starting their potential careers.

The Keys to ACCESS BladeRunners’ Success

ACCESS BladeRunners has shown that it is possible to support at-risk Aboriginal youth through training, education, and employment opportunities. The program’s longevity has been the result of having a team of highly dedicated staff, as well as an innovative program and support model. The following are some of the elements that have combined to make the ACCESS BladeRunners program a success.

Creation of Real and Sustainable Jobs for Marginalized Youth

ACCESS BladeRunners is not a training program that merely builds individual skills. They focus on engaging the private sector and trade unions in their work to help transition young people from training to sustainable employment opportunities in the local construction industries, as well as other employment areas, including hospitality and the creative arts.

24/7 Support

ACCESS BladeRunners is successful because the level of support participants receive during pre-employment and employment stages remains constant. From the moment they are brought into the ACCESS BladeRunners program, participants have access to the program’s support model, twenty-four hours a day, seven days

a week, for as long as they feel is necessary. The staff who underpin the support model are called *coordinators* and are crucial to the success of the intensive support model. They help new ACCESS BladeRunners deal with their troubles, barriers and newfound responsibilities. They are called if a participant has an issue on the jobsite or after-hours. They ensure that program participants get to work on time, and are fit for work. When issues arise, they take participants aside and help them through whatever challenges may be troubling them. Whether the situation calls for an advocate, a helping hand, a shoulder to cry on, or just a new pair of boots, the coordinators are there to support the program's youth in any way they can.

ACCESS BladeRunners' coordinators are dedicated and enthusiastic. As with any strong program, it is necessary to have the right staff in place to ensure fidelity to the program model. These staff are trained to provide support for participants on both a professional and personal level. Many participants will not have necessities such as a bank account, identification, or health card, and it is the responsibility of coordinators to assist young people with these types of issues. Additionally, coordinators negotiate jobs and positions for participants, ensuring they receive a rate of pay equal to industry averages.

Overall, the program recognizes that even after a participant gains employment, the barriers in their lives may still be present. Having access to ACCESS BladeRunners' high and constant level of support, even while employed, ensures that participants have the necessary support to help them maintain their employment and continue to positively develop over the long term.

Aboriginal Focus and Leadership

ACCESS BladeRunners focuses on helping at-risk Aboriginal youth. In terms of housing, employment, and education, the experience of Aboriginal youth can be markedly different from the greater population, and lends itself to a unique set of challenges and barriers.

For many of the Aboriginal youth who come to ACCESS BladeRunners, completing high school is no longer seen as a priority. The formal education system has proven to be a negative, alienating experience, fraught with marginalization and a general dismissal of their cultural heritage. A report from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples found that many youth felt that the traditional education system inadequately prepared them to understand their positions as Aboriginal within society (1996). This report also found that many youth were alienated to the point of being ashamed of their culture, which only serves to further marginalize these youth, drive them away from education, and erect a barrier that will have negative ramifications for their future development and employment.

ACCESS BladeRunners, which not only features Aboriginal staff members, also includes cultural awareness and appreciation as part of its training curriculum and strives to maintain an environment that is culturally positive. A study conducted by Kunz, Milan, and Schetagne also found that many Aboriginal youth have had difficulty maintaining long-term employment due to instances of discrimination or marginalization in the workplace (2000). As a result, ACCESS BladeRunners goes to great lengths to support their participants while on the jobsite. In addition to the elements of training that prepare the youth for the stresses and pressures of working in the construction industry, ACCESS BladeRunners' job coordinators continue to be available to the program's Aboriginal youth, even after they have completed their training. Emotional and psychological barriers that have kept these youth from maintaining long-term employment may still exist following the training program, so having access to job coordinators who are trained in coaching and supporting youth through potentially difficult situations is an important element of the ACCESS BladeRunners' system. Having access to a network of individuals who understand their struggles and challenges is incredibly beneficial.

In addition to providing education and training, ACCESS BladeRunners encourages their participants to embrace their backgrounds, and provides opportunities to work with educators and contractors from Aboriginal backgrounds.

Ongoing Participation of Program Graduates

ACCESS BladeRunners creates opportunities for program graduates to remain engaged with the program. When participants are finished with the training component of ACCESS BladeRunners, many continue to be involved in the organization. Known as Senior ACCESS BladeRunners, these program veterans provide unique insights into the program, its challenges, stresses, and benefits, all to help new participants manage their new duties and responsibilities. This can include helping with the programming and being a mentor to new participants on the jobsite. It is extremely helpful for young people in the program to interact with Senior ACCESS BladeRunners who share similar experiences and who understand their fears and questions. It is also important for them to see that with the program, success is possible. For Senior ACCESS BladeRunners, there are also additional benefits. It allows them an opportunity to 'give back' to a program that has supported them. They are able to put their personal learnings to good use and enable other at-risk Aboriginal youth to move forward with their lives. This ongoing engagement allows them access to both staff and Senior ACCESS BladeRunners, ensuring that they have a comprehensive support system at their disposal whenever they may be experiencing challenges in their lives.

Partnerships

It is important to note that, although the support model is a key element of the BladeRunners program, equally fundamental to its long-term success has been BladeRunners' ability to develop lasting partnerships with the construction industry, local partners, and the provincial government. In its infancy, BladeRunners did not benefit from having a peer organization or successful model from which to draw influence. Its founders saw the construction of GM Place as a great opportunity to address homelessness, and the subsequent program model was born out of a perceived necessity within their community, not because it was a proven concept. Quickly establishing strong, positive partnerships with the construction industry and provincial government was crucial to BladeRunners' long term success, as it represented secured funding for program operations. BladeRunners is a high-profile program, with housing, training, support, and employment components. Despite their high level of status, they, like many small organizations, struggle with securing adequate funding for their programs. Much of the funding they are able to secure is earmarked for specific tasks or aspects of the program, such as housing or training, and this can, at times, create sustainability challenges for other budgetary areas. Similarly, these partnerships provide access to job placement opportunities for program participants.

Private Sector Engagement

Without positive working relationships with organizations and contractors within the construction industry, ACCESS BladeRunners' youth may face difficulties in finding employment as a result of their personal or experiential barriers. Not to mention that as a job placement program, ACCESS BladeRunners' general operations are highly dependent on maintaining a steady flow of quality job opportunities to which their trained youth are well-suited.

During periods of economic growth, job availability is somewhat of a lesser concern. During periods of decline, however, when jobs for highly skilled labourers are at a premium, being able to place newly trained, inexperienced, at-risk youth into open positions is definitely a challenge. Positive relationships within the construction industry are especially vital during these times. Of course, this does not mean that ACCESS BladeRunners is limited to seeking jobs within the private sector. On February 8, 2010, ACCESS BladeRunners signed a memorandum of understanding with the BC provincial government, stating, "Contractor and Subcontractors for Provincial Homelessness Initiative projects must participate in the ACCESS BladeRunners Program" by hiring ACCESS BladeRunners participants" (ACCESS, 2010). In addition to securing positions for participants, strong relationships with the public and private sectors are important to ACCESS Blade-

Runners' success because they offset the public's misconceptions regarding the program's participants. Convincing employers to take on at-risk youth is not an easy task, especially when these youth may have addictions or mental health issues.

The Cost of ACCESS BladeRunners

It makes economic sense to help youth maintain employment and break the cycle of homelessness. After all, the longer people remain homeless, the more they must rely on emergency supports and services, which can be costly. ACCESS BladeRunners' program model ensures that youth are housed, fed, and emotionally and professionally supported, and does so at a cost that is much lower than allowing youth to remain at-risk and on the streets. As a whole, the average cost per participant can range from \$6,000 to \$10,000, depending on how much support is needed (Galway, 2012). This figure includes the cost of training, supporting, and housing the participant, their food, and a wage stipend (Galway, 2012). It should be no wonder, then, that the provincial government acted as a funder and steward of the program from 1996 until 2002, at which point, the Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society (ACCESS) assumed management of the program's general operations. In 2010, the fifteenth anniversary of BladeRunners, these relationships resulted in the program receiving \$14 million in funding from the BC provincial government, which will ensure funding to support an additional 600 youth (ACCESS, 2010).

Evaluating the Impact of ACCESS BladeRunners

The most recent external evaluation of ACCESS BladeRunners was completed in March of 2011, and examined training for three cohorts, totaling 37 participants, assessing the program for its ability to reach its target population, implement project activities, produce outputs, engage partnerships, and the effectiveness of their staffing model. The evaluation concluded that all 37 participants learned skillsets and workplace training that could situate them in high-demand industries, and found that at the time of the report's publishing, 27 had found successful employment, though that figure may have been low, given the fact that the third cohort completed their training rather close to the report's publishing date. This report concluded that ACCESS BladeRunners provides a unique combination of training and entry level employment to at-risk Aboriginal people (Izen Consulting, 2011).

In addition to external evaluations, ACCESS BladeRunners staff frequently (generally at intervals of three months, six months, and one year) connect with participants (either in person, by phone or over email) to evaluate their development and progress in the program. They also utilize the TOWES test, a test of work-

place essential skills, as a tool for evaluating the program's effectiveness. TOWES tests individuals on nine essential workplace skills, including numeracy, writing, document handling, and reading. The test is administered both before and after the training program to assess how successful a participant was at improving their aptitude in the testing areas, as well as to monitor how effectively the training's structure helps the participants to develop in these areas, as a whole. As a result of their efforts to monitor and improve their programs, recorded statistics show that their participants have a successful job placement rate of 75% (Galway, 2012). Most importantly, these evaluations provide ACCESS BladeRunners and their funders with qualitative feedback, granting them insight into the less tangible outcomes of the program (i.e. increased hope, self-esteem and sense of purpose, confidence to go back to school, or enhanced social relationships, for instance).

The Local Context

In 2006, Vancouver reportedly had 20.9% (Statistics Canada, 2010) of their families living below Statistics Canada's low-income cutoff (LICO) of \$33,221 (for a family of four in an urban area with a population greater than 500,000) (Statistics Canada, 2007). The census from that year determined Vancouver had a population of 578,041 (City of Vancouver, 2006), meaning that over 120,000 people were considered to be living below the LICO. The City of Vancouver has also reported that homelessness increased three-fold between 2001 and 2011 (City of Vancouver, 2011). Impacting the situation is the fact that construction of new, non-market housing is unable to meet demand. Between 2006 and 2010, there existed a demand for 2,510 units, but only 510 were constructed (City of Vancouver, 2011). Even amongst already-constructed housing, rising market prices are quickly making housing unaffordable for low income families. Between 1979 and 2008, while wages rose an average of 9%, the average cost, for example, of an eastside condo rose 280% (City of Vancouver, 2011). To attempt to address this rapidly growing issue, in 2011, the City of Vancouver adopted a strategic plan to address homelessness, *Vancouver's Housing and Homeless Strategy 2012 – 2021: A Home for Everyone* (City of Vancouver, 2011). How ACCESS BladeRunners might factor into this plan to build 2,900 new supportive housing units, (1,700 between 2011 and 2013), 5,000 new units of social housing, 11,000 new units of rental housing, and 20,000 new units of market housing remains to be seen. Provided all plan elements come to fruition, a significant amount of affordable housing will be in place within the next decade, and this would represent more work for future ACCESS BladeRunners, and more changed lives.

Conclusion

ACCESS BladeRunners works because it takes at-risk Aboriginal youth and provides them with training, support, and employment opportunities, thus helping them to overcome the barriers that have kept them from maintaining successful long-term employment. There is no judgment within the program, no forced workshops, and no mandatory rehabilitation stretches. There are no barriers that can prevent youth from being admitted into the program, and the program accepts participants as they are. All that is asked of participants is that they be motivated and ready to work.

ACCESS BladeRunners participants face challenges including addiction, inadequate housing, mental health issues, experiences with the criminal justice system, and/or educational issues. ACCESS BladeRunners ensures that participating youth have access to food, shelter, clothing, and support for all of these issues. On the surface, ACCESS BladeRunners may resemble a typical training program that places program graduates into positions within the construction industry, but it is much more than that. Theirs is a robust program model that is highly individualized, highly flexible, and highly reflexive of the specific needs and barriers of its participants. It is a model that has worked for nearly twenty years in Vancouver, and has found similar success when expanded to other communities in British Columbia.

The ACCESS BladeRunners model is significant because it has the potential to be replicated or adapted to improve new or existing program models in any community. While much of its success in placing its participants into jobs can be attributed to the high number of construction projects that are present in a large urban centre like Vancouver, there is no reason smaller or less-developed communities could not forge the relationships needed to sustain a program like ACCESS BladeRunners. This process is further simplified if there is a preexisting youth employment or support program already in place within the prospective community. Provided there are youth who would benefit from supportive training, any given community could build relationships with the public and private sectors. ACCESS BladeRunners, for instance, is being successfully delivered in many rural locations, such as Zeballos and Gold River.

Programs like ACCESS BladeRunners, that demand a high level of commitment from funders and their staff, are often met with a certain level of skepticism. Easing many of these concerns, ACCESS BladeRunners operates using an established and effective program model, with an extensive system of support, training, and education, all focused on breaking the cycle

of homelessness and placing at-risk Aboriginal youth into satisfying, sustainable employment. Not only does their program improve the lives of their participants, it also positively impacts the costs associated with homelessness. Theirs is a program model of genuine quality that can be implemented to affect positive change in the lives of youth in any community.

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LEGAL & JUSTICE ISSUES

20 Policing Street Youth in Toronto

Bill O'Grady, Stephen Gaetz, Kristy Buccieri

Get rid of the crooked ones, the rude ones that walk by. I have a lot of homeless friends and I've seen police walk by and just treat them like dirt on their shoe. That's wrong. Some people don't ask to be homeless and police just treat them like pieces of shit. It's wrong in many ways.
(Female street youth)

In 2003 the city of Toronto launched an advertising campaign to combat the negative press it received due to SARS (City of Toronto, n.d.). As part of this initiative, the new slogan, “Toronto: You Belong Here” was created. The goal of this campaign was to revive the struggling tourism industry and bring new visitors into the city. Yet, despite this warm and inclusive sentiment, the city of Toronto has not always strived to create a welcoming environment for all. In a recent interview with the *Toronto Sun*, Deputy Mayor Doug Holyday made it clear that homeless individuals do not belong in Toronto. He was quoted as saying,

I don't know if it's a matter of tossing them in jail but it's letting them know they're not allowed to utilize public space [in a way] that makes it their own. I know in New York City, they don't allow people to sleep on sidewalks or public benches and they move them on. We should look at what other jurisdictions are doing (as cited in Yuen, 2011).

In Toronto, as in New York and other cities across North America, homelessness is increasingly thought of as a policing matter.

In this chapter we draw on research conducted with 244 homeless youth and discuss the frequent interactions these young people have with law enforcement officials in Toronto and the effect this has on their experiences of being homeless in the city. We argue that the current response to homelessness – that is, one that focuses on emergency services like shelters, drop-in centres, and food programs – does little to prevent and/or move people out of homelessness. While these social programs are necessary and helpful, they often have the unintended consequence of making homelessness – and homeless individuals – more visible to the general public and the police. Lacking access to private spaces, homeless persons spend much of their time in public areas, such as parks and city streets. In Toronto, as in many other cities, this visibility is met with a law-and-order response. As demonstrated in the previous quote from Deputy Mayor Doug Holyday, the signs of homelessness – sleeping outside, sitting on sidewalks, and asking others for money – become viewed by some prominent city officials as threats to urban safety and consequently a policing matter.

This response does not go unnoticed by the young people confronted by it. Our research shows quite clearly that street youth in Toronto have frequent interactions with police officers. In this chapter we examine three questions related to these interactions. Given that the literature consistently shows street youth are more likely to be involved in crime than their housed peers (Baron et al., 2001; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Tanner & Wortley, 2002), we ask to what extent our participants are involved in crime and delinquent acts. Secondly, we question whether the increased police attention they receive is due to their involvement in crime, and if not, what other factors might account for their frequent encounters. Finally, we ask what short and long term consequences exist for these young people as a result of their encounters with law enforcement.

Research studies, such as ours, that focus on policing practices have become particularly important in recent years, with the growing recognition that many police encounters involve a certain degree of officer discretion or choice. It has been shown, for example, that police officers may focus their attention excessively on visible minorities (Wortley & Tanner, 2003; Satzewich & Shaffir, 2009), a practice commonly referred to as racial profiling. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2011), racial profiling can be defined as,

[...] any action undertaken for reasons of safety, security or public protection, that relies on stereotypes about race, colour, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, or place of origin, or a combination of these, rather than on a reasonable suspicion, to single out an individual for greater scrutiny or different treatment (n.p.).

The logic behind racial profiling can be extended to include notions of social profiling. Under social profiling, some individuals are flagged for increased police attention based on factors such as poverty and/or homelessness (Sylvestre, 2011).

In recent years the practices of racial and social profiling have become issues of interest to researchers. The concept of social profiling is of particular importance to those who work with marginalized populations such as homeless youth, because it serves as the basis for what has come to be known as the criminalization of homelessness. It is this concept that we will use throughout the chapter to examine the city of Toronto's response to youth homelessness, the interactions that homeless youth have with law enforcement officials, and the effects of these encounters on the daily lives of these youth, their perceptions of police officers, and their longer-term ability to move off the street and out of homelessness.

The Criminalization of Homelessness

...given what we know about the nature of the 'homeless' population and many of those who engage in disorderly behavior on our streets: while some may be passive or benign in their speech and acts, many more are scam artists, substance abusers feeding alcohol or drug habits, mentally ill, or have criminal records. (Kelling & Coles, 1997:230)

In Toronto the systemic response to homelessness mainly consists of services and supports designed to help those who are 'down on their luck'. While there is no denying that homeless individuals need emergency shelters, meal programs, and drop-in centres, the lack of preventive and transitional supports is an obvious flaw of the system. This lack of initiatives that work to keep people from becoming homeless or to help move them off the streets results in heavy use of emergency services (like shelters and drop-ins). Due to the large clientele of many of these agencies, homeless individuals often sleep, eat, and spend their time together in large groups. Lacking their own private spaces, many of these individuals spend a great deal of time outside in areas used by the general public. When homelessness is made visible in this way, city officials and members of the public may see it as a problem for law enforcement to address.

Many jurisdictions in Canada and the United States have responded to the growing visibility (inconvenience?) of homelessness with measures that have sought to restrict the rights of homeless people to occupy and inhabit public spaces such as street corners and parks, and which prohibit behaviours such as sleeping in public, or earning money through begging or squeegee cleaning. It is when the use of policing and the criminal justice system becomes a central feature of the response to homelessness, that we refer to the 'criminalization of

homelessness', intended to contain and restrict the activities and movements of people who are homeless and reduce their presence in public spaces, often with the outcome of fines and/or incarceration. The key here is that people who occupy public spaces (because they lack private ones) and whose poverty is highly visible are subject to extra attention by the criminal justice system not so much for what they do, but for *who* they are and *where* they are.

The criminalization of homelessness can involve the creation of new laws and statutes targeting people who are homeless, a key Canadian example being the Ontario Safe Streets Act¹. While legal prohibitions of this kind do not directly restrict the rights of the homeless to occupy public spaces, they indirectly target them by banning behaviours they commonly engage in. For instance, legislation of this kind may prohibit sleeping in public places, sitting on sidewalks, and/or soliciting others for money through acts like squeegeeing and panhandling (Foscarinis et al., 1999; National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2006; 2009). In addition to creating new laws, police may also rely on increased enforcement of existing laws to target homeless individuals (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2006; 2009; Harcourt, 2001; McArdle & Erzen, 2001). This can be seen when police are deployed to clear homeless tent cities and squatter settlements, for the official purpose of enforcing health and safety standards (Culhane, 2010; Guy & Lloyd, 2010; Wright, 1997).

These kinds of policing practices, and the underlying public views that guide them, do not occur in a vacuum, and must be understood in the context of broader, often political, social justice issues. For example, on-going debates of this nature may focus on the rights of certain individuals to occupy public spaces and/or the increasingly punitive and marginalizing law-and-order measures being taken by cities like Toronto in the name of public safety. In an effort to draw the public's attention to the underlying injustice of these targeted policing practices, researchers have increasingly sought to show how the experience and status of homelessness is being criminalized (Crocker & Johnson, 2010; Hermer & Mosher, 2002).

Politicians, policy makers, and police officials all want to be seen as taking decisive action against those who are deemed disruptive². Earning public favour is a top priority for these officials and restoring/maintaining order

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1. The *Ontario Safe Streets Act* (OSSA) exists as one of the clearest and most obvious examples of laws that contribute to the criminalization of homelessness. The OSSA, which came into effect in January 2000, in response to the growing visibility of homelessness in Toronto and other major cities in the 1990s, is provincial legislation designed to address aggressive panhandling and squeegeeing. While never mentioning homelessness specifically, the Act clearly targets homeless persons.
 2. What gets overlooked is that these very same individuals – politicians, policy makers, and police officials, along with the media – are often the ones who convince the public that a threat to urban order exists (and is caused by certain individuals) in the first place.

is a platform that many citizens can and will support. Thus, those who are homeless become targets of legislative measures and policing practices that seek to discourage (or sometimes even outright ban) them from using public spaces. This is based on a philosophy of action that many will no doubt recognize as stemming from broken windows theory³.

We argue that a broken windows style of policing is being used in Toronto, and likely in other Canadian cities, to regulate the perceived disorderly behaviour of homeless youth in public spaces. We are not arguing that all interaction between these youth and police is unfair. As will be discussed, homeless youth are generally more involved in crime than their housed peers (Baron et al., 2001; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Tanner & Wortley, 2002) and this likely accounts for at least part of the increased police attention they receive. However, the criminal involvement of some youth (and it is worth pointing out that not all targeted youth are involved in crime) is only one factor in their unusually high number of police encounters. The criminalization of homelessness accounts for many of these encounters as well.

There is no doubt that homeless youth in Toronto receive more attention from the police than do other groups. In the remainder of the chapter we outline the results of our study, focusing first on the extent of our participants' criminal involvement. We then examine whether this criminality is enough in itself to account for the high levels of police contact – and if not, what other factors might account for this attention. Finally, we examine the effects these frequent encounters have on homeless youth, with a particular focus on their ability to transition off the street and out of homelessness. We end the chapter with a discussion about why the policing of homeless youth is an important issue and what can be done to address the criminalization of homelessness.

The Study

When social scientific work is undertaken at least in part to convey another people's sense of their needs, the problems are as much political as they are methodological. (Brody, 1983:xiv)

The research discussed in this chapter draws on a larger study into the experiences of homeless youth in relation to legal and justice issues. Between January and July 2009, we met with 244 young people between the ages of 16 to 24 and

3. The concept of 'broken windows policing' was first introduced by Wilson and Kelling (1982). It refers to a style of policing that is intended to eliminate 'disorder' by targeting activities that are believed to lead to more serious crime. Drinking in public and squeegee cleaning are examples of the kinds of disorder that broken windows policing targets.

asked them to complete both a written survey and semi-structured interview⁴. The study, conducted in partnership with Justice for Children and Youth⁵, examined encounters between street youth and the police from the perspective of the young people themselves. As such, it must be noted that members of the Toronto Police Service were not consulted as part of this project.

Our participants were recruited through a range of agencies serving street youth in downtown Toronto and the surrounding suburbs. Participants had to be between 16 and 24 years of age and had to have been homeless (including staying in emergency shelters) or without shelter for at least one week during the previous month. Participants were given \$20 compensation for filling out a standard questionnaire and engaging in an interview with a member of the research team. Due to the sensitive nature of the research, measures were taken to protect participants, such as obtaining ethics approval through York University, protecting participants' anonymity, and conducting research in places where trained counsellors were available on-site.

Being young, homeless, and street-involved means there were many different situations in which our participants might encounter the police (for example, as victims or witnesses of crime, as well as suspects). In our study, we asked street youth to talk about any incidents in which they may have been involved with the Toronto Police Service. Our study focused on encounters in the last twelve months but also included questions about their experiences more generally since becoming homeless. Whenever possible, the youth were asked to describe the details of these encounters, including a description of their own actions and those of the police officer(s). The information presented throughout this chapter was collected through this survey and interviewing process.

Street Youth and Criminal Involvement

The police should stop picking on easy targets. They need to focus on the real criminals. (Male street youth)

Canadian research consistently shows that street youth are, on average, more involved in crime than youth who have stable housing (Baron et al., 2001; Baron &

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4. In a semi-structured interview, researchers work from a fixed list of questions, but may change or add questions in order to get a fuller picture of the experience of the person being interviewed.
 5. Justice for Children and Youth (JFCY) provides select legal representation to low-income children and youth in Toronto and vicinity. They are a non-profit legal aid clinic that specializes in protecting the rights of those facing conflicts with the legal, education, social service or mental health systems. JFCY runs a specialized outreach and education program called Street Youth Legal Services (SYLS). For more information, please refer to their website at <http://www.jfcy.org>

Hartnagel, 1997; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Tanner & Wortley, 2002). According to this research, the kind of criminal activities homeless youth typically engage in range from shoplifting of food and clothing, to consuming illegal drugs or drinking in public, to more serious yet minor assaults. A small percentage also engages in more serious offences such as serious assaults, robbery, and drug dealing. Our findings were largely consistent with these studies. For instance, we found that marijuana use was the most commonly reported deviant activity engaged in by our young participants, followed by selling marijuana (with 75% and 36% of participants reporting these, respectively). A minority of youth were involved in violent crime as well, with 15% reporting having beaten someone badly and 20% reporting they had used a weapon in committing a crime. As shown in previous research (Baron, 2008; Tanner & Wortley, 2002), these rates of offending are without a doubt higher than for young people in the general population.

Crimes Committed in the Past 12 Months		Drug-Related Offences in the Past 12 Months	
Violent		Selling Illegal Drugs	
Beaten someone badly	15%	Sold Cannabis	36%
Used a weapon to commit a crime	20%	Sold Crack Cocaine	17%
Property		Sold other drugs	20%
Stolen money from a person	19%	Illegal Drug Use (Once a month or more)	
Stolen food	22%	Cannabis	75%
Stolen clothes or shoes	20%	Powder cocaine	22%
Stolen something in order to sell it	8%	Crack cocaine	12%
		LSD	13%

However, like previous research by Hagan and McCarthy (1997), our findings suggest that at least some of the criminal behaviour committed by our participants is a response to the challenges of living on the street. For instance, in our study 20% of the participants stole food in the past twelve months and 22% stole clothes or shoes. While these are criminal acts, they are likely motivated by hunger and the need for clothing. It should also be noted that many survival strategies used by street youth are *quasi-legal* and may also be treated as deviant acts that draw police attention (for instance, sex trade work, squeegee cleaning, and panhandling) (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002). The reality of life on the street often requires that street youth break the law at some time or another. Certainly not all young people who are street-involved commit criminal offenses. However, given the large number of street-involved youth involved in many different forms of criminal activity, it may not be surprising that they are closely monitored by the police.

Does Criminal Involvement Account for the High Degree of Police Attention?

The cops actually went to the point where they patted me down and checked my pockets. I asked them why they were stopping us. They just said, 'Don't ask questions'. (Male street youth)

This research clearly shows that some young people on the street are involved in violent and/or property crimes, as well as using and selling illegal drugs. The question then becomes whether this criminal involvement entirely explains the extra attention they receive from police officers. To examine this question, we asked our participants about the types of encounters they had with the police in the past twelve months. First, we reviewed what were considered supportive encounters with police (i.e. when a police officer stopped to help a young person or when the youth were known to police as victims). Given that homeless youth are likely to be the victims of crime (Gaetz, 2004; 2009; Gaetz et al., 2010), a high level of police contact can be expected. In fact we did find some evidence of this, with 25% of our sample reporting supportive encounters. Additionally, almost 14% reported receiving help from the police, as when an officer took them to a shelter.

Reasons for Reported Contact with the Police (At Least Once) in the Past 12 Months			
	Total	Female	Male
Victim of a crime	25%	34%	21%
Witness to a crime	19%	32%	13%
Police stopped to help	14%	11%	15%
Asked to "move on"	37%	22%	44%
Asked for identification	60%	32%	74%
Had name run (CPIC)	45%	23%	56%
Given a ticket	33%	20%	39%
Were arrested	44%	34%	49%

However, while street youth do report having some positive encounters with police officers in Toronto, the majority of the youth considered their interactions to be mostly negative. Among our participants, 78% reported at least one negative encounter with police in the past year. For example, when asked about their interactions with the Toronto Police Service in the past twelve months, 60% of our participants had been stopped and asked to show identification, 45% had their name searched in the police database, 44% had been arrested, and 37% were asked to move out of a public space on at least one occasion.

The question we need to consider is whether these negative interactions with police are due to these young people's involvement in criminal activity. Utilizing statistical analysis⁶ we found two significant findings. First, as perhaps expected, the strongest and most consistent predictor of police contact was previous involvement in criminal activity and/or the use of illegal drugs within the past year. In this sense, involvement in criminal activity does account for at least some of the frequent encounters these young people have with members of the Toronto Police Service.

The second key finding, however, suggests that criminal involvement is not the only predictor of police encounters. Our analysis showed that males were more likely to have direct contact with the police. Additionally, being a male street youth also predicted multiple police encounters (83% of males reported multiple contacts in the past year, compared to 63% of females).

That homeless men attract police attention is not a new finding (Novac et al., 2009). However, what is important to note is that these young men reported high rates of police encounters *regardless* of their criminal involvement. That is, those who were not involved in crime also reported being frequently stopped by the police. Males who reported not having committed a property or violent crime in the past year⁷ still received a lot of police attention: in the past twelve months 34% had been arrested, 32% had been asked to "move on", 21% had received a ticket, 64% had been asked for ID, and 52% had their names searched.

This pattern of engagement with police did not apply to the females in our study. The young women with no criminal involvement in the past year reported significantly lower levels of police contact. We also found that race and age only weakly predicted the kinds of negative encounters the young men frequently reported. It is particularly interesting that age, gender, and race do not predict police encounters for young women, given that these are all important factors in the risk of being victimized on the street (Gaetz et al., 2010). While our findings do not suggest racial profiling, they do indicate social profiling and the criminalization of homelessness in Toronto, especially in the case of young men. Given these findings, we can reasonably argue that while criminal involvement is a factor in these young people's frequent interactions with the police it is not the only reason they are targeted for surveillance. Our research showed that even those youth who are not involved in crime have frequent contact with police officers. One sign of these interactions is the number of tickets street youth collectively receive.

6. Multiple regression analysis is a statistical technique for estimating the relationships among variables.

7. This does not include illegal drug use.

The Ticketing of Street Youth in Toronto

As previously discussed, part of the criminalization of homelessness has been due – in recent years – to the increase in Canadian legislation aimed at discouraging certain behaviours common among homeless individuals (Bellot et al., 2005; 2008; forthcoming; Sylvestre, 2010a; b; 2011). Researchers have taken a particular interest in the use of laws that target the homeless, such anti- camping, squeegeeing, and panhandling regulations (Hermer & Mosher, 2002; Esmonde, 2002; Parnaby, 2003). The Ontario Safe Streets Act, for instance, is a controversial law that has been at the centre of one book, *Disorderly People*, which presents a variety of papers focusing on its legal and ethical implications (Hermer & Mosher, 2002). A few years later proposed Safe Streets legislation in Nova Scotia provoked researchers to compile a similar book, *Poverty, Regulation and Social Justice*, to oppose it on the same legal and ethical grounds (Crocker & Johnson, 2010).

One of the most controversial aspects of this type of legislation is the authority it gives the police to issue tickets for behaviours mostly specific to homeless individuals (such as sleeping outside, sitting on sidewalks, squeegeeing, and panhandling). While it is not admitted that these laws are anti-homeless in nature, it is clear that targeting behaviours common among homeless individuals is a (not so veiled) attempt to regulate the homeless population as a whole. In our study, ticketing was one of the most common reasons young people were approached by the police – and also one of the most common outcomes of encounters with the police.

Two key findings regarding Toronto police ticketing practices are important in relation to street youth. First, the percentage of young people who are homeless and who receive tickets is high. In our study, 33% of the participants had received at least one ticket in the past year (with males more likely to report this than females, at 39% versus 20%). Additionally, 16% had been ticketed on multiple occasions and/or been given more than one ticket at a time. Several youth characteristics increased the chances they would receive certain tickets: being male, engaging in criminal behaviour and/or being under the age of 20. Importantly, while black or Aboriginal youth did not report more encounters with police, they were in fact more likely to receive tickets because of these encounters.

The first key finding of this study – that street youth experience an unusually high number of encounters with police – offers some support for the argument that the criminalization of homelessness is happening in Toronto. However, the second key finding regarding ticketing shows this even more clearly. When we look at the reasons youth are receiving tickets a clear pattern emerges: young people are being punished for engaging in activities that result directly from being homeless. For instance, many of these tickets stem from a lack

of private space in which to engage in adolescent activities. This can be seen in the percentage of participants who received tickets for drinking in public (23%), hanging out with friends in a public place (21%), sitting in the park (14%), using drugs in public (13%) and sitting on a sidewalk (8%). Several of these tickets were also a result of the survival strategies of these young people, such as choosing to sleep in a public place (10%), which is often done for protection, and earning money through panhandling or squeegeeing (10%).

Tickets Received (One or More Times) in the Previous 12 Months	
Drinking in public	23%
Hanging out with friends	21%
Sitting in the park	14%
Walking down the street	14%
Using drugs in public	13%
Sleeping in a public place	10%
Panhandling or squeegeeing	10%
Jaywalking	9%
Sitting on a sidewalk	8%

Many of the participants admitted that they were in fact breaking the law at the time they received the ticket. However, not all of the youth felt the tickets were deserved. For instance, in our study one third of those who reported receiving a ticket believed the charges to be unfair, since they were not committing an offense at the time. Additionally, many felt they were singled out for offences the average person would not be cited for (such as the 14% who were ticketed for walking down the street and the 9% who were ticketed for jaywalking). The perception of unfair ticketing practices serves to reinforce their beliefs that ticketing is a form of harassment of street youth by the Toronto Police Service. Many believed that whether they were technically breaking the law or not, police were trying to discourage them from occupying public spaces in the downtown area. Further, they believed that housed youth would be much less likely to receive tickets for the same actions, even if in violation of the law.

According to the youth we interviewed, this perceived police harassment was most likely to occur in the downtown area of Toronto, with 54% saying they had received at least one ticket downtown in the past twelve months. This is perhaps not surprising, given that the downtown core is a busy area filled with stores, office towers, restaurants, condominiums, and sporting and entertainment venues. It is also the area of the city with the most services for homeless people, including homeless youth. Research on ticketing and arrests of home-

less persons in Los Angeles (Culhane, 2010) indicates that the concentration of homelessness services in one area is likely to increase the level of police attention. This was certainly true in our study as well. The parts of the city that are policed by 14, 51, and 52 Divisions (i.e. the downtown sections of the city) were, according to the youth, the areas where ticketing was most likely to occur. Additionally, several youth stated that they were most likely to receive tickets when directly outside the doors of agencies serving street youth (such as Evergreen in 52 Division and Youthlink Inner City in 14 Division⁸).

The findings of this study very clearly indicate that street youth in Toronto generally feel they receive an undeserved amount of police attention. While police encounters may result from criminal behaviour on the part of some street youth, our research shows that even those not engaged in criminal activity are also subject to strict law enforcement practices. This is particularly true for males, who attract police attention regardless of whether they are involved in criminal activity. Lacking private space, these young people – both male and female – come under surveillance and face punishment under urban disorder-based legislation like the Ontario Safe Streets Act. The practice of targeting the behaviours of homeless individuals, such as sleeping outside, sitting on the sidewalk, and soliciting others for money, often results in police encounters and tickets for these youth. We argued this can be seen as the criminalization of homelessness, which has been supported by our research findings. The last question we consider is the effect that these police encounters have on the young people who live on the streets of Toronto.

What are the Effects of these Policing Practices on Street Youth?

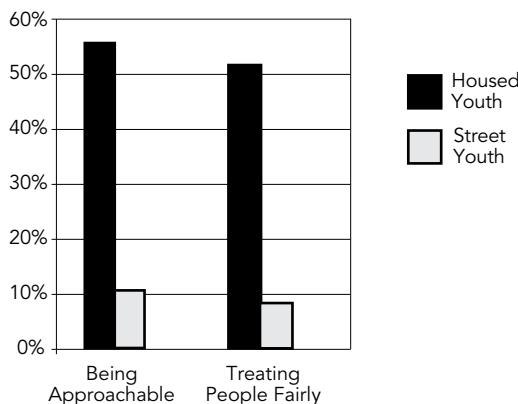
The problem with the criminalization of homelessness is that it's not resolving the roots of homelessness, but causing more problems for people who are homeless. There are so many other social services that could be provided. I get so bogged down in the tickets and into the heavy policing and the harm that youth are feeling when they get involved with police, it is devastating for them. (Johanna Macdonald, Lawyer, Justice for Children & Youth)

The seemingly excessive attention homeless youth receive from police has its consequences. Homeless youth tend to see encounters with the police as harassment, feeling that the attention they receive is unfair. As a result of these encounters, homeless youth develop very negative attitudes about police officers, policing in general, and the criminal justice system. When compared

8. In the time since this research was conducted Youthlink Inner City has closed its doors and Evergreen has begun to reduce its services as well.

to young Canadians who are housed, street-involved youth are much more likely to view police in very negative terms. For instance, while 56% of the general public under the age of 25 think the police do a good job of “being approachable and easy to talk to,”⁹ only 11% of street youth feel the same way. Additionally, while 52% of young people in the general public think the police do a good job of “treating people fairly,” just 8% of street youth feel this way.

Percent Who Think Police Do a “Good Job”



No doubt part of this dislike stems from the relatively high rates of physical encounters these young people reported having with police officers in Toronto. Whether they were being charged with an offense or not, many street youth reported being mistreated by the police in ways they believed other youth would not be treated. Most serious were the street youth’s reports of violent encounters with the police. Our interviews revealed a number of incidents where police used violence during arrests, often injuring the youth. In fact, 42% of the street youth we interviewed said that the police had used force against them in the past. Perhaps not surprisingly, given our previous findings, males were more likely to report this than females (48% versus 24%). Just as concerning, almost half of the respondents who reported physical encounters with the police stated that it happened on more than one occasion.

These statistics are alarming. However, many of the youth in our study spoke about physical encounters with the police as though they were routine and unremarkable. When asked to describe these encounters, those who had been shoved or pushed around by a police officer generally defined the interactions as, “nothing serious” because they had not been physically injured. In one interview, a young woman stated, “It was nothing too serious but I did have some

9. Statistics Canada (2004) General Social Survey on Victimization, Cycle 18

stomach pain. I was 5 months pregnant.” Another youth responded, “Oh yeah, I was hurt for two weeks. My whole face was black from bruises.” The issue of police violence is complex and often misunderstood, in part due to the fact that the police are allowed to use force if necessary to enforce the law. As a result, one cannot argue that all incidents of reported violence involving the police constitute misconduct. The problem is defining an appropriate use of force.

Street youth appear to have a fairly sophisticated understanding of policing and the situations in which police will – and are allowed to – use force. They are generally able to distinguish reasonable (or at least justified) actions of police officers from those considered inappropriate or a violation of the law. Many have fairly mainstream attitudes about policing and respect the fact that police ‘have a job to do’. To gain a better understanding of the situations that turned physical, we asked respondents what they had been doing before their encounter with the police. There was a variety of responses. The majority of our interview participants appeared willing to admit cases where their own behaviour (such as resisting arrest and/or being under the influence of substances) may have contributed to the violence.

While many stated they had done nothing wrong, there were others (mostly males) who attracted police attention because of public drug and/or alcohol use. Some youth reported that they had provoked the officer or resisted arrest while intoxicated. Such provocation may result in the use of force by police. Indeed, poor attitude, being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and being someone the police consider to be a regular troublemaker are all factors that have been found to predict apprehension and arrest (Doob & Cesaroni, 2004). Many youth in our sample fit this profile. Nevertheless, negative encounters with police – particularly those involving the use of force – contribute to the negative attitudes many homeless youth have about police officers, policing, and the justice system.

The negative perceptions that street youth hold and the threat that police encounters will turn violent are both serious consequences of the criminalization of homelessness. However, there are also more long-term effects that need to be considered. This mostly has to do with ticketing, as previously discussed. Many homeless youth accumulate a large number of tickets for minor offences related to being homeless (such as sleeping outside, sitting on a sidewalk, and soliciting others for money). Whether or not individual police officers think youth will pay these tickets, the assumption seems to be that the fines will be a deterrent. However, because these young people are homeless and living in poverty, they are generally unable to pay. The continued use of tickets for minor offences can lead to the accumulation of debt. In our study, of those who reported receiving at least one ticket in the past

twelve months, only 30% stated they had paid the fine(s)¹⁰. As a group, the youth who had outstanding tickets owed a total of \$45,150 and individual debts ranged from \$65 to as high as \$20,000 for one young man.

All of this creates challenges for young people attempting to move forward with their lives. Virtually all street youth want to move off the streets at some point. Unfortunately, even those who are in the process of becoming more stable – obtaining an apartment, getting a job, and/or attempting to finish school – may carry a debt load from their time on the street. The tickets that are accumulated become a debt that does not disappear, as municipal governments contract with collection agencies to enforce repayment of fines, which in some cases can amount to thousands of dollars.

The criminalization of homelessness thus not only has a negative effect on young people while they are on the street, that can continue as they try to move off it. Despite political talk of maintaining order in cities, our research shows that legislation and practices aimed at criminalizing homelessness tend to have the opposite effect. Many young people acquire such a considerable debt as a result of ticketing that they are unable to move off the street, essentially keeping this “disorderly” population firmly rooted in place.

Addressing the Criminalization of Homelessness

Every kind of peaceful cooperation among men is primarily based on mutual trust and only secondarily on institutions such as courts of justice and police. (Albert Einstein)

Street youth are heavily policed in the city of Toronto. As this research has shown, part of the increased attention they receive is due to criminal behaviour on the part of some youth. However, not all young people who report frequent interactions with police are involved in criminal activity. Young men in particular are targeted by police (that is, they are stopped, searched, asked for ID, etc.), even if they have no involvement in criminal behaviour. Many youth report that these encounters sometimes turn violent and that they are often issued tickets for behaviours that would be overlooked if committed by housed youth. These repeated encounters have negative effects for these young people, as they come to think negatively of police officers and the justice system – a problem given the high rates of victimization they experience (Gaetz et al., 2010). Additionally, the debt they incur from tickets generally goes unpaid

10. The tickets that did get paid were generally for motor vehicle infractions. Ontario Safe Streets Act tickets, drinking in public, and other provincial statute violations were the least likely to get paid.

and the financial burden keeps them from moving off the street. This response to homelessness – the repeated targeting of non-criminal homeless youth and the ticketing of behaviours such as sleeping outside, sitting on sidewalks, and soliciting for money – can be thought of as the criminalization of homelessness.

While many Canadians – including politicians – have become comfortable with the criminalization of homelessness as a strategic response to a seemingly persistent problem, we argue that we need to find another way to deal with the issue. The criminalization of homelessness is not merely about policing and policing practices, but rather reflects a broader effort to make this form of extreme poverty less visible. When our response to homelessness does not adequately provide resources to people so that they can avoid homelessness, or at least help those in crisis move out of homelessness quickly, then we are left with a visibly poor population occupying public space. Criminalizing that population is not the answer. A strategy that houses and supports people who are in poverty would be a more humane and affordable solution. However, unless homelessness becomes a *political problem* that is viewed in these terms in Canada, street youth will continue to roam our streets.

We suggest that communities need to take action to help these young people move off the street and out of homelessness. One strategy would be to instate amnesty programs in which people who are homeless could clear their records. The accumulation of minor charges is a barrier many youth face when trying to move off the street. Many people who are homeless accumulate debts that can amount to thousands of dollars. In some areas in the United States, ‘homelessness courts’ have been established where, similar to drug courts, people can have charges reduced or dismissed in exchange for community service. We argue for an amnesty program instead, as many of the charges against people who are homeless are considered unfair and/or the result of being homeless. Provincial and city prosecutors should work together to create policies and strategies that move homeless people out of the justice system – including simply withdrawing charges – to help people reduce or eliminate their debt from ticketing. Such a strategy should include rigorous pre-screening as well as discussions with local Police Services.

The police need to develop and put in place alternative approaches to dealing with young people who are homeless. Central to this effort should be an examination of existing practices – including ever-increasing use of the Ontario Safe Streets Act (O’Grady et al., 2011) – that target people who are homeless through increased police attention. While the police should enforce the law when crimes are being committed, evidence from our research suggests that policing is also being used to address broader social and economic problems. Because there is evidence of social profiling, measures should be taken to ensure that members of the Toronto Police Service do not target homeless people for enforcement. A

cultural shift is needed so that police view homeless people (including homeless youth) as being “in need of housing” as opposed to having “no fixed address”.

The issuing of tickets and fines to young people who are homeless, living in poverty, and who have a limited ability to pay, goes against the spirit of both the Criminal Code of Canada and the Youth Criminal Justice Act, both of which recommend compassion in such situations. Often, street youth feel so completely incapable of making any sort of fine payment, that they cannot imagine challenging the ticket in any way. Each day, street youth are focused on the immediate concern of finding enough food, clothing, and safe shelter. They are also profoundly alienated from, and distrustful of, both police and the justice system. Challenging tickets, asking for reductions, or paying any fine amount, is not a concern for street youth. Our research suggests that an environment has been created in Toronto where street youth have lost trust in the police. Rather than being viewed as vulnerable young citizens in need of added protection, an attitude of control has been created where street youth, as a group, are perceived as a threat. If the policing of street youth is to be informed and understood within this context, then it is clear that criminalizing homelessness is not the solution to the problem, but rather a costly mistake.

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21

Why Street Youth Become Involved in Crime

Stephen Baron

Introduction

Research on homeless street youth in Canada suggests that these young people are heavily “at risk” of becoming involved in criminal activities (Baron, 1995; Gaetz, 2004; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). The factors that contribute to why and how street youth come to engage in illegal activities are many and often complex. In the following chapter I summarize my research over the past two decades, as well as draw on the work of other Canadian researchers, to explore a range of factors that explain why street youth become involved in property crime, drug dealing, and violence. I begin with a short overview of the extent of street youth’s participation in crime and then move to outlining the background factors in these young people’s lives that affect the way they behave on the street. I then explore how homelessness and unemployment influence participation in a range of crimes. The key here is understanding not only how severe poverty can lead to offending, but also how individual perceptions of poverty can shape these youth’s responses to their difficult situations. The chapter also details how street peers, street culture, and street lifestyles sway youth’s decisions to engage in illegal behaviour. Further, I explore the social-psychological factors that develop in response to adverse circumstances and which contribute to youth’s criminal behaviours, as well as youth’s responses to potential criminal punishments and their influence on criminal choices. I end by reviewing the potential policy implications of the findings.

To What Extent Are Street Youth Involved in Crime?

Research shows that compared to their housed peers, street youth are more likely to be involved in a range of criminal activities (Baron, 1995; Gaetz, 2004; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; O'Grady et al., 2011; Tanner & Wortley, 2002). For example, I found that male youth living on the street in Edmonton committed almost 1,700 offenses each on average in a year (Baron, 1995). While these numbers are large, it is important to acknowledge that street youth are involved in criminal behaviour to different degrees. Research reveals that a large minority of youth on the street engage in relatively little or no criminal activity (Baron, 1995; Gaetz, 2004; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; O'Grady et al., 2011). To illustrate, Gaetz (2004) found that 37 percent of street youth in his sample had not engaged in any criminal activity. There are, however, youth who engage in high rates of crime. My work in Edmonton showed that 20 percent of the youth sampled were very high rate offenders committing over 2,000 offenses in the prior year (Baron, 1995).

The types of offenses these youth are involved in vary. For example, in my 1995 study, 20 percent of the total number of offenses committed were property crimes. O'Grady et al., (2011) show that 19 percent of the youth they interviewed in Toronto had stolen something from a person, 22 percent had stolen food, and 20 percent had stolen clothes or shoes. I found youth also stole from cars, broke into houses and buildings, and took motor vehicles.

Most youth who engage in property crimes do so for utilitarian purposes. Gaetz (2004) outlines that 53 percent of the street youth in his study had shoplifted for their own use and 38 percent had stolen something for the purposes of reselling. Generally, youth resort to theft for survival or to help cope with being on the street (Baron, 1995; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; O'Grady et al., 2011). Research shows that youth use money gained by theft to buy food or clothes, to secure shelter, or to purchase drugs and alcohol.

The distribution or selling of drugs also contributes to street youth's high number of offenses (Baron, 1995; Gaetz, 2004; McCarthy & Hagan, 1991; O'Grady et al., 2011). In my Edmonton work (1995) selling drugs was the largest contributor to offense rates; the average youth indicated participating in 1,200 transactions (i.e. drug deals) in the past year. Of the 56 percent of youth in the study who reported selling drugs, over a quarter had sold drugs more than 2,000 times. More recent research finds similar patterns. Gaetz (2004) found that 50 percent of his Toronto sample had sold drugs. O'Grady et al., (2011) reported that 36 percent of their sample sold marijuana, 17 percent sold crack cocaine, and 20 percent sold other drugs. Like property offending, youth report they are involved in the drug trade to earn money for survival and

to support their own substance use (Baron, 1995; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002).

Finally, street youth are involved in a great deal of violent crime. Youth in my (1995) research reported committing an average of 82 violent crimes per year. Over 58 percent of these violent offenses involved robbery where the youth took money, jewellery and other valuable items from people by force or the threat of force. Violent crimes also include assaults of varying degrees of seriousness, as well as physical altercations (fights) between groups of youth. Gaetz (2004) found that 42 percent of the street youth in his Toronto study had been involved in an assault for reasons other than self-defense in the prior 12 months; and O'Grady et al., (2011) showed that 20 percent of respondents used a weapon while committing a crime.

To summarize, a minority of the street youth population is heavily involved in a range of criminal activities. At the same time many youth on the streets have chosen not to engage in these activities. What does the research tell us about why certain youth are more at risk of offending?

Background Factors and Crime on the Street

Research consistently reveals that the path to the street often begins with negative family backgrounds. Hagan and McCarthy (1997) show that adverse economic circumstances foster psychological and economic stress in homes. This stress hampers parents' ability to care for children and increases the likelihood that inconsistent and coercive methods of discipline will be utilized. Studies show that youth on the streets have often suffered high rates of abuse (Forde et al., 2012; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). Street youth have often experienced physical neglect, including food insecurity (situations in which their homes lack food for regular meals), a lack of clean clothing, and a lack of medical attention (Forde et al., 2012). Their parents often had alcohol and/or drug problems that undermined their ability to care and provide for their children (Forde et al., 2012; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Street youth also frequently encountered emotional neglect where support and affection from family members was absent (Forde et al., 2012; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). Many street youth also report having experienced emotional abuse from members of their family; incidences which involved being regularly insulted and hurt over comments directed at them (Forde et al., 2012). Further, many street youth describe high rates of physical abuse, often so serious that victims were left physically damaged (Forde et al., 2012; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). Finally, some youth have encountered sexual abuse (Forde et al., 2012; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999).

Criminologists suggest these experiences leave one at greater risk for criminal be-

haviour (Baron, 2004; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Childhood abuse can jeopardize a child's needs, values and/or identity, and is seen as unjust by those who experience it (Agnew, 2006; Baron, 2004). Abuse also serves to weaken youth's emotional attachments to caregivers and undermines the influence of parents and other adults. This lack of attachment means less concern for the wishes and opinions of others leaving one free to commit crime (Baron, 2003a; 2004; Baron et al., 2001). Youth who experience emotional abuse come to view the world as a coercive, hostile environment, leading them to become hostile and aggressive in their interactions with others (Baron, 2003a; 2004; Baron et al., 2001). Children who experience more physically violent forms of abuse often see aggression as the way to solve problems and adopt values and attitudes that support the use of violence (Baron, 2003a; 2004; Baron et al., 2001). Physical abuse also undermines one's ability to cope with future negative experiences and stresses, and harms the development of compassion and empathy, increasing the likelihood one will victimize others (Baron, 2003a; 2004; Baron et al., 2001). Physical abuse also leads youth to seek out and create violent situations including joining peers who use, support, and encourage violence (Baron, 2003a; 2004; Baron & Hartnagel, 1998). Sexual abuse can result in feelings of betrayal, hostility, and anger, as well as lead to a sense of powerlessness that damages coping abilities. Feelings of guilt, shame and stigmatization leave victims more likely to be drawn to others who are stigmatized, including criminally involved peers (Baron, 2003a; 2004).

Research outlines that certain experiences of abuse tend to be associated with certain forms of offending. In particular, street youth who have suffered physical abuse are at an increased risk of engaging in higher rates of criminal activity when compared to those who have not had these experiences (Baron, 2004; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). There is a strong link between the experience of physical abuse and violent offending (Baron, 2004; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997), particularly robberies and more serious forms of violence where victims suffer significant injuries (Baron & Hartnagel, 1998). It is unclear if there is a direct link between sexual abuse and the offenses being looked at in this chapter since research has produced support both for and against this link (see Chen et al., 2007; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Tyler & Johnson, 2006; Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999). While the role of its direct relationship to crime is in dispute, sexual abuse has been found to lead to crime when accompanied by certain other factors. My research shows that youth who have histories of sexual abuse are more involved in violence if they have also acquired and developed values that support the use of violence or associate with peers who support and use violence (Baron, 2004). As I will show later, the street is an arena where there is support for the use of violence.

Levels of self-esteem also appear to influence how street youth channel their

abusive experiences. I (2004) discovered that physical abuse was more likely to lead to violence amongst street youth who, despite the abuse, had higher levels of self-esteem than their street peers. Similarly, youth who had experienced emotional abuse were more likely to be involved in property offenses when they had higher levels of self-esteem. I have argued elsewhere (2004) that self-esteem may allow one to adopt a criminal route to combat repression and assist in bringing a sense of balance back into one's life (see Tittle, 1995). Alternatively, crime may be a method of reaffirming self-esteem that is diminished during the experiences of abuse (see Baumeister et al., 1996).

Homelessness and Crime

Youth who flee their homes for the streets enter an environment that promotes participation in crime. Youth find themselves in need of food, money, and shelter (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Criminologists recognize that the experience of homelessness can have a powerful impact on individuals and note its potentially strong link to criminal activities. Becoming homeless is felt to be unjust by those who experience it and threatens an individual's needs, values, goals and/or identities (Agnew, 2006; Baron, 2004). Homelessness also reduces one's contact with the people and institutions of regular society and breaks previous social ties. With no relationships to maintain and little stake in social institutions, people who become homeless have little to lose if convicted of a crime; in sociological terms, social control has little power over them (Agnew, 2006; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Homelessness also provides opportunities for crime. Youth who lack shelter are often forced to spend a significant amount of time in public locations. This public lifestyle brings individuals into contact with tempting property and human targets for victimization (Baron & Hartnagel, 1997).

Homelessness also provides an environment where crime can be learned (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; McCarthy, 1996). On the street, youth encounter other young people involved in criminal activities. These other offenders are criminal models for those new to the streets and provide training and encouragement for criminal activities (Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; 1998; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). These peers can facilitate criminal activities that require accomplices and can offer approval for their friends' criminal behaviour. Further, homelessness exposes youth to an alternative culture that values many forms of offending, including property offending, drug dealing, and violence (Baron, 2009a; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997). Many street youth are drawn to this street culture because it reflects and extends some of the lessons learned from abusive backgrounds (Baron, 2009a; Colvin, 2000). Together, youth on the street develop new standards and expectations for behaviour. In this environment the morals and expectations of the broader society are rejected and new ones substituted that allow street youth to more effectively

cope with their life situations (Baron, 2006; 2009a; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997). Included in this culture is support for the use of criminal means to overcome financial struggles (Baron, 2006; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997). Street youth are directly educated in this culture through social rewards for criminal behaviour, and social punishments for reluctance to participate, as well as through their observation of other street youth's behaviours (Baron, 2011b; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997). My research consistently reveals that both having values that support criminal behaviour *and* having criminally involved peers leads to criminal activity on the street (Baron, 2004; 2006; 2008; 2009a). Hagan and McCarthy (1997) show how homelessness increases the chances that youth will become involved in "coaching" relationships where they are taught to engage in theft and drug dealing, offered protection, and helped to sell stolen property and drugs (see also McCarthy et al., 1998). Through these coaching relationships, street youth undertake more criminal activities than those not engaged in these relationships (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997).

Research reveals that the longer one stays on the streets, the more likely one is to engage in various forms of crime (Baron, 2003b; 2004; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; McCarthy & Hagan, 1991), including property offenses (Baron, 2004; 2006; 2008; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; McCarthy & Hagan, 1991), violent offenses (Baron & Hartnagel, 1998; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; McCarthy & Hagan, 1991) and drug dealing (Baron, 1999; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; McCarthy & Hagan, 1991). The likelihood that homelessness will lead to offending generally, and property offending in particular, is also greater when street youth have few moral barriers to breaking the law and/or when they have a low sense of self-efficacy or competence (Baron, 2004). In other words, youth who feel that they do not have the capacity to cope with their homelessness by legal means are more likely to resort to crime when they are homeless (Baron, 2004). Finally, "situational adversity" – situations of desperate need – can have a direct impact on offending. Research shows that hunger is directly associated with the theft of food and serious theft, while the need for shelter increases the likelihood of participation in more serious property crimes (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997).

Street Youth Unemployment and Crime

Most youth on the street are unemployed. Street youth are often unable to find work because of incomplete education and a lack of qualifications (Baron, 2001). These backgrounds exclude them from consideration for most jobs and from forms of employment that might offer opportunity for growth and advancement (Baron, 2001). Unemployment has been found to increase the probability that street youth will become involved in criminal activities (Baron, 2001; 2006; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). With no employment to be lost by criminal conduct, and work made irrelevant by its absence, street

youth become more likely to engage in crime. Unemployment can also reduce an individual's commitment to societal norms and rules, leading street youth to the conclusion that breaking the law is acceptable (Baron, 2008; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997). Unemployment may also contribute to feelings of boredom and frustration for some, who may view crime as one way to relieve these feelings (Baron, 2001; 2008; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997). Finally, unemployed youth are in need of money, which crime can provide. Beyond this direct impact, my research shows that unemployment is even more likely to lead to crime when youth have adopted values that support criminal activities (Baron, 2004).

Unemployment also produces a great deal of anger. Youth who want legitimate employment and are willing to work hard are understandably angry when they cannot find work. Homeless youth may feel they are unfairly deprived compared to others, blame others for their unemployment, be unhappy with their lack of money, and have peers involved in crime. This anger increases participation in violent offending and drug dealing (Baron, 2008; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997).

Street youth's experiences of frustration when trying to find work also leave them more likely to reject the idea that those who are willing to work hard will be able to achieve their economic goals. This disillusionment increases the likelihood that unemployment will lead to violent offending and drug distribution (Baron & Hartnagel, 1997). Further, perceiving their unemployment as unfair can lead to crime when youth have criminal peers and attitudes that support engaging in crime (Baron & Hartnagel, 2002).

Another key economic factor in street youth crime is relative deprivation. Relative deprivation occurs when people judge themselves to be worse off financially than other people or groups they know (Baron, 2004; 2006; 2008). My research reveals that relative deprivation increases participation in a range of offenses and is more likely to lead to crime when homelessness is long-term and the youth associates with criminally involved peers (Baron, 2006). Furthermore, being dissatisfied with their lack of money compels street youth to engage in criminal activities particularly as the length of their homelessness and unemployment increases (Baron, 2004; 2006; 2008).

Finally, the goal of financial success also leads directly to general crime and drug dealing in the street youth population (Baron, 2006; McCarthy & Hagan, 2001). Wanting financial success and seeing no legal way to achieve it makes crime an attractive alternative (Baron, 2006). This is often the case when youth have experienced long-term homelessness and unemployment (Baron, 2006), and have values that encourage crime (Baron, 2011a).

Street Victimization and Crime

The experience of homelessness puts street youth at increased risk for victimization (Baron, 1997; Gaetz, 2004; Gaetz et al., 2010). Spending a great deal of time in high crime areas increases youth's vulnerability to property loss and damage, as well as risk of violent victimization (Baron, 1997; Gaetz, 2004; Gaetz et al., 2010). Further, homelessness may bring youth into contact with peers involved in crime who may victimize them (Baron, 1997; 2003a). Peers may steal from them, assault them, or encourage them to engage in conflicts where participants can end up as victims. Finally, the street subculture that encourages violence makes conflicts between youth more likely to turn violent (Baron, 1997; 2003a).

Many street youth are also regular users of drugs and alcohol, which increase their risk of victimization (Baron, 1997; 2003a; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997). First, these substances are often consumed in dangerous areas. Second, the biochemical and psychological impact of these substances can make youth less careful about their own safety, increasing the likelihood of theft or violent attack (Baron, 1997; 2003a). Users may also become more aggressive or provocative while using these substances, increasing the possibility of violent altercations (Baron, 1997; 2003a). At the same time, youth may be physically less able to defend themselves when intoxicated (Baron, 1997; 2003a).

Engaging in crime can also lead to victimization (Baron, 1997; 2003a; Gaetz, 2004). Illegal means of survival including drug dealing, robbery and theft have been found to be associated with violent victimization (Baron, 2003a). There is also a relationship between violent offending and victimization (Baron, 1997, 2003a; Baron, Forde, & Kennedy, 2007). Drug dealing or selling stolen property are high-risk activities, and street youth who engage in them become easy targets since they are unlikely to report their victimization to the police. Finally, violent offenders are continually at risk for retaliation from others who wish to settle scores (Baron & Hartnagel, 1998).

Experiences of victimization on the street often lead to criminal responses (Baron, 2009b; Baron & Hartnagel, 1998). First, people who experience victimization often feel unjustly harmed and learn from their victimization experiences that physical aggression may be necessary to ensure the safety of their property and themselves (Baron et al., 2001). Further, involvement in street peer groups, the public nature of the victimization, and subcultural expectations that encourage and reward retaliation against the offender, together increase the potential for retaliatory criminal responses in an effort to "get even" (Baron, 2009b; Baron, et al., 2001). I found that street youth who experience violent forms of victimization are more likely to engage in violent offences including

group altercations (fights), minor and serious assaults, and robberies (Baron, 2004, 2009b; Baron & Hartnagel, 1998). Furthermore, being a victim of violence leads to violent crime when street youth also have values that support the use of violence and have high levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem. These characteristics appear to contribute to youth responding to their victimization with violence (Baron, 2004). Violent victimization is also more likely to lead to a violent response when youth have low self-control (Baron, 2009b). The experience of being robbed also provokes violent responses, and again those who have higher levels of self-esteem are able to draw on this resource to more successfully address their victimization. Property victimization is also more likely to be met with violence when youth consider this a justified response (Baron, 2004).

Beyond direct victimization in terms of theft, robbery and physical attacks, the dangerous street environment also exposes street youth to “vicarious” victimization and the development of “anticipated” victimization (Baron, 2009b). Youth on the street frequently see or hear about others being victimized. Street youth come to expect that they will be victimized unless they take some form of defensive or pre-emptive action (Baron, 2009b). I found that (2009b) street youth exposed to vicarious victimization often undertook violent actions to prevent future harm to themselves and those around them, as well as for revenge against those deemed accountable for the harm. Exposure to the victimization of peers was more likely to evoke a violent response from street youth with low self-control. Similarly, expecting violent victimization was more likely to lead to a violent response from such youth (Baron, 2009b).

The Overall Experience of Coercion & the Link with Crime

My research shows that street youth's experience with formal state supervision through welfare or imprisonment can also lead to crime, in part because these systems are viewed as coercive. That is, people view them as negative experiences where they are forced or intimidated to act a certain way (Baron, 2009a; Colvin, 2000). State officials with the power to withdraw financial support (such as welfare), and inflict or threaten to impose punishment can coerce street youth (Baron, 2009a). There is evidence that youth who encounter more of these forms of coercion, along with other negative experiences, engage in more violent crime. I found (2009a) that the total combination of experiencing childhood abuse, street victimization, homelessness, receiving welfare, as well as imprisonment leads to a higher rate of violent offending. Further, youth who have this combination of experiences also tend to develop lower levels of self-control, higher levels of anger, greater association with violent peers, and stronger values supportive of violence, when compared to those street youth who do not have these experiences. These factors, in turn, lead to higher levels of violence.

Drug and Alcohol Use and Crime

Another important contributor to street youth crime is drug and alcohol use. Studies suggest that offenders spend much of the money earned through criminal activity on drugs and alcohol (Baron, 1999; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997). Hartnagel and I (1997) found that drug and alcohol use were related to increased participation in property offending, and drug use was associated with drug dealing. While drug and alcohol use can be seen as a coping strategy to manage the negative emotions arising from traumatic backgrounds and difficult living situations in the present (Baron, 2004; 2010; Gallupe & Baron, 2009), these substances are also used as a form of enjoyment and recreation (Baron, 1999; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997). For some street youth, substance use provides an identity and social status among their peers (Baron, 1999; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; 1998). Participation in crime as well as substance use may both be requirements for one to be accepted in the “street lifestyle” subculture, in order to take advantage of the social rewards it has to offer (Baron, 1999; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; 1998). Over time, social contacts become increasingly limited to others involved in this lifestyle (Baron, 1999; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; 1998). For participants, crime finances substance use, and substance use fuels the need for profitable crime to sustain an ever-increasing pattern of use (Baron, 1999; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; 1998). Drug and alcohol use can also be important in facilitating criminal activities in another way. The use of these substances can make risky or difficult offenses psychologically easier to commit (Baron, 1999; Baron & Hartnagel, 1997; 1998). This type of influence may be important in understanding the link between drug and alcohol use and violent crime (Baron, 1997b; Baron & Hartnagel, 1998; Baron et al., 2007).

There is also some research to suggest that alcohol might be linked to lower violence (Baron et al., 2007). I argue along with Kennedy (1993) that there are subcultural rules on the street about substance use and violence. In some instances, street youth may be expected to ingest substances and act aggressively. In other settings, street youth may be encouraged to become intoxicated and socialize and relax with peers. In sum, different situations and settings may provide different rules regarding substance use and behaviours (Baron, 2003a; Baron et al., 2007; Kennedy & Baron, 1993).

Low Self-Control, Perceptions of Control, and Crime

Criminologists have observed that some street youth have low self-control and this trait, or aspects of it, appear to have a direct influence on street youth’s involvement in crime (Baron, 2003b; 2009a; 2009b; McCarthy & Hagan, 1998; Kort-Butler et al., 2011). People who lack self-control tend to be insensitive, impulsive, short-sighted, bad tempered risk-takers who have a low tolerance for frustration

(Agnew, 2006; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). For some, these characteristics seem to arise in childhood, and once established persist for life (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hay & Forrest, 2006; Vaske et al., 2012). Parents or guardians who do not consistently supervise their children, recognize uncontrolled behaviours, and correct these behaviours allow this trait to become firmly established (Hay & Forrest, 2006; Vaske et al., 2012). Recall that Hagan and McCarthy (1997) found that economic and psychological strains in the families of street youth often led to inconsistent disciplining. It is also possible, however, that this negative trait can be influenced by other environmental factors including those experienced later in life (Agnew, 2006). There is evidence that physical abuse experienced at an early age (Kort-Butler et al., 2011), poverty, and street culture can contribute to the creation and/or strengthening of this trait (Baron, 2009a; 2009b). The constant exposure to stress and aggressive environments can foster low self-control, as can social environments where this trait can be observed and learned (Baron, 2009a; 2009b).

Beyond its direct association with crime, low self-control also impacts a range of other behaviours and life outcomes (see Baron, 2003b). Research shows that low self-control leads individuals to spend more time on the street, increases their likelihood of unemployment, participation in criminal peer groups and the adoption of values supportive of criminal behaviour (Baron, 2003b; Baron et al., 2007; Kort-Butler et al., 2011). Each of these factors also leads to street youth offending. Low self-control also increases the likelihood of victimization (Baron et al., 2007; Forde & Kennedy, 1997; Schreck et al., 2004). People who are impulsive are less likely to recognize the consequences of risky behaviours. Those with low empathy may be unable to assess the actions of others that might undermine their safety. Individuals with low frustration tolerance may be more aggressive and become involved in altercations. Those who are short-sighted may not take sufficient precautions to reduce opportunities for victimization. Finally, risk-takers can be drawn to exciting activities that have the potential for dangerous outcomes (see Baron et al., 2007; Forde & Kennedy, 1997; Schreck, et al., 2004). Thus, the negative experiences that generate low self-control put street youth at increased risk for victimization and as discussed, victimization is also important in understanding offending (Baron et al., 2007; Forde & Kennedy, 1997; Schreck et al., 2004).

Street youth crime can also be related to attempts by youth to gain a sense of control over certain areas of their lives (Baron& Forde, 2007). My work with Forde (2007) exploring street youth's perceptions of control over their homelessness, unemployment, health, cleanliness, nutrition, and comfort shows that assaults or serious thefts are attempts to further a sense of control. This research also shows that attempts to further a sense of control through crime are even more likely when street youth have peers who are also involved in crime (Baron & Forde, 2007).

Deterrence

My research also explores whether threats of legal sanctions influence street youth's decisions to engage in crime (Baron, 2011b; Baron & Kennedy, 1998). This work investigates whether the certainty of arrest and punishment for an offense, as well as the potential severity of the punishment, influences a street youth's decision to offend. The research shows that youth who think property offenses and drug dealing are more likely to result in arrest and severe punishment are less likely to engage in those crimes (Baron, 2008; Baron & Forde, 2007; Baron & Kennedy, 1998). My research also shows, however, that morals, peer support, and substance use can affect street youth's expectations regarding potential punishment, often reducing, but sometimes increasing, perceptions of the certainty and severity of consequences (Baron & Kennedy, 1998).

The link between the threat of legal punishment and the reduction of violent behaviour, in contrast, has received only minimal support (Baron, 2008; 2011b). It often appears that the threat of punishment has no direct impact on violent offending (Baron, 2011b; Baron & Forde, 2007; Baron & Kennedy, 1998). In fact, there is some evidence that potential punishment for violent offending actually increases the likelihood of youth engaging in violent crime under certain conditions. My research has found that street peer groups often reward individuals when they engage in violence and violence may increase an individual's acceptance and standing within a group (Baron, 2011b). Street youth risk ridicule, physical attacks from peers, and exclusion from the group for avoiding participation in violent crime (Baron, 2011b). Expressing fear of being caught and punished by legal authorities is unacceptable within some street groups.

Moreover, there are sometimes street codes among peers that provide guidelines for using violence to gain respect and protect one's reputation (Anderson, 1999; Baron, 2009b; 2011b; Stewart & Simons, 2006). Anderson (1999) argues that on the street, unreliable law enforcement and negative experiences with the police leads individuals to conclude that they need to take care of themselves. This requires that people on the street display to others the readiness and inclination to use violence. The main aspects of the street code surround respect and the protection of reputations. The need to protect one's reputation on the street requires promptly engaging in violence in response to slights, to show loyalty to others, and to gain revenge. This process of protecting one's reputation entails showing others in violent altercations that one is prepared to use violence regardless of potential legal consequences (Baron, 2011b). Using violence in situations where there is a high certainty of severe legal consequences shows opponents that one is prepared to suffer considerable costs to maintain one's reputation. The fact that status is given to those who receive serious punishment further increases the

likelihood that one will engage in violence in the face of legal penalties. Individuals on the street who fail to seek revenge for prior victimization or insults risk damaged reputations, lowered respect, negative labels, and future victimization. Ultimately, the threat of being caught and punished for violent offenses can encourage rather than discourage crime (Baron, 2011b).

My research (Baron, 2011b) found that high certainty of being arrested and charged for violence increased violent offending when youth had violent peers, held values supportive of violence and had spent more time homeless. Similarly, the severity of the potential legal punishment for violent offending increased violent reactions among youths with greater exposure to the street code through long-term homelessness (Baron, 2011b).

There is also evidence that the experience of legal punishment can increase street youth criminal behaviour. Hagan and McCarthy (1997) found that legal punishments led to an increase in criminal activity among street youth who had experienced sexual abuse at the hands of their fathers, and physical abuse at the hands of their mothers. The shame and rejection that evolves from these backgrounds combines with feelings of anger and “foolishness” over being punished and creates a situation where youth express defiance in the face of punishment and an escalation in criminal activities.

Policy and Street Youth Crime

Findings on street youth crime in Canada point to a number of important policy implications. First, research suggests that childhood abuse is important in understanding why street youth engage in crime. These problems often emerged in environments of economic and psychological strain. These childhood experiences in turn both influence criminal behaviour directly, and sway youth to take to the street, where a host of other causal factors take over. It is clear that prevention of the various forms of abuse that street youth suffer at home is required. Key here is the need for various economic and social support programs for families. One potential avenue is through easier access to resources, such as social workers who can assist families, combined generally with the promotion of support service utilization in a way that decreases the stigmatization of those seeking help. Creative social policies including government subsidies for parents to enter drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs may go far in decreasing stigma and promoting positive assistance. In addition, schools should be provided with social workers or counsellors who are trained to look for signs of abuse and neglect. These individuals could then work with the youth in the school and connect with their families to provide assistance.

The literature reviewed also suggests a strong link between homelessness, street

victimization, street culture and various forms of crime. This highlights the need for more street outreach workers, shelters, safe houses, and drop-in centres to allow opportunities for early intervention. Street youth need protection from victimization, and stable, safe living environments that provide for basic survival. These facilities should offer access to assessment, assistance and treatment for the range of issues, including abuse, substance use, and unemployment, that are associated with street youth offending. First, it is apparent that youth need help to cope with past experiences of abuse. Programs and treatment need to be accessible and individually tailored to focus on youth's various histories. This is important not only for addressing issues surrounding crime, but also for broader mental health issues that often emerge. Second, in light of the link between substance use and crime on the street, programs should address substance use and provide intervention and follow-up to assist in recovery (Baron, 2003a).

Third, research on unemployment, perceptions of poverty, and crime suggests that youth need work and training opportunities that pay liveable wages and provide possibilities for advancement and skill acquisition. Youth should be trained in areas of employment that avoid repetitive, boring tasks that will only alienate them further. The work should provide a sense of progress and accomplishment. These types of experiences may help youth get off the street, separate them from influences found there, and provide them with the resources to support themselves. Consequently, this could lead to a reduction of feelings of anger and perceptions of deprivation, which have been shown to increase participation in crime among street involved youth (Baron, 2003a). Hagan and McCarthy's work (1997) shows that the time commitment required by employment, the connections to people not involved in a criminal lifestyle, and the job skills and employment histories that can be established, create positive experiences for street youth that go against their street and illegal activities. Hagan and McCarthy (1997) found that youth who were able to secure even marginal employment in the service sector and other unskilled occupations spent less time with street friends, using drugs, and engaging in crime. Employment, then, can serve as a "turning point" to steer these youth towards a life off of the street.

It must be recognized that many street youth lack the social skills needed for employment. They need help developing basic life skills including work habits, literacy and communication skills, time management skills, responsibility, skills for working with authority, and the self-esteem and confidence that will encourage coping skills in the work place and other environments. Further, skills and resources for finding work are important. Street youth tend to lack the finances and appropriate clothing to conduct job searches. They need help with job search skills and tasks such as filling out forms and conducting interviews. These types of life skills will promote success across a range of environments and

enable youth to meet their needs without resorting to crime (Baron, 2003a).

In sum, a combination of prevention and accessible targeted programming is required to help youth avoid or get off the street and combat the various negative influences that generate criminal behaviour.

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22 Governing the Streets: The Legal, Social and Moral Regulation of Homeless Youth

Rory Sommers

Legal responses to urban homelessness sometimes referred to as the “criminalization of homelessness” have become more common over the last two decades. In Canada, provinces like Ontario have enacted laws that enable police to issue tickets to those who panhandle or beg in public places. In cities like Toronto the number of tickets issued under the Ontario Safe Streets Act to homeless people continues to rise (O’Grady et al., 2011). Similar law based approaches have also been deployed in Montreal (Sylvestre, 2010) and the United Kingdom (Gordon, 2004). In Canada in particular, increasing strain on the social safety net has led to further reliance on private sector agencies to provide basic necessities such as shelter, food and health services to the homeless population. At the same time, more pressure has been placed on all members of society to be responsible citizens who are accountable for all their actions, particularly when it comes to maintaining employment and managing personal finances. While these changes have been felt across society, one of the groups most affected have been the homeless, specifically young people who are homeless. As this chapter will reveal, changes in social and economic policies, which include reduced social support, increased individual responsibility and an overall intolerance for crime and disorder, have altered the way homelessness is viewed, linking it to a new set of problems. This in turn has shaped current responses to youth homelessness. In this chapter it will be argued that while homeless youth have received increased attention from law enforcement, they have also been subject to other forms of regulation that attempt to reinforce socially and economically

responsible behaviour. Here, it will be demonstrated how interaction with shelter workers and hostel staff helps to control the behaviour of homeless youth and reinforces social and economic responsibility as well as independence.

This chapter is organized into three parts. The first section discusses how changes in political and economic strategies (described below as neo-liberalism) have altered the availability of social services and placed more emphasis on a type of citizenship that encourages responsible behaviour in all aspects of life. This section will also touch on how public spaces have become increasingly regulated and less tolerant of disorder. This section will provide an overview of the concept of “governmentality¹,” a theoretical framework helpful in explaining why services for homeless youth have become almost the sole responsibility of the non-profit sector and why homelessness has come to be seen as a form of disorder. The second part of this chapter explores the various ways in which youth homelessness is viewed as “problematic” and how current responses are formed in reaction to these perceived problems. This section examines the range of responses to youth homelessness that on one hand punish youth who occupy public spaces (through enforcement of the Ontario Safe Streets Act), and on the other hand seek to transform youth into economically responsible citizens (through interaction with shelters and other services for homeless youth). The final section of this chapter explores the broader implications of the present political and economic climate and its impact on youth homelessness. It is argued that current responses to youth homelessness further reinforce the idea that homelessness is an individualized problem, ignoring the structural factors like the short-comings of foster care services and transitional housing programs and overall high rates of poverty that continue to contribute to youth homelessness. While the focus of this chapter is on the experiences of youth, many of the control techniques discussed also affect the broader homeless population.

Being a Responsible Citizen and Living in a Safe City

The changes in political and economic thinking often described as “neo-liberalism²” have re-structured government at all levels. By reducing its involvement in the regulation of the economy and by moving away from the social welfare model in which society as a whole is responsible for caring for vulnerable citizens

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1. A theoretical concept used to describe the way modern governments rule a given society. Governmentality refers the process where government attempts to align the conduct of citizens with the goals of government not through direct coercion but rather through voluntary compliance.
 2. A concept used to describe the political and economic changes that have occurred since the early 1970's characterized by the de-regulation of the global economy, privatization and increased individualism.

(those who are poor, disabled, etc.), government involvement in many sectors of society has reduced significantly since the 1970's. This has contributed to a rise in flexible or unstable forms of employment, such as part time and contract work, and higher rates of unemployment in North America (Crawford, 2003; Lippmann, 2008). At the same time, significant cutbacks have been made to education, health care and anti-poverty programs (Broad & Anthony, 1999; Crawford, 2003) as federal and local governments passed services off to the non-profit sector (May et al., 2005). This corresponded with employment insurance becoming more difficult to access in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom (Broad & Hunter, 2009; Pierson, 2007). For young people especially, this led to a rise in urban unemployment (Hasluck, 1987; Young, 1999). As research suggests, exclusion from formal employment has contributed to a rise in informal economic activities, including panhandling and squeegee cleaning (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Karabanow et al., 2002). While these changes have had major effects on the entire population, changes in how citizenship is defined and how the use of public spaces is viewed have been most damaging to homeless youth.

On an individual level, what has been described above as "neo-liberalism" has had a major influence on how citizenship is defined. Neo-liberal models of citizenship put a great deal of emphasis on individual responsibility and self-discipline and encourage people to contribute to the economy by both working and consuming goods (Dean, 1999; O'Malley, 1992). While the belief that all citizens have rights is not ignored (see Heater, 2004), neo-liberal forms of citizenship insist that individuals have "no rights without responsibility" (Giddens, 1998:65). This has been referred to as active citizenship (Dean, 1999). In this view, all individuals within society are expected to actively protect themselves against the risks of criminal victimization, poverty and even more personal characteristics like low self-esteem (O'Malley, 1992). While encouraging responsible behaviour, this way of thinking about citizenship also emphasizes the defense of traditional institutions, like the family (Giddens, 1998; Dean, 1999). At a community level, active citizenship has led to the idea of active communities. An active community, as a collective group of active citizens, promotes high standards of socially acceptable behaviour in order to ensure social order and guard against disorder. As Rocco (2007) suggests, the active community becomes an environment that is heavily self-controlled and self-policed. Although government involvement in various sectors of society has lessened from the 1970's onward, it should be noted that neo-liberalism has also influenced social and legal policies geared towards regulating and disciplining the poor (Peck & Tickell, 2002). The enactment of the Ontario Safe Streets Act speaks to this point.

The political and economic changes described above as "neo-liberalism" have sharpened the division between those who are viewed as members of society and those

who are not. Those who are unable to effectively stay in control of their own lives are now faced with a growing sense of resentment (Young, 1999). This has created a divide between “active citizens,” and “target populations” (Dean, 1999:167), a concept that is highly damaging for at risk street youth (Farrugia, 2011).

This social divide can also be found in the way cities have been re-built in order to draw more consumers into shopping and tourist districts while excluding the homeless from public space. At the core of city re-development is a movement that promotes consumer activities like shopping and tourism and works to maintain security and safety. Here, modern cities (like Toronto), work towards the goal of encouraging business and economic growth while promoting safety (Davis, 1990; Fitzpatrick & LeGory, 2000). Hannigan (1998) perhaps best captures this in his description of the “Fantasy City”, a place that is aesthetically pleasing and appealing to middle class consumers, an almost mirror image of a modern day amusement park. Importantly, this appeal to middle-class consumers expands beyond shopping and tourism, as major cities across North America have experienced a rise in middle class families returning from the suburbs to live in the city. As Blomley (2004) has noted, this has had a moralizing effect on public space. In other words, as more families call the city home, forms of physical disorder, like graffiti or litter, and social disorder, like homelessness, become less tolerated.

Understanding Neo-liberal Governments

Michel Foucault’s (1991) concept of governmentality is helpful in understanding how current responses to youth homelessness take shape. For governmentality scholars, the goal of government is to shape the behaviour of individuals so that they will adopt the values of conventional society (Foucault, 1991; Rose & Miller, 1992). This imposes moral standards and social norms on individual conduct, specifically in relation to economic participation. For example, individuals work and contribute to the economy not because they are forced to, but because they have come to see this as an important part of their lives and the right thing to do. However, with the privatization of social services, government as a centre of authority has been replaced by a “complex assemblage of diverse forces” that respond to the problems of modern day society (Rose & Miller, 1992). Here, governments have passed over some of their authority to organizations that operate within the community and respond to the social problems that emerge in our society. For the present analysis, these “government authorities” might include the volunteers, social workers and experts, such as health professionals who offer frontline services to homeless youth.

Under these conditions, the central aim of government is to ensure that individuals are hard working and self-governing (Kelly, 2006). Self-governing individu-

als are able to take care of themselves without relying on others. These individuals are able hold a steady job, are forward-thinking in managing their finances and live responsible lifestyles. As noted throughout the governmentality literature, attempting to shape individuals in this manner is what makes governing so problematic. As governmentality theorists have suggested, the role of governmental authorities (shelter staff for example) is not to provide charity handouts to needy individuals, but instead to empower and enable those who are “down-and-out” to take control of their own lives (Donzelot, 1979). Experts have not stopped providing aid, but instead use it as a platform to provide a “legitimate moral influence” (Donzelot, 1979). Here, shelter for the night is accompanied by a reminder that living on the streets goes against the norms and values of conventional forms of living. As further discussions will suggest, this perspective believes that what some individuals need is a “social vaccine”, something that empowers one to live responsibly and take control of one’s life, helping to guard against the ills of crime and welfare dependency (Cruikshank, 1996).

Evidence of this approach is seen in the 1960’s war on poverty, which worked under the assumption that “the powerlessness of the poor, not the actions of the powerful, was the root cause of their poverty” (Cruikshank, 1993). Cruikshank (1996) warns that not all individuals in society respond equally to this form of “social vaccination” or more generally to approaches dependent on self-governance. Therefore, current forms of government strike a balance between self-governance and discipline (law enforcement). As discussions of the current responses to youth homelessness will reveal, the encouragement of self-governance does not exclude the use of more disciplinary approaches.

The “Problematic Nature” of Youth Homelessness

Youth homelessness is undeniably problematic. However, exactly what makes youth homelessness so problematic has become less clearly agreed upon as political and economic policies (neo-liberalism) have led to increasing intolerance towards homeless youth. In an attempt to add clarity to this debate it is worth examining the context in which youth homelessness takes place.

The Real Problem: A Population in Need

While many forms of homelessness exist, the present analysis will focus on homeless youth who live primarily on the streets. Studying this portion of the homeless population is strategic as the visibly homeless (or urban homeless) are most likely to use front line services like shelters, drop-in centers and hostels. As suggested by O'Reilly-Fleming (1993), there is really no way of measuring the urban homeless population. In Canada it has been estimated

that roughly 65,000 youth experience homelessness or live in a shelter during the course of the year (Evenson & Barr, 2009).

Understanding Youth Homelessness

To truly understand homelessness, one must understand that not having a home is more than just a matter of lacking shelter. Homelessness is a blow to emotional well-being (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993). To have a home provides social empowerment because it indicates security, belonging, and participation in society (Hartman, 2000).

There is some debate about what causes and maintains high levels of homelessness in today's society. For some, homelessness is a result of individual flaws. While understanding youth homelessness through a personal fault approach has become less common (Karabanow, 2004), issues of substance abuse, alcoholism, mental illness and lack of work ethic ("laziness") are still commonly seen as causes of homelessness (Main, 1998). Research has indicated that drug use does contribute to youth leaving home, but that drug use is also influenced by parents' habits (Baron, 1999). Having parents with drug and alcohol problems, combined with general family conflict and violence in the form of physical and sexual abuse, puts youth at much higher risks of homelessness (Broadhead-Fearn & White, 2006).

Others suggest that urban homelessness is a result of structural causes like unemployment, poverty and the overall economy, while at the same time occasionally questioning large-scale social policies that shape social services like foster care. Hartman (2000) suggests that on the extreme end of poverty, many have difficulty finding work that pays a living wage. O'Reilly-Fleming (1993) suggests that unemployment, particularly for individuals with fewer skills (like youth), can cause homelessness. Research on the structural causes of youth homelessness has also shed light on failures at an institutional level, including the problems youth experience moving from foster care to transitional housing and other more independent forms of living (Brown & Wilderson, 2010; Rashid, 2012).

Life on the Streets

For youth who call the streets home, everyday survival becomes a major challenge. Amidst the chaos of street life, access to food becomes increasingly difficult (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002). Besides a lack of nutrition, homeless youth become increasingly vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases and victimization (Christiani et al., 2008). In addition, finding and maintaining paid employment becomes one of the most difficult challenges (specifically for youth). As Gaetz and O'Grady (2002) suggest, homeless youth primarily resort to money making

strategies that take place in the informal economy and include short-term or odd jobs, including squeegeeing, panhandling and small scale crime. While homelessness in general and its links to the informal economy are by no means new, in the past several decades these activities have become increasingly unwelcome in both Canada and the United Kingdom (Parnaby, 2003; O'Grady et al., 2011; Fitzpatrick & Kennedy, 2001). Broadly speaking, there is a movement in society that has categorized visibly homeless individuals, who resort to public forms of begging and panhandling, as "urban undesirables" (White & Sutton, 1995).

The New Problem: A Population in Need of Regulation

Over the past two decades there has been a growing intolerance for activities that do not contribute to the formal economy or that are perceived as being dangerous and therefore damaging to the local economy.³ This in turn, has increasingly led homeless youth and the homeless population in general to be perceived as problematic. Although many of these so called "problems" relate to the literature reviewed above (for example, homelessness as a result of individual flaws), neo-liberal thinking has defined homelessness as a certain set of problems that in turn relate to specific solutions. This way of thinking sees homelessness as a spatial problem, a problem of social disorder, a family problem, and a citizenship problem.

Homelessness is a spatial problem. As municipal governments attempt to promote the growth and prosperity of local economies, the physical presence of homeless individuals (young or old) has become increasingly problematic. From an economic perspective, begging has negative effects on local businesses and harms the growth of the local economy (Smith, 2005). As the continued growth of the economy has become top priority, space within major cities has become increasingly privatized and unwelcoming to homeless individuals. As Blomley (2004) explains, the spaces in and around shopping malls, street corners and public parks have become increasingly regulated by private property rights and municipal governments who claim ownership as a way of ensuring public safety. For homeless youth, the division between public and private space is often blurred. While research has suggested that youth's street survival strategies often involve the "privatizing" of space (for example, seeking shelter in a public doorway) (Wardhaugh, 2000), this form of privatization is only temporary. Importantly, how public and private spaces are used within modern cities also affects how and where services are offered to the homeless population. In accordance with the view that homelessness is a spatial problem, authorities continue to use municipal zone by-laws to locate homeless shelters

3. Parnaby's (2003) analysis of the events that contributed to the passing of the Ontario Safe Streets Act provides a strong example of how those who "squeegee" were labeled as dangerous to both public safety and the formal economy.

outside of areas where homeless individuals would come into contact with residents of the communities (Kuzmak & Muller, 2010).

Closely linked to the idea that homelessness is a spatial problem is the idea that *homelessness is a disorder problem*. Due to a belief that small scale displays of immoral behaviour, like public drinking and loitering, have the potential to escalate into more serious offences (like crime), visible forms of homelessness have now been lumped together under the loosely defined label of disorder (Wacquant, 2009). In Ontario specifically, the passing of the 1999 Safe Streets Act validates this point. As suggested by Parnaby (2003), in cities like Toronto, the fight against squeegeeing was framed as a fight against public forms of disorder. This mentality that “punishes the poor” for being visibly homeless is also evident in American cities, where urban renewal projects in San Francisco, for example, led to widespread police campaigns aimed at eliminating the nuisance of homelessness (Gowan, 2010).

However, as much as homelessness has undoubtedly been problematic in terms of space and disorder, under the present political climate, homelessness has come primarily to signify the breakdown of the family.

Homelessness is a family problem. As already noted, neo-liberals put a great deal of emphasis on family. The traditional family is seen as a “functional necessity for social order,” while other forms of living are associated with social decay (Giddens, 1998:12). Simply put, the family unit helps guard against both social and economic “problems.” From this perspective, strong families make strong communities, which contribute to strong economies. However, this mindset also means that not belonging to a family and having a weaker connection to the community and the economy poses a problem to social order (Donzelot, 1979). Under this mindset, homeless individuals not only fail to contribute to social and economic life, they actually disturb it (Donzelot, 1979). Donzelot’s commentary on homelessness sheds light on the problematic nature of life without a home, which represents a disconnection from greater society and perhaps more threatening, a retreat from the responsible self-governing form of citizenship described above.

Whether viewed as a spatial issue, an issue of disorder or signifying the breakdown of the family, for neoliberal governments, *homelessness is*, fundamentally, *a citizenship problem*. On a very basic level, urban homelessness comes into conflict with definitions of citizenship that see economic participation as the benchmark. In this sense, since they are economically dependent and/or do not contribute to the economy, homeless individuals are not seen as full citizens (Arnold, 2004). Couple this with the concept of active citizenship that demands morally responsible behaviour and financial independence, and it is easy to see how homeless individuals, especially youth, fall short of the mark.

Current Responses to Youth Homelessness

Disciplining Disorder – Punitive Responses

While the majority of this section will be devoted to current responses to youth homelessness that centre on social and moral regulation, law enforcement plays an important part in the regulation of homeless youth and deserves attention. While law and order responses to youth and adult homelessness have become more common in the present day, punitive responses have a long history. Historical examples, like Britain's Vagrancy Act (which is still enforced), confirm this (Gordon, 2004).

The late 1990s saw the introduction of the Ontario Safe Streets Act, which mostly targeted “squeegeeing” in large cities like Toronto. Squeegeeing, once seen as part of the cultural fabric of the city, instead became an eyesore that tarnished the image of the city (O’Grady et al., 1998). The Safe Streets Act more broadly targeted aggressive solicitation (which includes squeegeeing and some panhandling) in various public spaces including city streets, sidewalks, parks, bus stops and around bank machines (Ontario Safe Streets Act, 1999). Violations of the Act resulted in fines and even imprisonment for multiple offenders (Ontario Safe Streets Act, 1999). Most alarming is the rate at which the Safe Streets Act is enforced. The Toronto Police gave out just over 700 tickets in the year 2000, a number that increased to 3,646 in 2005 and an astonishing 15,244 in 2010 (O’Grady et al., 2011). While a majority of SSA tickets are issued to the adult homeless population, research indicates that homeless youth remain in regular contact with the police, who more often use other laws, like municipal bylaws, when ticketing youth for things like drinking in public or hanging around with friends (O’Grady et al., 2011). Using similar policing strategies, the number of statements of offences (a form of ticket issued under municipal law in Quebec) issued to homeless individuals in Montreal from 1995-2004 has increased 500% (Sylvestre, 2010). This trend can also be found in Canadian cities like Winnipeg and Vancouver that use a range of legal tools to ban visible forms of begging in malls, bus stops and bank entrances (Murphy, 2000). Similar approaches have been adopted in the United States. In Fort Lauderdale there are by-laws banning begging on beaches; New York has banned begging in the subway and Chicago has gone so far as to ban homeless individuals from the airport (Murphy, 2000). This intolerance of the visibly homeless is also taking place in the United Kingdom. When policy initiatives failed to network service providers and make shelters more accessible for London’s urban homeless population, police reacted with “massive clearance campaigns” arresting homeless individuals under Britain’s Vagrancy Act (May et al., 2005). Although these punitive approaches target not just youth but the broader homeless population, these trends do shed light on the growing intolerance of visible forms of disorder. Importantly, as youth homelessness continues to be por-

trayed as a spatial and disorder problem these punitive responses have increased. However, they only represent part of a larger pattern of government action.

Homeless Shelters: The Platform of Legitimate Moral Influence

Homeless shelters emerged in the 1980s as a temporary response to homelessness, but have now become a permanent service (Hartnett & Harding, 2005). Although shelters are a refuge from the harsh reality of street life, they are also a place of regulation and perhaps more importantly, a starting point for transition. Research suggests that “shelters for street kids are more likely than shelters for homeless adults to define their mission not simply as providing temporary shelter but as changing kids’ lives” (Karabanow & Rains, 1997:301). Empowerment, encouragement and guidance towards the type of active citizenship described above now accompany a warm bed. As services provided to homeless youth have increasingly become the responsibility of the private sector, the staff working in these shelters are now part of a long history of experts and professional reformers who attempt to resolve “problems” associated with homelessness (Lyon-Calio, 2004).

Shelter Functions: Sovereignty and Discipline

As the primary response to homelessness, homeless shelters function in many ways like a micro version of society (Lyon-Calio 2004). Much like contemporary society, shelters operate by striking a balance between self-governance approaches (encouraging youth to follow rules) and discipline. Most shelters blend formal rules and regulations with informal policies and practices (Hartnett & Harding, 2005). Although governments have distanced themselves from direct involvement in frontline service provisions, they still have an influence on policy as they are often the primary funder (Bridgman, 2003; Friedman, 1994).

In terms of function, as already mentioned, shelters play a double role, on one hand providing immediate shelter while on the other assisting homeless youth to become self-supporting and self-disciplined individuals. Ultimately, shelters provide a positive moral influence while providing essential services. In a practical sense, shelters address the aspects of youth homelessness that neo-liberal thinkers consider problematic. Therefore, shelters direct their services towards reshaping youth based on certain definitions of active citizenship, while also getting youth off the streets (homelessness as a spatial problem) and helping them resolve family conflict (homelessness as a family problem).

Intake Regulation

Although shelters use specific tactics like daily routines and evening curfews to

help homeless individuals regain independent living, they also use strategic, yet less formal measures that regulate the behaviour of homeless individuals before they even step foot in a shelter. For starters, homeless individuals must arrive at the shelter already showing self-disciplinary and self-responsible behaviour. To be more specific, drunkenness is largely prohibited in shelters and is one of the main reasons that people are turned away (Lyon-Callo, 2004). While youth shelters like Vancouver's Covenant House have an "open intake" policy, youth who arrive under the influence of alcohol or drugs are not allowed in (Covenant House, 2012). Although some specialized adult shelters in Canada have adopted harm reduction strategies allowing controlled alcohol consumption (Podymow et al., 2006), drinking or drunkenness is widely prohibited in most shelters, especially those geared towards youth. As Lyon-Callo (2004) further elaborates, drinking even small amounts is considered a sign that homeless individuals lack the basic amount of self-discipline needed for an extended stay at a shelter. While these policies ensure the safety of shelter guests and staff, they also demonstrate the importance of the responsible behaviour valued by neo-liberal thinking.

Responsible Behaviour

Homeless shelters, while providing a degree of safety, also provide resources that enhance a youth's ability to be self-governing and responsible. As research on adult shelters suggests, homeless individuals, once admitted to a shelter, are subject to in-depth interviews allowing staff to assess not what the shelter can do for the individuals but rather what the individuals need to do for themselves (Lyon-Callo, 2004). The goal of these interviews is to map out the skills and the moral mindset that homeless individuals will need to return to citizenship, hold meaningful employment and make good financial decisions (Desjarlais, 1997). Similarly, youth shelters, like Toronto's Covenant House, use individualized "discharge plans" focused on financial support, housing, finding work and pursuing education (Karabanow & Rains, 1997). Located throughout the United States, Father Flanagan Boys Homes develop individualized treatment plans focusing on the development of social skills in an attempt to change youth's behaviour (Teare et al., 1994). Although skill-building can lead to positive outcomes among homeless youth (Broadhead-Fearn & White, 2006), individualized plans can also reinforce the idea that homelessness is a result of personal flaws (Lyon-Callo, 2004).

As suggested by Marvasti (2002), shelters consciously make the time spent in a shelter morally charged. Many homeless shelters throughout the United States have embraced the idea of replacing "rules" with "codes of conduct" (Marvasti, 2002). Although the difference between rules and codes of conduct is minimal, the codes of conduct do "encourage them (homeless) to be aware of how their personal behaviour affects their re-entry into the com-

munity as productive citizens” (Marvasti, 2002:622). Similarly, some youth shelters have moved towards a “positive points” system that rewards morally responsible behaviour, such as following instructions and accepting criticism (Teare et al., 1994). In turn, these “positive points” are linked to various privileges within the shelter. Closely related to Cruikshank’s notion of a “social vaccine”, rather than imposing rules, the methods used to help homeless youth regain their ability to be self-governing individuals encourage behaviours valued by society. In other areas, however, shelters also use discipline.

Discipline and Shelter

While self-discipline is without question strongly encouraged by shelter staff, it would be misleading to suggest that this is not accompanied by external discipline. For starters, the activities of shelter guests must be monitored to ensure compliance with the shelter’s code of conduct. Lyon-Calio (2004) suggests that informal surveillance is understood by both the guests and the shelter staff as the means of identifying those breaking the rules. More so than adult shelters, youth shelters often rely on structured and regulated schedules that include daily wake-up and curfew times (Teare et al., 1994). Karabanow and Rains’ (1997) interesting analysis of shelters also demonstrates how staff help shape the behaviour of youth by providing structure in their lives by caring for them. By emphasizing respectful and honest communication, rules can be implemented in a way that sends a clear message that structured routines, while regulating the behaviour of youth, are implemented because the shelter cares for the youth’s well-being. As noted by Karabanow and Rains, while working as “professional change agents,” staff at Toronto’s Covenant House often doubled as “substitute parents” while enforcing the strict rules of the shelter (1997:302). In this regard, I would argue that the main purpose of the shelter is therefore to change behaviour to fit with social norms, not through the constant enforcement of rules but rather through a combination of discipline and encouragement.

Discipline and Regulation Reconsidered

Without entering a whole new field of literature, it is important to acknowledge that homeless shelters have a function outside of encouraging responsible behaviour in youth. Although this chapter cannot offer a complete analysis of spatial regulation literature, it can be argued that shelters function to a certain extent as a centre of social control (Bridgman, 2003). Modern day shelters function on multiple levels, one of these levels being spatial control – keeping undesirables out of mainstream society (Desjarlais, 1997). This is supported by DeVerteuil (2006), who suggests that modern day shelters work as centres

of “poverty management”. It should be noted that my intentions here are not to take away from the argument that a shelter’s goal is to encourage responsible behaviour. However, acknowledging the multiple functions of homeless shelters further illustrates the influence of neo-liberal politics and the argument that homeless individuals have increasingly become a spatial problem.

Alternative Forms of Regulation

As one of the primary responses to homelessness, shelters play an important role in governing homeless youth and encouraging self-discipline and self-regulation. However, attempts to govern the homeless population extend beyond the shelter into more public areas. Although not targeting youth specifically, in one of the clearest examples of the active community mentality, the British government attempted to tackle urban homelessness by transforming the public’s understanding of the issue into something that needed to be addressed by the homeless themselves (May et al., 2005). At the forefront of this campaign, called “Change a Life,” citizens were encouraged to “divert giving” and “think twice” before giving money to people begging in the street and to instead contribute time or money to local charities (Fitzpatrick & Kennedy, 2001). In Canada, a similar program exists in Ottawa, where recycled parking meters renamed “charity meters” are strategically located in the downtown core, with the goal of encouraging people to donate to social services instead of giving their change to homeless individuals begging or panhandling (CBC, 2007).

Implications and Challenges

We move now to the implications of this research for those who work closely with homeless youth. Speaking in broad terms, the current political-economic environment described in this chapter has created a complicated and often contradictory web of responses to youth homelessness. As this chapter has suggested, shelters seek to empower homeless individuals to improve their social situation by providing them with the skills needed to live independently. However, disciplinary responses continue to exclude homeless individuals from society, sending a mixed message to both the homeless and members of the public in general. This relationship creates a social and political environment that is both confusing for the public and harmful to homeless individuals.

For the public, the lines between those in need of help and those who pose a threat to safety continue to be unclear. Public opinions towards the homeless have changed considerably over the last several years, allowing punitive responses to be introduced with little public outcry (Murphy, 2000). Part of this can be attributed to the media and to municipal governments, who have played a sig-

nificant role in stereotyping certain homeless subpopulations (like panhandlers) as dangerous and harmful to society (see Parnaby, 2003). These political actions only stigmatize the homeless population and further discourage their efforts to make meaningful changes in their lives (O'Reilly-Fleming, 1993).

Implications for Frontline Service Providers

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, one of the ways that neo-liberal politics has affected services offered to the homeless population has been by shifting responsibility for frontline services to the private and non-profit sectors. While recent responses to homelessness have always been somewhat unorganized and disconnected (see, Raising the Roof, 2001), as government agencies become less involved in providing frontline aid, coordinating or streamlining services becomes even more difficult. In some cases, programs and practices that have proven successful fail to spread beyond the communities where they began (Raising the Roof, 2001). The reliance on the non-profit sector has also become an issue of geography. The services available to homeless youth especially are spread over miles and miles of city blocks. According to Toronto's Guide to Homeless Services, the city of Toronto has no "central hub" that offers a full range of services. At best, homeless individuals may spend night after night, day after day travelling from one place to another in order to receive the services they need. While tackling issues of geography can be difficult, what this reinforces is the importance of open dialogue between service providers so that successful practices are shared and providers can offer multiple services in a single location. In many ways this is already taking place. However, as the task of offering services to the youth homeless population continues to fall to non-profit organizations, communication will be all the more important.

As this chapter has suggested, wide-scale changes to how citizenship is defined have put an increasing emphasis on individualism and demanded that all members of society act in a manner that is both socially and economically responsible. While the primary goal of many youth shelters is to provide shelter, this is often accompanied by promotion of economic and social responsibility. This raises important questions. Specifically, how can shelter staff and administrators continue to help youth without contributing to the neo-liberal idea that homelessness is primarily a personal deficit or problem? Furthermore, in what ways can service providers offer their services to youth while also challenging local and state governments to do their part in addressing the structural causes of homelessness?

Although a significant amount of research on youth homelessness exists, research on shelters for youth is not as plentiful. Studies on the influence of neo-liberal politics on shelter governance are even less plentiful. Nevertheless,

the research that does exist offers valuable advice on how service providers can avoid supporting the individualistic ideology of neo-liberalism. While it is not always easy, one of the most important things shelter staff and administration can do is to focus their attention on establishing environments that encourage self-empowerment and not self-blame among the homeless (Lyon-Calio, 2004). Shelters need to avoid “treating deviancy” and focus on empowering homeless individuals to make smart choices that encourage healthy lifestyles not centered only on employment. In this sense, responsibility is not completely removed from the individual, but the self-blame often associated with the stigma many youth feel is avoided.

Addressing Structural Inequality

For many of those who work in frontline services for youth, ending homelessness is not only a job, but also a passion. In this regard many staff and administrators are also advocates. How then can this activism be mobilized to address the structural causes of homelessness? As established above, governments at all levels continue to pass off many areas of service provision to the private or non-profit sector. In one sense, this has made it difficult to coordinate services to the homeless population. However, this has given more power to the local agencies that are now the experts when it comes to defining needs and establishing priorities. In the context of this chapter, what this means is, now more than ever, frontline agencies are in a position to advocate against the structural inequality that plays such a massive role in causing and maintaining high levels of homelessness amongst youth. In many ways this advocacy is already taking place, especially within the Canadian context. Numerous agencies are now becoming a part of the public dialogue drawing attention to issues of unemployment and poverty, as well as the shortcomings of foster care services and transitional housing programs that have long been associated with homelessness in general. As those who study the political and economic changes of the last several decades have noted, the retreat of government involvement in service provision and the move towards a model of citizenship that encourages financial independence above all else has certainly not happened without resistance. Building on what has been discussed above, with the proper communication, local knowledge can be put to use and positive change can happen.

Conclusions

Although homelessness is not a new phenomenon, changes in political and economic thinking, described here as neo-liberalism, have associated homelessness with a new set of problems. In times where earning and spending money has become a growing sign of citizenship in countries like Canada, the

homeless have become further stigmatized and marginalized (Arnold, 2004). By failing to address the structural causes of homelessness, shelters and front line workers only serve as an emergency response to the problem, not a solution. If the ultimate goal is to end youth homelessness, then the structural factors that continue to foster high rates of homelessness amongst youth must be acknowledged. In addressing issues of poverty, unemployment and the lack of affordable housing and by continuing to draw attention to the unjust enforcement of laws that only punish the poor, meaningful change is possible.

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DIVERSITY & SUBPOPULATIONS

23

No Fixed Address: Young, Queer, and Restless

Alex (Ilona) Abramovich

Introduction

My dad found out about it, and was like: “Come out to the garage, I heard Vicky is gay. You can’t be friends with her anymore. You’re not gay are you?” And I was like: “No, fuck no, of course not”, and he was like: “Okay good, cause if you were I would have to kill you.” He really meant that, it wasn’t an empty threat. So, if my father knew that I was queer and trans he really would do something to eliminate me from the world. I fully believe in his ability and his desire to do this. That was when I was fourteen. (Homeless youth, 26 years old)

It is accepted wisdom in our culture that home is where the heart is and that our primary caregivers are supposed to love us unconditionally. Our childhood storybooks teach us that home is a place of shelter and safety, a place of refuge from the rest of the world. However, this is not the case for young people coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ) to an unsupportive family. Approximately 25-40% of homeless youth are LGBTQ, while only approximately 5-10% of the general population identifies as LGBTQ (Josephson & Wright, 2000). The large number of LGBTQ youth (defined as 16 to 26 years old) who are homeless tells us that a *house* is not always a loving *home* (Abramovich, 2012; Cull et al., 2006; Josephson & Wright, 2000; Ray, 2006). There are many reasons that lead or force youth out of the home;

however, family conflict is the number one cause of youth homelessness (Cull et al., 2006; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). In particular, family conflict resulting from a youth coming out as LGBTQ is a major contributing factor to youth homelessness (Abramovich, 2008; Ray, 2006). In recent years, there has been extensive research in the area of youth homelessness both in Canada and internationally; however, little is known about LGBTQ youth homelessness.

The incidence of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Toronto is on the rise, and agencies serving homeless youth have reported challenges in providing support to this population (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). We also know that many LGBTQ homeless youth feel safer on the streets than in shelters due

**I WOULD LIKE TO OPEN THIS CHAPTER
WITH A FEW WORDS ABOUT LOVE.**

The notion of love is critical to discussions of homophobia and transphobia, because these are ultimately about hate and about efforts to confine the powers of the human spirit. A deep understanding of love and of our culture's mistrust of the capacity of the human heart is fundamental to this research. Our culture does not nurture love enough and it rarely teaches us how to love. The family is still thought of as the primary place where we should learn about and how to love. However, this belief can hurt young people who are kicked out of their homes for coming out, who learn that there are 'right' and 'wrong' people to love and that loving the 'wrong' people means losing their families' love. Sadly, we live in a culture where some people are more comfortable with hate and violence than with love and acceptance. Only profound changes in the ways that people think and act can create a culture of love and acceptance.

This lack of love and acceptance is what lies behind LGBTQ youth homelessness. The experiences of LGBTQ homeless youth are a critical piece often missing from discussions on youth homelessness. This area does not receive nearly enough attention or discussion. It is time that we begin to raise awareness by naming the problem of homophobia and transphobia and by listening to the voices of those with lived experiences of discrimination. It is my hope that this chapter inspires discussion and strategies that can lead to solutions and support for LGBTQ youth who are homeless, and that we may shift towards a more loving culture, where all youth are accepted regardless of their sexual and gender identities.

to homophobic and transphobic violence in the shelter system (Denommee-Welch et al., 2008; Ray, 2006). Despite these findings, there are few specialized support services and no specialized shelters for LGBTQ street-involved youth in Canada. Additionally, there are gaps in knowledge indicating a need for research. For example, we do not know enough about how the lack of specialized services impacts this population's health, wellbeing, and length of time on the street; or how experiencing intersecting or multiple oppressions (e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia), both on the streets and in the shelter system, impacts LGBTQ street-involved youth.

Society's acceptance of sexual diversity is growing, and consequently, youth are coming out at younger ages (Lepischak, 2004). Nonetheless, homophobic and transphobic bullying remains a significant problem in Canadian schools. A recent study that investigated homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools reported that a high proportion of LGBTQ students feel unsafe at school and are exposed to daily verbal harassment (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Due to gaps in knowledge and support, our society does not truly understand the social and emotional complexities of coming out and how often it leads to homelessness. Our society also does not have a thorough understanding of the connection between homophobia and homelessness, and of the challenges of coming out, trying to form one's gender and sexual identities¹, and bearing the burden of social stigma and discrimination in addition to the everyday stresses of street life. These factors have a major impact on the wellbeing of LGBTQ homeless youth. For example, it has been found that LGBTQ youth are at a dramatically higher risk for suicide and mental health difficulties than heterosexual and cisgender² youth (Cull & Platzer, 2006; Frederick et al., 2011; Gattis, 2011).

This chapter begins to address the complex issue of LGBTQ youth homelessness and provides initial findings from an ongoing qualitative (narrative-based) study exploring the specific changes needed for Toronto's shelter system to become safer, more accessible, and more supportive of LGBTQ youth who are homeless³. Core findings discussed in this chapter include: shelter staff's perceptions of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system, and their thoughts on the training needed for shelter staff to be well equipped to deal with situa-

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1. Numerous studies have clumped transgender people under the label *sexual minority*. While, gender identity and sexuality overlap, they are not the same. Gender identity refers to how one identifies one's gender (male, female, genderqueer, transgender, etc.) and sexual identity refers to how one identifies whom they are sexually attracted to (lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, etc.).
 2. The term 'cisgender' refers to people whose lived gender identity matches with the sex (female or male) they were assigned at birth.
 3. The study's methods include critical ethnography, participatory research, and arts-informed research.

tions of homophobia and transphobia and to serve all youth properly; the need to revise the City of Toronto's shelter complaints procedure; and the need to create specialized services for LGBTQ homeless youth. The aims of this chapter are to inform policy and practice, to raise awareness of the ongoing crisis of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Canada, and to share the voices and experiences of LGBTQ street-involved and homeless youth. The voices of LGBTQ homeless and street-involved youth are shared throughout this chapter to raise awareness of the ongoing barriers and challenges faced by this group of youth in the shelter system, as well as to recognize their voices and lived experiences as knowledge. It was particularly important to present the voices of these youth, as it is precisely their voices and experiences that are so often marginalized in society.

(Please note that a glossary of important terms used throughout this document can be found in Appendix A.)

Background

I used to be homeless 3 years ago, just because I slept over at my friend's house and I came home late and my father said, "Where are you coming from? You're sleeping over at a man's house now" and he started calling me names and all this stuff. He asked me if I'm gay, "Batty boy get out me house" and then the man almost cut me up to pieces, so I took my stuff and I left. I disappeared for one year. For one year everybody thought I was dead. [...] He wanted to shoot me. He told me that he wanted to kill me. My father is a bad man. (Homeless youth, 22 years old)

When youth are kicked out or forced to leave home for reasons beyond their control, they are suddenly faced with the stress of street life: finding safety, shelter, and food, often while coping with intense feelings of rejection, trauma, and fear. Although services for homeless youth seek to offer support, a number of LGBTQ youth report conflicting experiences, such as homophobic and transphobic violence within services. Homeless youth experience significantly higher rates of criminal victimization than housed youth (O'Grady & Gaetz, 2004). These rates are higher again for LGBTQ homeless youth, who experience daily incidents of homophobia and transphobia (Dunne et al., 2002; Van Leeuwen et al., 2006). LGBTQ homeless youth are also at greater risk for substance use, risky sexual behaviour, and mental health difficulties, and these risk factors are amplified by the lack of support available (Ray, 2006; Sheriff et al., 2011). Not only do LGBTQ youth face different risks and barriers; their needs also differ from those of their heterosexual and cisgender peers. There is a greater need for acceptance, in the form of safe spaces where youth are able to identify themselves freely (e.g. name, gender, sexuality), as well as specialized programs that address

and acknowledge the impacts that homophobia and transphobia have on this population's wellbeing and mental health (Abramovich, 2012; Ray, 2006).

Toronto is advertised as a safe city for LGBTQ people, a place where same-sex marriage is not only acknowledged and accepted, but even becoming somewhat normalized. This reputation for acceptance attracts thousands of LGBTQ people to Toronto (Carlson, 2012). Nevertheless, homophobic and transphobic violence remains a problem in the City. Additionally, the high prevalence of homelessness in Toronto has made the city known as the homeless capital of Canada (Laird, 2007; Novac et al., 2009). It is estimated that there are approximately 1,500-2,000 homeless youth in Toronto on any given night (Canadian Foundation for Children Youth and the Law, 2011; O'Grady & Gaetz, 2002). The City of Toronto provides funding to 13 youth shelters with a capacity of 529 shelter beds (City of Toronto, 2012). Although there are no shelters for LGBTQ youth in Toronto, there are several specialized evening/drop-in programs offered through the Sherbourne Health Centre: Supporting Our Youth, and the 519 Church Street Community Centre. These programs offer food, subway tokens, activities, and a place to feel safe and accepted; unfortunately, they do not offer a place to sleep. Due to Toronto's queer friendly reputation, LGBTQ youth frequently migrate to Toronto expecting to find support and safety, which unfortunately is not always the case.

A high percentage of people who are homeless happen to be LGBT because they got kicked out of their house, or maybe they lost their job, or they lived in a small town, then they can't pay their rent and where else can they come, but Toronto. (Homeless youth, 27 years old)

While the City of Toronto does not have any shelters for LGBTQ youth, other cities have invested in these resources. For example, there are a number of emergency shelters and transitional living programs for LGBTQ homeless youth in the United States (e.g. Detroit, New York City, Massachusetts). Most notable is the Ali Forney Center in New York City, which has become the nation's largest and most comprehensive organization serving LGBTQ homeless youth (Siciliano, 2012). The Ali Forney Center was named after a homeless transgender youth who was murdered in New York City. The center offers emergency housing, transitional housing, as well as day programs such as street outreach, medical care, HIV testing, mental health assessment and treatment, and workshops on LGBTQ issues for service providers. The Ali Forney Center is recognized for the specialized care and support they have been providing to LGBTQ homeless youth since 2002 (Siciliano, 2012). Moving forward, the City of Toronto could use the Ali Forney Center as a blueprint for creating a broader action plan to develop services and meet the needs of LGBTQ homeless youth in Toronto.

Results

[Homophobia and transphobia] is the number one reason why we have so many homeless people. [...] I had a few friends who killed themselves because they couldn't deal with it; what other people said about them, their parents kicked them out and didn't listen to them. [...] A lot of these guys they do not want to go to the shelter. That is most of them, being stubborn and staying on the street, because they are afraid to be in the shelter. Do you know what they do you to you in the shelter? They tie you to the bed and they beat the shit out of you. (Homeless youth, 22 years old)

During the first stage of data collection, a number of focus groups and one-on-one interviews were conducted with adults who work in the shelter system, including frontline shelter workers, shelter executive directors and management from the City of Toronto's Shelter, Support and Housing Administration. I also observed three mandatory training workshops for shelter staff, and interviewed the facilitators of each workshop. All interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide, were recorded and transcribed verbatim (word for word), and took place in a private office at the interviewees' places of work. There were three aims to interviewing professionals in the shelter system: first, to learn what the adults who work in the shelter system have to say about the issue of LGBTQ youth homelessness; second, to explore their level of preparedness in dealing with situations of homophobia and transphobia; and third, to learn more about the anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia training that shelter staff receive.

During the second stage of data collection, eleven LGBTQ youth who are either homeless or street-involved in Toronto were interviewed about their experiences with the shelter system and the problems and barriers they deal with on a daily basis. These interviews were also semi-structured and were conducted in private offices at the Sherbourne Health Centre and the Queen West Community Health Centre in Toronto. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The purpose of this stage was to identify the local problems faced by LGBTQ youth who are homeless in the city of Toronto and to learn more about their experiences with the shelter system and where they found support.

Several of the core findings were selected for the purpose of this chapter and are presented as follows:

Perceptions of Homophobia and Transphobia

Shelter staff were asked about their understanding and perceptions of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system. Major differences were revealed

in the ways that they perceived these issues. Some staff acknowledged that homophobia and transphobia are problems in the shelter they work in, as well as in the shelter system more broadly, while others did not think it was a problem at all, but rather believed that some youth use the term ‘homophobia’ as a way to protect themselves. For example, one staff member stated:

I've seen something here where they started an altercation but it wasn't about because he's a gay or he's a something different orientation where they are fighting with each other that was about something else. But this is a way to protect themselves, "Oh because I'm gay he's attacking me". It's not true, no. It's not true in any cases, no.
(Staff member, Blue Door Shelter)

In contrast, there were staff who recognized homophobia and transphobia as daily occurrences in the shelter system, which sometimes are ignored by overworked staff who are too exhausted to intervene when such incidents occur. One staff member stated:

I do know that there are many instances in the shelters and in a lot of the places that I've worked, that what happens a lot of the times is that staff will turn a blind eye to it or not address it or just not put their foot down about it and I think that that's where a lot of the gaps in the systems lie. Or just burned out staff who may not necessarily be doing rounds. Like there was an incident at one of the youth shelter's with one of our clients who was beaten up [because he was gay] in the shower there and it was a pretty brutal beating and staff didn't know about it. (Staff member, Turning Point Youth Shelter)

Training

Frontline shelter workers were asked to describe the level of anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia training they had received to date, either inside or outside of their current workplace. Participants reported that they had not received any formal anti-homophobia training – all focus groups expressed the need for this, as well as for training regarding LGBTQ culture and terminology. The Toronto Hostels Training Centre (THTC), run by the City of Toronto, provides all mandatory training workshops, as well as additional training, to shelter staff. THTC offered anti-homophobia training in 2001-2002; however, the training was never made mandatory and the workshop was discontinued due to low registration. In recent years, shelter workers have made ongoing requests both verbally and on workshop evaluation forms for anti-homophobia training, however, THTC still does not

offer this type of training⁴.

A number of participants had taken anti-oppression and/or transgender 101 workshops at THTC. However, many of them had received the training years ago. For example, one staff member reported that he had been working in the shelter system for 10 years and had only taken one anti-oppression workshop during his first year of work and had never had any follow-up training. The focus group data suggested that staff want and see the importance of ongoing anti-oppression, transgender 101, and anti-homophobia training.

Complaints Procedure

The City of Toronto – Hostel Services, has a complaints procedure in place for shelter residents and staff, which allows them to file complaints by telephone, fax, letter, email, or in person. The Hostels Complaints and General Inquiry number is supposed to be posted in a visible area in all shelters. The phone line accepts calls between the hours of 8:30am-4:30pm from Monday to Friday. All complaints are input into an electronic complaints tracker and the tracker captures who is calling, when, why, etc. Calls are tracked by demographic (single women, single men, youth, etc.) and are separated by the nature of the complaint. This procedure allows the City of Toronto to keep track of the types of complaints that are lodged, which provides them with information on the problems that are occurring in the shelter system. Hostel Services receives approximately 300 complaints per year and not surprisingly, the majority of complaints are lodged by the adult sector, as adults make up the majority of the shelter system. It was found that youth file the fewest complaints and there have been no known complaints from the youth sector in relation to transphobia or homophobia dating back to 2009. However, there is only one complaint per year filed in relation to transphobia or homophobia amongst the entire population of single adult users of the shelter system, with access to shelter being the nature of the complaints (e.g. being denied service at a particular shelter, shelter being full, etc.)

Although there are violent occurrences as a result of homophobia and transphobia in the youth sector of the shelter system, as described in the staff quotation above, the City of Toronto has no record of such occurrences. This suggests that incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence in the shelter system are not being reported. Among the youth interviewed, 73% did not know that the complaints procedure existed. When asked if they would ever file a complaint, 82% of youth stated that they would not, because it is an inaccessible

4. Since collecting data for this study, THTC reintroduced an introductory level homophobia and heterosexism workshop in March 2012, however, it is not considered mandatory training for shelter workers.

and unrealistic system from their point of view. For example, one youth stated:

I did not know about this, this is the first that I've heard of this, which is interesting, having been involved in the shelter system. You said there is a number that people can call? Yeah, all these street-involved youth have these magical cell phones with unlimited minutes to just call in this number that we are going to retain in our magic brains because we are not focused on other things. Sorry that was completely sarcastic, just to be clear. That doesn't really sound accessible to me. Like, you know what I mean? Oh I have to take time out of my day, quarters out of my pocket to call you from a payphone, to tell you how I just got the shit beat out of me? No, that's not happening. [...] That just seems completely unrealistic, like many things that the city does. It's a government, it's a system and it's not always in the best interest of the people, especially those who need it most. (Homeless youth, 26 years old)

Other youth reported that the complaints procedure was of little use to them after a threatening or violent occurrence and believed that filing a complaint would not solve or change anything:

That's literally of no value to anyone because you are in the situation which you are trying to get out of, unless there is someone right there in order to help you, sorry not to be rude but what am I going to say, oh yeah, this happened, now what? It's like, not worth the time. (Homeless youth, 27 years old)

Youth stated that the complaints procedure is not always made accessible to them in shelters for various reasons. Several youth stated that they believed that staff do not want residents complaining for fear of receiving less funding from the City of Toronto.

The number is not made accessible and I think that sometimes the shelters don't want you to know about that, cause staff want a pay cheque and a lot of times staff are just there for a pay cheque. It's sad to say. Some staffs really do care, but some are just there for a pay cheque. (Homeless youth, 24 years old)

Additional reasons for not reporting incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence given by youth included their own sense of pride, wanting to appear tough, social pressure to fit in, and internalized homophobia and transphobia. For example, one youth stated:

I don't know if a lot of it is really reported, honestly, I don't know how much is, honestly, a lot of gay kids take it, really, a lot of them do, they take it and they don't say anything. [...] It is a big thing in this town. It's huge, with the shelter boys and the street boys. They have internal homophobia. And it's very dangerous. (Homeless youth, 26 years old)

Specialized Services

Another key theme that arose was the need for a specialized LGBTQ youth shelter in Toronto. All participants were asked a number of questions regarding the idea of a specialized LGBTQ youth shelter. There was consensus amongst the youth participants that a LGBTQ youth shelter is necessary and urgently needed in Toronto. All youth participants stated that such a service would have been helpful to them at different points while they were homeless, especially during crisis situations. One youth participant spoke about living in a park for four months because he did not feel safe in the shelter system due to the homophobia and transphobia he had experienced:

I was taking so many sleeping pills, so I would sleep through the night. Often if it went below 30 degrees or something, I was just like fuck this. Safer for me to be popping pills and sleeping outside in minus zero degree weather than being in the shelter system, [because of] transphobia and homophobia. (Homeless youth, 26 years old)

A number of shelter workers, executive directors, and workshop facilitators were shocked to find out that there are no LGBTQ youth shelters in Canada. However, they held varying views on the need for such a shelter. Some believed that it would be an essential service to help youth feel comfortable and safe, while others were uncertain because they worried about the implications of a segregated shelter and whether other shelters in the broader system would stop working on creating an inclusive environment for LGBTQ youth. Most agreed that it would be important to first get insight from LGBTQ homeless youth on whether they would access such a shelter.

Support services play a crucial role in fulfilling homeless youths' daily needs, such as shelter, food, healthcare, and presumably safety. However, it is essential that services be equipped to deal with the wide-ranging needs of youth, which have undoubtedly become more complex and diverse since the first shelters were established in the city of Toronto approximately thirty years ago (Youth Shelter Interagency Network, 2007). Today's homeless youth are faced with problems such as homophobia, transphobia, immigration, legal issues, HIV/AIDS, etc. Support services must be revised and adapted to reflect the changing needs of youth. Both

the adult and youth participants felt strongly that even with a specialized shelter for LGBTQ youth, it would still be crucial for other shelters to work on inclusion and safety, so that there is not just one designated space for LGBTQ homeless youth. This was mainly because LGBTQ youth would continue to access other shelters for various reasons (e.g. if they were discharged or restricted from the specialized shelter, not all LGBTQ youth could access a specialized shelter, etc.).

Specialized services for certain populations are crucial in meeting the needs of homeless youth and decreasing the threat of violence and discrimination (Cull 2006; Ray 2006). However, in the City of Toronto there is reluctance to create a specialized shelter for LGBTQ youth, due to a variety of opinions and beliefs. For example, some people believe that segregating LGBTQ youth in a specialized shelter will lead to further marginalization, but that allotting a number of beds to LGBTQ youth within a shelter would not cause the same problems.

This reluctance does not reflect the experience of many LGBTQ youth, who when interviewed talked about the value of such a resource. While a specialized shelter is not a solution to homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system, it is a way of responding to a situation that youth have described as unsafe. For example, one youth stated:

They need to have more LGBT housing workers to go around and deal with the queer youth to get them off the street. There should be someone going around and doing more outreach for the people who are in Cawthra Park [Toronto's gay village] at 2 o'clock in the morning, cause they have nowhere else to sleep. (Homeless youth, 27 years old)

Discrimination against transgender youth on the streets and in the shelter system is rampant: transgender youth face more discrimination than any other youth group (Quintana et al., 2010). Enforcing gender-related shelter rules, such as segregating sleeping spaces by birth sex, which is often done, increases the risk of transphobic violence in the shelter system. Currently, there are several youth shelters in Toronto that allocate 1-2 beds to transgender youth, which is problematic because it segregates youth in a way that forces them to out themselves as transgender to everyone else in the shelter. For this reason many transgender youth avoid the shelter system altogether, even at the cost of putting their safety at additional risk. For example, one youth stated:

I just think it's easier and safer to not be in a homeless shelter, even if it means being with somebody who might not be safe or being in a situation that might not be safe. It [LGBTQ shelter] would just be like more inclusive and instead of having one bed and having to out

yourself as trans to some random worker I think everyone else in the shelter would know and then people wouldn't be like, "why do you get your room all to yourself?" (Homeless youth, 27 years old)

When asked about the key elements that youth participants thought would be necessary for a successful specialized shelter, a number of youth stated that it would be essential to have LGBTQ staff and volunteers working at the organization, which would help them feel safer and more understood. Numerous youth also discussed feeling disappointed that there is never any mention of gender or sexual identity upon arrival at shelters and that offering information or resources related to gender and sexual identity would be helpful and put a lot of youth at ease. For example, one youth stated:

The intake was so shitty in terms of trans stuff, there's just no room for trans or even LGBTQ stuff on their intake. I tried to incorporate it in, cause they are like, 'do you need tokens to go to your appointments?' And I'm like 'yes! I'm going to this trans program Monday, this trans program Tuesday, this one at Sherbourne, this one at 519', and they just kind of ignored that. I just found it really shitty and I was in crisis. I hadn't slept for four days and it was January, so it was peak of the winter and I was just so cold. (Homeless youth, 26 years old)

The preliminary findings presented in this chapter indicate that people who work within the shelter system have conflicting perceptions of homophobic and transphobic violence that occurs in the shelter system. This may be due to a combination of youth not reporting occurrences of homophobia and transphobia, overworked staff ignoring or not noticing such situations, and an inaccessible complaints procedure. We have also discovered that shelter staff have limited knowledge of LGBTQ culture and terminology and receive no formal anti-homophobia training. Nonetheless, there certainly are individuals working in the shelter system who not only understand the marginalization of LGBTQ homeless youth, but also have a desire to make the shelter system a safer place for these youth.

Informing Policy and Practice

Systemically there aren't policies that necessarily protect people and talk about inclusion from a useful perspective, address the kinds of barriers that exist for trans people for example. They need policies about access and intake. There need to be policies that say if a trans person comes into the shelter, they will be served in the gender in which they've identified as the safest and most comfortable for them. [...] The onus is on the agency to make the space safer. That needs to be there. And that hasn't happened yet. (Staff member, 519 Church Street Community Centre)

The epidemic of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Canada has yet to be fully investigated or understood. LGBTQ youth are not only at a higher risk of homelessness, but also commonly experience homophobia and transphobia within the shelter system. Due to gaps in knowledge and a lack of reported incidents, discrimination against these youth remains largely invisible to policy makers and shelter management at a time when LGBTQ youth homelessness is on the rise (Abramovich, 2012; Denomme-Welch et al., 2008; Yonge Street Mission, 2009). Service providers are not fully equipped or prepared to deal with issues of homophobia and transphobia in the youth shelter system. Currently there are few specialized support services and no specialized shelters in Canada that meet the needs of LGBTQ youth. The impact this lack of support has on this population's health and wellbeing has yet to be revealed.

The present research informs social service and shelter providers and policy makers about the issues of LGBTQ youth homelessness and the need to fund a specialized LGBTQ shelter, anti-homophobia/anti-transphobia training for shelter staff, and further research in this area. This research not only contributes to education and awareness around youth homelessness, but it also provides new and surprising findings on current issues faced by LGBTQ youth who are homeless in Toronto.

The lack of awareness of LGBTQ youth homelessness and the daily occurrences of homophobia and transphobia experienced by youth keep major decision makers from implementing necessary changes in the shelter system and to support services so that LGBTQ youth receive the supports they need. Further research in the area of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Canada will undoubtedly expand our understanding in this area and will help us create policy recommendations and best practice guidelines. The present research asks policy makers to develop supportive policies for LGBTQ youth and to modify existing policies to ensure that the shelter system provides high-quality support to all youth, regardless of their sexual and gender identities. Currently, there are a number of successful LGBTQ youth shelters in the United States, which the City of Toronto can look to for best practice guidelines (Ray, 2006; Wilber et al., 2006).

Policy and practice recommendations include:

- Immediately provide mandatory anti-homophobia training at the Toronto Hostels Training Centre for shelter staff. The City of Toronto needs to revise the shelter standards to include stronger guidelines for ongoing mandatory anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia training.
- Revise the City of Toronto's shelter system complaint procedure to have stricter guidelines for shelters so that each youth is informed

upon arrival, both verbally as well as on paper, of all the details regarding the complaint procedure and the importance of reporting incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence. In order to find out how to make the complaint procedure more accessible and useful, and how to get youth to use it and report incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence, youth should be involved in the revision process.

- Reduce and eliminate the barriers to services experienced by LGBTQ youth by creating shelter policies that allow youth to identify their sexuality, gender, preferred names, and pronouns, rather than having staff make assumptions about sexual and/or gender identity. All shelters must be equipped with appropriate resources for youth (e.g. information about coming out, sexual identity, and gender identity, as well as information on any local services that address gender identity and sexual orientation) and knowledge to refer transgender youth to transition-related treatment (e.g. hormone therapy, name change, counseling).
- Shelters should have strict anti-homophobic and transphobic language policies and have residents sign written agreement forms when checking in to the shelter to comply with the language policy.
- Shelters that have implemented all of the above changes should openly identify as LGBTQ positive by posting a rainbow flag or positive space sticker on their front door.
- The City of Toronto should immediately develop and fund a specialized shelter for LGBTQ youth. The shelter should provide a positive, safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ youth, as well as short-term assistance, emergency shelter, food, clothing, treatment and counseling, health care, separate washrooms and showers, private rooms, information and referrals. The City of Toronto should look to the specialized LGBTQ shelters and supportive housing facilities in the United States (e.g. The Ali Forney Center and the True Colors Residence) as models.
- Funding/resources are needed for further research on LGBTQ youth homelessness and a needs assessment of LGBTQ homeless youth in Canada.

Concluding Comments

Everybody seems to be down and when we have these pressures, homophobia, well guess what, now people have to guard themselves all the time. That guy's crying, this girl's crying, that kid looks so sad, this kid just wants to talk to somebody, that kid's dying on the inside. It's a big

problem. There's a big social thing going on here with all the kids and they're all dying to just talk to somebody. [...] A community would look like people looking out for the best interests of kids. That's a community. There's no other such thing as a community. I'm Native, we know that. It's about the kids. It's not about nobody else. You're supposed to be watching out for them, no matter what. (Homeless youth, 26 years old)

This study begins to demonstrate the dire need for specialized services that create safe spaces for LGBTQ homeless youth, for stricter policies in the shelter system against homophobia and transphobia, and for more discussions of inclusion and acceptance among shelter providers and workers. Professionals working with homeless youth, as well as the general public, need a solid understanding of the impacts of homophobia and transphobia on the lives of people who identify as LGBTQ, and of the ways in which the LGBTQ community has been and still is marginalized and oppressed. May we start this important work by raising awareness of the growing problem of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Canada and by naming the hate that leads so many youth to homelessness.

Moving forward, I hope these findings will help fill some of the gaps in knowledge around LGBTQ youth homelessness and that this study can serve as an important call to action for all levels of government, policy makers, shelter directors, shelter staff, youth, and the general public to become more inclusive, accepting, and supportive of all youth regardless of what they look like or who they love.

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Appendix A: Glossary of Important Terms

Cisgender	When a person's gender identity matches with their body and sex assigned at birth.
Coming-out	The process of coming to terms with one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity and disclosing it to others. Heterosexuality and fixed gender states that fit into the binary of "female" and "male" are typically assumed by others, therefore, coming-out is an ongoing process.
FTM	A person, who was assigned the female sex at birth, but identifies as male. Also, trans man or transman. FTM is the acronym for Female-to-Male.
Gender identity	A person's deep internal feeling of whether they identify as being female, male, something in between, genderqueer, or something other.
Heteronormativity	The belief that heterosexuality is the 'normal' sexual orientation. Also refers to the belief that female and male gender roles are fixed.
Homeless	People who lack a stable living situation, such as those who are living on the streets, in the shelter system, couch surfing, or in temporary or marginal shelter.
Homophobia	Feelings of rage, hate, and disapproval of homosexuality. Homophobia can be manifested in numerous ways, such as verbally, emotionally, and through physical attacks.
LGBTQ	Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and queer, questioning.
LGB	Acronym for lesbian, gay, and bisexual.
MTF	A person, who was assigned the male sex at birth, but identifies as female. Also, trans woman or transwoman. MTF is the acronym for Male-to-Female.
Queer	An umbrella term for LGBTQ. Also a term of self-identification for people who do not identify with binary terms that describe sexual and gender identities.
Sexual identity	How a person identifies whom they are sexually and romantically attracted to (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, etc.)
Transgender	An umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity does not match with the sex they were assigned at birth. This term can encompass those who identify as transsexual, genderqueer, cross-dresser, and others whose gender identities challenge gender norms.
Transphobia	Feelings of rage, hate, and disapproval towards transgender people or people who are gender-nonconforming. Transphobia can be manifested in numerous ways, such as verbally, emotionally, and through physical attacks.
Youth	People between adolescence and young adulthood. Youth programs typically categorize youth between the ages of 16 and 26 years old.

24

Shaking Off the Colonial Inheritance: Homeless Indigenous Youth Resist, Reclaim and Reconnect

Cyndy Baskin

Introduction

What does it mean and what does it look like for all members of a community to be a part of a child's family? What is involved in the raising of children when every person in a community has a role to play? Within Indigenous worldviews, this means that every individual has a contribution to make, not only to their biological children, adopted children, nieces and nephews, and children in their care at a particular time, but to all children who live around them or who belong to their community. Family includes the extended family, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles and members of the child's clan. This means that all community members have a right and a responsibility to care for all children, who are seen as gifts from the Creator. As stated by Greenwood and de Leeuw, "children, particularly young children, cannot of course be disentangled from the broader families, communities, and Nations that sustain them" (2007:51). In practice, communal care for children means that they often live in homes with both parents and grandparents; that they may live at times with their parents and at other times with grandparents or other extended family members to learn whatever such members may teach them; and, that if biological parents are struggling with raising their children for

any reason, not only family members, but also community members who are in a position to assist, will do so by taking in these children. There is no stigma connected to not living with one's biological parents. In fact, in the past, living with extended family members and moving from one household to another has always been viewed as the norm in Indigenous communities (Baskin, 2011).

Although these beliefs are still alive within Indigenous families and communities, they often are not put into action. This is the result of centuries of colonization, which continues to negatively impact Indigenous Peoples today. Many reports and publications by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers view the child welfare system as a strong arm of colonization (Bennett et al., 2005; Blackstock, 2009; First Nations Child and Family Task Force, 1993; Trocme et al., 2004; Thibodeau & Peigan, 2007). According to one report, women most likely to lose their children were poor, young, Indigenous, and came from families that had previous involvement with the child welfare system (Rutman et al., 2005). Another report states that young Indigenous women in Canada have the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy when compared to non-Indigenous females of the same age. In fact, First Nations female adolescents are four times more likely to become pregnant than non-First Nations adolescents, and Inuit adolescents are 12 times more likely than non-Inuit adolescents to become pregnant (Ordolis, 2007). Ordolis links the high rates of Indigenous adolescent pregnancy to socio-economic inequalities such as poverty, as adolescents may not be able to afford birth control, are not educated about effective methods of birth control, see having children as a way out of their family homes or as a way to create some sort of happiness and purpose in their lives, and have few role models who show them anything different (Ordolis, 2007).

Demographically, Indigenous women in Canada are more than twice as likely to be single parents compared to non-Indigenous women (19% vs. 8%) and typically have more children than non-Indigenous women (2.6 children over a lifetime compared with 1.5 children) (Niccols et al., 2010a). For women who occupy disadvantaged and marginalized social positions, the removal of children by child welfare agencies is most often based on "neglect" (Niccols et al., 2010a; Niccols et al., 2010b). According to Niccols et al., "neglect is a direct consequence of abject degrees of poverty, poor housing conditions and high instances of alcohol and substance abuse" (2010a:324). They also point to serious social and economic challenges such as homelessness, lack of affordable housing, and the struggle to provide "stable and nurturing" environments for children as barriers to women's ability to parent (2010a:324). This analysis is gaining attention as a perspective from which to examine how social structures and systems impact upon individuals, families and communities (de Leeuw et al., 2010; Loppie-Reading & Wien, 2009).

In order to understand the current struggles of Indigenous Peoples today, one needs to understand the history and treatment of Indigenous Peoples since the time of contact with those who came from European countries. It is crucial to acknowledge the historical and intergenerational impacts of colonization on the lives of Indigenous Peoples. Colonization can be understood as the settlement of Turtle Island¹ by French and British settlers in the 1500s, which signaled the beginning of troubling times for Indigenous Peoples (Miller, 2000). Colonialism brought disease, death, and displacement of Indigenous Peoples through forced settlement on reserves (putting an end to traditional, sustainable, nomadic ways of life), imposition of government legislation such as the Indian Act, legislated assimilation policies such as the loss of Indian status in exchange for the right to vote in Canadian elections or to attend university, residential schooling, harmful child welfare practices (such as the “60s scoop,” where thousands of Indigenous children were taken from their homes and communities by child protection agencies during the 1960s), and the ongoing marginalization of Indigenous Peoples (Miller, 2000). It is this long lasting colonial legacy that is seen as the major contributor to the contemporary social ills that plague Indigenous Peoples today (Bombay et al., 2009; Chansonneuve, 2008; de Leeuw et al., 2010; Ordolis, 2007; Sheppard et al., 2006).

Intergenerational trauma, also referred to in political terms as historical trauma, explains how traumatic experiences from colonialism have been carried over from one generation of Indigenous Peoples to the next (Bombay et al., 2009). Two of the intergenerational experiences that have impacted Indigenous Peoples in particular are residential schools and the child welfare system, which resulted in the breakdown of traditional Indigenous kinship and family structures, impacting parenting across generations and disrupting traditional systems of social support (Horejsi et al., 1992; Niccols et al., 2010a; 2010b; Rutman et al., 2005; Shepard et al., 2006; Thibodeau & Peigan, 2007).

The residential school system is an example of Canada’s shameful “Indian” policies used over a long period of time (Dion Stout & Kipling, 2003). These institutions, whose legacy continues to impact Indigenous families, disrupted and even destroyed many traditional ways of life for Indigenous Peoples. Residential schools removed children at an early age from their homes and communities, and forced them to live within these institutions, where Indigenous languages and cultures were forbidden. In recent years, many Indigenous people have disclosed their experiences in these schools, which include painful stories of sexual and physical abuse by authorities who operated the schools and the death of many children at the hands of these same authorities (Annett, 2007; Dion Stout & Kipling 2003).

1. A name that originates from the Haudenosaunee (“People of the Longhouse”) for the North American continent, which is now used by many Indigenous groups.

The purpose of this chapter, which is based on findings from four research projects that took place in Toronto, is to explore with homeless Indigenous youth the conditions under which they became homeless, including the impacts of historical trauma from the residential school and child welfare systems, how they can be helped today, and what can be done to prevent homelessness from continuing in the future.

Institutional Child Protection: Structural Racism

Indigenous People's history and experiences with the child welfare system often paint stories of troubling, discriminatory and harmful interactions that have left deep scars in the memory, and present day reality, of Indigenous Peoples. In Canada, there are three times more Indigenous children in the child welfare system today than the number of children in residential schools at their height in the 1940s (de Leeuw et al., 2010; Salmon, 2010). The child welfare system continues to be criticized for placing more emphasis on the removal of Indigenous children from their families than on addressing the root causes that impact Indigenous Peoples' ability to parent (Ordolis, 2007). A major area of concern is that the policy behind child protection work continues to push "the best interests of the child" (as defined by mainstream society) rather than seeking the well-being of the family (as defined by Indigenous worldviews) (Rutman et al., 2005).

Child protection is an extension of colonization in the tradition of residential schooling, as it has continued to remove children from their communities rather than providing the financial and social supports necessary to help families care for their children within Indigenous worldviews. For many Indigenous families, the impacts of colonization are often interpreted as individual psychopathologies, meaning that individual parents are seen as lacking parenting skills or misusing substances, rather than taking into consideration how colonization destroyed Indigenous economies and methods of collectively raising children. Such assessments, usually by professional social workers, may lead to the removal of children from Indigenous families. As stated by Blackstock of the Gitksan Nation, director of First Peoples Child and Family Caring Society, "the concept that we [social workers] can do harm or even do evil rarely appears on the optical radar screen of professional training, legislation or practice" (2009:31). Based on the assessments of mainly non-Indigenous social workers, Indigenous children are then placed in mostly white foster homes, which often lead to more white foster homes, adoptive homes or group homes.

The documented experiences of Indigenous youth involved in the child welfare system too often include histories of violence, sexual and physical abuse, mental health challenges, incarceration, poverty, homelessness, stigma, racism, and

struggles with identity (Baskin, 2007; 2009; 2011; BCCEWH, 2010; Bombay et al., 2009; Chansonneuve, 2008; de Leeuw et al., 2010; Fry, 2010; Horejsi et al., 1992; Niccols et al., 2010a; 2010b; NWAC, 2007; Ordolis, 2007; Pacey, 2009; Salmon, 2007; Smith et al., 2006; Shepard et al., 2006). All of these histories apply to Indigenous adults as well; however, an important difference between homeless adults and homeless youth is that youth are forced to leave home at an early age, before they have a chance to fully develop into adults (Cauce & Morgan, 1994; Fitzgerald, 1995; Golden et al., 1999; MacLean et al., 1999). Generally, many Indigenous youth who are homeless come from the care of the child protection system, such as adoptive, foster or group homes (Cauce & Morgan, 1994; Fall & Berg, 1996; Fitzgerald, 1995; Lindsey et al., 2000; Maclean et al., 1999; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). In fact, according to one study, between 25% and 50% of homeless Indigenous youth were previously in the care of foster homes (Lindsey et al., 2000). This is supported by a 2006 report from the Public Health Agency of Canada that states that over half of homeless youth have gone through the child welfare system. In these foster homes, away from their families, cultures and communities, Indigenous children and youth are stripped of their identities (spirituality, languages and cultural practices) (Blackstock, 2008; 2009; Carriere, 2005; 2006; 2008; Carriere & Scarth, 2007; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Hughes, 2006; Reid, 2005; Richardson & Nelson, 2007; Sinclair, 2007; Trocme et al., 2004). Even without any form of direct abuse, this psychological, emotional and spiritual neglect may harm children (Blackstock, 2008; 2009; Carriere, 2005; 2006; 2008; Carriere & Scarth, 2007; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Hughes, 2006; Reid, 2005; Richardson & Nelson, 2007; Sinclair, 2007; Trocme et al., 2004). Once child protection takes over the lives of Indigenous children, the children are often worse off than with their biological families because of abuse and/or disconnection from their communities and cultures (Blackstock, 2008; 2009; Sinclair, 2007; Trocme et al., 2004).

Once a child becomes an adolescent, when issues of identity become extremely important, they begin to question and challenge their situations, and their behaviour can be seen as confrontational, rebellious and disrespectful. These responses on the part of Indigenous youth often lead to behaviours (i.e. not going to school, ignoring the house rules, staying out all night and projecting their anger onto family members) that are viewed as problematic by their foster and adoptive families. These behaviours build over time and become more frequent with foster and adoptive families not understanding the reasons for such “acting out” and responding in punitive ways, which leads to youth running away, or being told to leave the home. From a structural perspective, this is a direct result of an oppressive system that removes Indigenous children in the first place, rather than simply being the result of individual problems in the foster, adoptive or group homes. Perhaps a better way to decrease the rate of homelessness among

youth is to prevent them from being removed from their communities or from leaving adoptive and foster homes in the first place. To accomplish this, we must understand why so many Indigenous children are removed from their families by child protection and why youth feel compelled to leave their adoptive and foster homes before they are fully developed adults (Baskin, 2007; Fitzgerald, 1995; Maclean et al., 1999). Since Indigenous youth are overrepresented in the child welfare system (Blackstock, 2008; 2009; Du Hamel, 2003; Thomas, 2003) and likely make up a large percentage of the homeless population (Golden et al., 1999), it may be important to explore a possible link between these. Perhaps by examining the gaps in the child welfare system, including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous child protection agencies, areas for positive change can be found to better serve Indigenous youth who may be currently at risk of homelessness, and to prevent the next generation of children from becoming homeless.

Along these lines, one hopeful change lies in Bill 210 of the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA). Often referred to as the “Transformation Agenda”, this amendment, added in 2005, focuses on differential responses (more family centered so that children can live with extended family members rather than go into foster care with people they do not know), alternative conflict resolution (alternatives to court proceedings, which occur when child welfare workers apprehend children or need to make them permanent wards of the state) and planning for permanent care (care by extended family members, or adoption) (Ministry of Child and Youth Services, 2011). Bill 210 also requires child welfare workers to inquire whether the child has Indian status. Frankly, however, Indigenous child welfare agencies and their advocates have been suggesting these changes to the CFSA and have been using such practices for many years (Ministry of Child and Youth Services, 2010). Exploratory research from 2006 – 2010 on the implementation of the Transformation Agenda indicates that “generally less children are being admitted into care, more children are spending time in family-based care and there is less court involvement” since these changes were put in place (Goodman & Chung, 2011:3). Unfortunately, however, there are no references to Indigenous families in this research, and the authors caution that the results are still early and further evaluation is needed.

Youth Participants

Many sources state that there is no accurate data regarding numbers of homeless Indigenous people, let alone Indigenous youth (Golden et al., 1999; Layton, 2000; Native Counseling Service of Alberta, 2000; UNNS, 2001). In *Homelessness: The Making and Unmaking of a Crisis* (Layton, 2000), existing statistics show that Indigenous Peoples in general do have a high rate of homelessness as compared to the rest of Canadian society. The Native Counseling Service

of Alberta states that about 40% of homeless people in Canada are Aboriginal (NCSA, 2000: 3). Golden et al., report that Indigenous people make up 15% of the homeless population in Toronto and that “many Aboriginal Canadian youth from reserves and urban communities end up on the streets of Toronto” (1999:75). These statistics are troubling given that only four percent of the total Canadian population report some Indigenous ancestry (Statistics Canada, 2008a). It is important to note, however, that these statistics are usually taken from the number of shelter users, while many Indigenous people do not use the mainstream shelter system. The UNNS (2001) indicates that shelter users do not represent the entire Indigenous homeless population. Indigenous communities within cities are believed to have a high rate of concealed homelessness, and these numbers are not included in the official data. Concealed homelessness describes those in transition homes, jails and detox centers, and those who live in overcrowded, unstable, or inadequate housing. This also includes “couch surfing,” (when people stay with friends or family members for a short period of time, then move on to another person’s home). Another category that often goes unnoticed is people at risk of becoming homeless. This category consists of many Indigenous people who live in poor housing conditions and pay more than 30% of their income on rent. To completely capture the Indigenous homeless population, all of these categories of homelessness must be included (UNNS, 2001).

According to Statistics Canada (2008a), the Indigenous population is increasing: it has grown by 45% from 1996 to 2006, as compared to 8% for the rest of the Canadian population. Furthermore, children and youth aged 24 and under make up almost one-half (48%) of all Indigenous people, compared with 31% of the non-Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2008b). Castellano (2002) found that over 50% of the Indigenous population is under 25. Thus, not only is it likely that there is a high rate of Indigenous-specific homelessness, but it is also likely that a substantially higher rate of youth are homeless within this population.

Four research projects were conducted with Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness or at high risk of becoming homeless in Toronto from 2005 to 2011:

Project 1: Indigenous research methods, including the Medicine Wheel, a well-known symbol within many Indigenous Nations (which includes four quadrants), and the sharing circle (where participants take turns speaking about the topic) were implemented with 30 youth aged 15 – 24 who identified as homeless. Youth were invited to talk about how/where they grew up (eastern quadrant on the Medicine Wheel), what led to their becoming homeless (southern quadrant), what/who was helping them at the time of the project (western quadrant) and what suggestions they had for preventing future youth from becoming homeless (northern quadrant).

Project 2: This project explored how homelessness affects food security and involved 21 young Indigenous mothers aged 20 – 30² years old. They expressed their responses to the topic through a sharing circle and arts based methods (the women and their children created a mural from their responses).

Project 3: Also implementing the sharing circle and arts based methods, this project explored the connection between homelessness and poverty through the eyes of 12 Indigenous youth aged 20 – 30.

Project 4: Through the Medicine Wheel and sharing circles, 40 young mothers aged 18 – 30, 15 child welfare workers and 9 substance misuse treatment counselors (in separate groups) discussed their thoughts and experiences regarding possible relationships between homelessness, child welfare involvement and substance misuse.

Within the four research projects conducted with Indigenous youth, the most common themes found in the youth profiles included: 1) most did not grow up with their biological parents, and 2) their grandparents and parents had involvement with residential schooling and/or child welfare system as children. Many of them did not have what mainstream society would consider a “traditional” family. Rather, they grew up in non-Indigenous families they did not know, moved from one foster home to another or went back and forth between their biological and foster families. Many of these youth were placed as babies and young children into homes where they experienced abuse, neglect and racism (as a young child, one female youth was nicknamed “squaw” in a foster home). Neglect and racism also include lack of contact with Indigenous cultures, spirituality and other Indigenous people (Baskin, 2007; Carriere, 2006; Carriere, 2008; Carriere & Scarth, 2007; Sinclair, 2007; Thibodeau & Peigan, 2007).

Based on the topics of discussion that were put to the youth who participated in these projects, they connected their present or recent homelessness to their personal experiences of childhood trauma and also to a community struggling with the ongoing effects of colonization. The majority of the Indigenous youth in these projects spoke about the ongoing relationship of their families with institutionalized “care” of children. Many told stories of their grandparents growing up in residential schools, and of their parents and themselves growing up in foster care. Some who are now parents shared stories of their own children’s involvement in the child welfare system. These youth are not only living with their own trauma, but they carry that of their parents and grandparents as well. This is historical trauma.

2. In Indigenous communities today, people are considered to be youth until the age of 30.

One of the youth framed the impacts of trauma from growing up in numerous foster homes in the following way:

I never had a childhood. I went from a baby to an adult. I had to do things on my own. If I did anything wrong, I was beaten....I was no good at school. I can't read or write. I try, but I can't do it and that's because of being in and out of foster homes – 17 different foster homes, 14 different schools (Baskin et al., in press).

A substance misuse counselor who was interviewed for one of the projects added, “the system is biased, but it’s biased in terms of it doesn’t even understand the healing process” when it comes to historical trauma.

Youth who participated in the four research projects clearly believed that the child welfare system was difficult for them, their families and communities because, according to them, it mirrored residential schooling. The impact of the residential school system is a significant historical trauma that these youth have inherited from their grandparents and parents. Youths’ suggestions on how to make the child welfare system more helpful for Indigenous youth fell into three categories, discussed below: 1) the need to keep families intact and accept alternative forms of family; 2) the need to incorporate Indigenous worldviews and Indigenous social workers into the child welfare system; and 3) the need to address the effects of colonization.

Need to Keep Families Intact and Accept Alternate Forms of Family

One of the counselors who participated in research project number four provided an example of how the criminal justice and child welfare systems as racist because they make it impossible for some extended family members to care for their young relatives:

If women say, “I want my children to go to my brother,” so then child welfare has this big screening process. Get the brother’s criminal [records] check.... When we look at Native populations and at the racist criminal justice system and who might have a criminal justice record... Oh well, he has a criminal record, so then he can’t take the children. So then the children are removed from their family.... Because he has a criminal record doesn’t mean he can’t parent. (Project 4)

This counselor means that the criminal justice system is racist towards Indigenous people as they are overrepresented in jails and prisons, are more likely to

be charged and sentenced than non-Indigenous people for the same crimes and receive longer sentences for the same crimes (Baskin, 2011; Ross, 2009). When child welfare conducts the standard criminal records check, chances are high that the Indigenous relative who has stepped forward to care for children will have a record and then most likely will be excluded from being able to care for them.

The youth agreed with this counselor, questioning the policies that govern who is allowed to look after children. They stressed that these policies need to be changed to better fit the circumstances of Indigenous Peoples. Youth agreed that permanency planning (i.e. keeping children in one home for the long term) should be key and that workers ought to try to keep children with other family members if it is impossible for them to stay with their birth parents.

The youth also emphasized that taking children away from their communities to place them in non-Indigenous homes with little or no contact with their families was a repetition of placing children in residential schools in the past. They spoke of their understanding of the impacts of residential schooling on Indigenous Peoples, including stolen identities, despair and internalized oppression (which occurs when marginalized people believe the stereotypes that are created about them), which led to poverty, substance misuse, mental health challenges, homelessness and self-destructive behaviours. They noted that these impacts of residential schooling are similar to the impacts of child welfare experiences on their birth parents and on many of them.

These youth also insisted that some Indigenous families' lack of money should not be reason enough to reject their ability to parent. They pointed out that many lower income families do a good job of raising children. Moreover, youth believe two-parent families should not be preferred by the child welfare system. They spoke of knowing many Indigenous families with one parent raising children in a positive environment. They also believe that more effort needs to be put into keeping siblings together if families have to place their children into care. One promising suggestion was to create a group of parents who had been through the child welfare system, but now had their children back, who could offer information, support and resources to other parents who are struggling with raising their children.

Some of the youth who participated in the research projects moved back and forth between their biological families and foster homes. When asked about the reasons for such movement, youth explained that when a biological parent complied with the demands of child welfare, such as staying in counseling for a long enough period of time or completing a substance misuse treatment program, they were able to go back to these parents. However, when the parent stopped complying (i.e. by drinking, dropping out of counseling or getting back

with an abusive partner), the child would once again go to a foster home. This response on the part of child welfare authorities can be linked to colonization in a number of ways. Often when Indigenous parents are placed in a position of having to comply with demands of the child welfare system in order to get their children back, they are being set up for failure. For example, they may not voluntarily participate in programs; these programs likely do not examine the structural factors that led to their current situation and they may not be culturally relevant; there may not be enough emphasis on support and resources for the parent; there may be too many demands on the parent; or, assessments may be biased because the values and worldviews of Western society are being applied to Indigenous parents. Workers should realize that everyone is different and what is “normal” for an Indigenous family may not be “normal” for a White one.

Incorporate Indigenous Worldviews and People into the Child Welfare System

Another point emphasized by both youth and counselors is that more Indigenous customary care homes (equivalent of foster homes) and adoptive families need to be recruited. Youth insisted there must be more Indigenous families to adopt or care for children, and that provincial and federal governments need to encourage and support this process through funding and legislation which will equip families financially to care for children and give them the legal right to do so. Youth also stated that non-Indigenous families caring for Indigenous children should be obligated to keep them connected to their cultures.

The participants also talked about child protection workers. They suggested that workers should be Indigenous or, if not, have intensive training in issues affecting Indigenous people. They stressed the need for greater consistency in what helpers learn in their training and education about colonization, its current impacts, the strengths of Indigenous communities and beliefs and how to work collaboratively with families. More specifically, participants emphasized how helpers need to learn about historical trauma caused by the residential school system, and take into account what families need and want, rather than considering the child in isolation.

Youth understand that children have to be protected, but at the same time, Indigenous families have different needs that are often neglected by services that are supposed to assist them. With this in mind, youth talked about the importance of incorporating Indigenous cultures into their lives, no matter who their families are or where they live. They also emphasized that although having Indigenous family service agencies do the work of child protection services is an empowering idea, it does not work if these services have to use the same legislation as mainstream Children’s Aid Societies. Although Indigenous child welfare

agencies employ some or mostly Indigenous people and incorporate some Indigenous practices such as involving extended families as caregivers of children, they are required to follow the same legislation – the Child and Family Services Act (CFSAct) – as all other child welfare authorities. This Act does not consider Indigenous values, particularly around collective responsibilities for raising children discussed above, nor does it acknowledge the impacts of colonization or the strengths of Indigenous Peoples and communities. It does not distinguish between parents who abuse and neglect their children, and parents who cannot provide for their children because of poverty, nor does it include prevention.

Addressing the Effects of Colonization

The youth who participated in these research projects also linked the current challenges of Indigenous communities, such as poverty, to colonization. They adamantly took the stand that if being poor is such a concern, the state should provide the necessary funds to support families. They strongly declared that, “after all, the government is the reason why so many Indigenous people are living in poverty in the first place” (Baskin, 2007).

They questioned the rationale for continuing to remove Indigenous children from their families and communities. They were all in agreement with one youth who stated:

Obviously, taking children from their communities and putting them in residential schools was a horrible thing to do. Everybody knows this and it's becoming public knowledge. Even the government has sort of acknowledged this by apologizing [Prime Minister Stephen Harper's statement of apology on June 11, 2008]. So why then are they continuing to remove so many kids today through what they call child protection and putting them in White homes where their experiences are pretty much the same as the survivors of residential schools? (Baskin et al., 2012)

Participants also expressed a need for more Indigenous policy makers to change child welfare legislation. They explained that hiring Indigenous child welfare workers without involving Indigenous people in policy-making would simply mean “putting a brown face on it”. This may “soften the blow” for some families, but will also continue to oppress many.

The Ontario government continues to blame a lack of cultural services, meaning Indigenous-run social services agencies based on Indigenous worldviews, for the problems of Indigenous youth. The government promotes cultural programming, such as the learning of Indigenous values, participation in spiritual cer-

emonies and healing circles, and mentoring by Elders, as the remedy to youth homelessness and other social problems (Wilson, 2011). Social inequalities, in the government's view, are not a political issue and do not require social change, but rather that individuals and communities take responsibility for youth seen as "at risk". Communities and agencies must adapt while government ignores the real inequalities of racism, classism and sexism. "Brown faces" having control of Indigenous child welfare will not lead to access and opportunity for Indigenous youth, but paying attention to the structural barriers to wellbeing might. Of most significance is the fact that the current CFSA does not address the sovereignty (i.e. control or authority over their own affairs) of Indigenous Peoples. What is necessary, then, is an Indigenous Family and Child Services Act.

Few youth in the care of the state experienced a positive home life. Many participants felt they were forced to leave their homes, explaining they were not wanted any longer by adoptive or foster parents because they were seen as rebelling, getting into trouble or questioning the rules. Others spoke of leaving their homes because of years of sexual, physical and emotional abuse. Even though some expressed how difficult street life was, none of them regretted their decision to leave home. In fact, youth sometimes spoke of how freeing leaving child protection was for them. One youth stated that her adoptive parents were abusive, which forced her to move out on her own. She viewed street life as tough, but easier than being in the care of the state because she "could make her own rules" (Project 1). Another participant stated that she was "sick of group homes... too many rules," and that she was constantly being moved from one group home to another. Leaving child protection and becoming homeless meant that she could begin to create a life that was more under her control. Some of the youth who were in care, adopted, or in group homes stated that they had lived in small towns and experienced a great deal of blatant racism. They believed that they could escape this by moving to a large, multicultural city like Toronto. As one youth explained, "some of us are able to blend in with all the other people and not even be seen as Indigenous." All agreed that even though there is racism in Toronto, "it is not as obvious all the time as it is in small places." A few of the youth stated that they came to Toronto for opportunities; in this city, they believed they had found the freedom to change their lives for the better.

Moving Forward

Despite criticism of the Ontario government's promotion of culturally specific programs and services for Indigenous youth as the entire solution to Indigenous youth homelessness, such programs are useful, as highlighted by several scholars and organizations (Chansonneuve, 2008; Niccols et al., 2010a; 2010b; NWAC, 2007; Rutman et al., 2005). Healing through "cultural renewal" is described in

the literature as reconnecting Indigenous people with their heritages, which may be facilitated by Indigenous-specific agencies and/or participation in Indigenous ceremonies and teaching circles (Chansonneuve, 2008; Rutman et al., 2005). The majority of youth who participated in these research projects emphasized the importance of Indigenous-specific services, as seen from the following quotations:

Youth 1: *Once I got involved with [Indigenous services], I got help with finding housing and returning to school.... Continuing to get services keeps our Indigenous cultures going.... Before, I didn't want anything to do with the Indigenous community [in Toronto]. I believed Indigenous people were all disrespected and disrespectful* (Baskin, 2011:165).

Youth 2: *Workers help me do productive things. They are people who care. I stay connected to these helpers* (Baskin, 2011:165).

Youth 3: *Going through [Indigenous services] helped me understand how the past makes the present: we need to see what has happened in the past, which can lead to harmful behaviours in the present. If we understand this, we can begin to make positive changes. It also helped me to look at what we've overcome, not just what we've done that's not good* (Baskin, 2011:166).

Youth 4: *I have housing and am in school now.... I go to spiritual ceremonies sometimes. Now I'm into everything Indigenous instead of how I was before, not wanting anything to do with it. We can relate to Indigenous people who come to speak about their experiences, how they got out of their destructive lives through their cultures and spirituality. We can learn from them; they're our role models* (Baskin, 2011:166-167).

Clearly, access to cultural services is crucial and wanted by Indigenous youth. However, it is highly important for child welfare workers and counselors who work with youth and families to develop a better understanding of the historical relationships between Indigenous Peoples and child welfare authorities (Horejsi et al., 1992). Research emphasizes the need to understand the “loss of trust” that can occur on numerous levels for some Indigenous people, including loss of trust in self, family, community, government, and in those referred to as “outsiders” (Thibodeau & Peigan, 2007). This loss of trust partly evolves out of child welfare involvement, which undermined Indigenous ways of raising children, leading to a lack of confidence in parents and other community members. It also led to the mistrust of the Canadian and provincial governments which outlawed Indigenous ways of parenting children, and to non-Indigenous people, particularly social workers, as the agents of the removal of children from their communities.

Research findings from these four projects similarly highlight the importance of a child welfare system that is sensitive to the historical trauma it has caused among Indigenous people. Child welfare workers who participated in the research projects spoke about the need for a system designed to address a wider “picture,” that recognizes factors that contribute to youth’s immediate circumstances:

You don't just want to be meeting their immediate needs; although that's what child welfare primarily focuses on. It's having a good analysis of the overall picture, and what is impacting, what are the environmental factors that are affecting that client, or that are affecting the children. (Project 4)

The need for a wider perspective on the part of child welfare was echoed in this young woman’s remarks, “They’re always trying to fit people into boxes. [They] don’t really understand the complexities of our lives and don’t really understand the whole healing process.” This was echoed by the majority of youth who spoke about the need for a child welfare system designed to address its own historical failings and remodeled to incorporate Indigenous worldviews and values.

For those youth who are parents, a system is greatly needed that is aware and appreciative of the distance that many must travel to develop healthy ways of parenting according to Indigenous worldviews. These youth told stories of not having parenting models to guide them once they became parents. Instead of understanding their circumstances and the supports they need, they were blamed by the child welfare system for their lack of knowledge and labeled “bad parents”. A system that is designed to address these issues and to assist young parents in learning and experiencing Indigenous ways of parenting is needed. One former child welfare worker who is now in the area of substance misuse treatment added:

I think that we're looking at who's the client, and I find therein lies one of the biggest issues for all of us... this one sees the woman as the client, this one sees the child as the client. But again, isn't that creating the silos that we're saying that we don't think are helpful? The clients, if you want to call them that, are the family. And why aren't all agencies looking at the family as the unit that they're trying to assist? (Project 4)

Approaches to services depend on which perspective child welfare workers take or are legislated to take. Perspectives arise out of one’s worldview. Indigenous worldviews tend to focus on the whole family and community, with an emphasis on collective rights. Eurocentric worldviews, which shape mainstream Canadian society and institutions, are more likely to focus on the individual, and highlight individual human rights. In cases of child welfare, views often become polarized between prioritizing group versus individual, parent versus

child, or safety plan (keeping the children in their home with measures in place intended to keep them safe) versus foster care (removal of children from their homes) scenarios. In practice, narrow, heterosexist views of what a family looks like and who raises children (biological parents) may lead to dismissing many people who can care for children. As one of the counselors emphasized, “I think that we really need to look at whose needs are we addressing here?” (Project 4).

Indigenous child protection agencies continue to be directed by legislation and social policies not based on Indigenous values and worldviews. Such legislation and policies do not incorporate the distinct needs of Indigenous Peoples. The creation of legislation and policies that are compatible with Indigenous worldviews in general, such as holistic approaches to health and well-being, spirituality, and respect for Elders, while taking into consideration the great diversity of Indigenous cultures, is needed. In addition, legislation and policies must take into account past injustices and the effects they have on the wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples today. As a youth in one of the projects stated simply, “If you want to work with Native people, you have to know and understand... the history of the people” (Baskin et al., 2012:33). This position was echoed by one of the substance misuse treatment counselors in this same project who noted, “there are aspects of the child welfare mandate and other mandates of other agencies and services that need to be re-addressed and need to evolve with the evolution of the healing path that Indigenous people are on” (Baskin et al., 2012:10). These comments from research participants support the literature on effective counseling with Indigenous youth, which states that the following skills and attitudes of counselors are seen as helpful: empathy, open communication, acceptance, role modeling, recognizing the impacts of trauma, supporting links to spirituality, and acknowledging the pasts of youth while assisting them on their path to a healthier future (Rutman et al., 2005).

The revision of oppressive legislation to include “culturally based practice” changes little (Anderson, 1998; Hudson, 1997; RAJIM, 1998). As Hoglund advocates, both research and policies developed within an Indigenous context, by Indigenous people is crucial because in order to create programs that support the health and well-being of Indigenous children, “researchers, educators, service providers, and policymakers need to look beyond [mainstream] models of successful development” to those favoured by Indigenous communities and which also take into consideration the “historical, political”, social and economic circumstances in the lives of Indigenous children, families and communities (2004:165; 168).

Thus, insider views are necessary to develop social policies that reflect Indigenous worldviews and values regarding the importance of families and communities in the raising of children. However, there must first be an acknowledgement that

current systemic policies are unjust and that meaningful changes are necessary. Ultimately, the creation of an Indigenous Family and Child Services Act is a must.

Conclusion

The depth of these young people's knowledge and understanding of the reasons for their homelessness is amazing. They are insightful and clear. They are easily able to understand their life experiences, which included, for most, contact with child protection services and separation from their biological families and communities, within the framework of the realities of colonization. They clearly made the links between the residential school system and the child welfare system in terms of the historical trauma that they have inherited, which has seriously impacted the childrearing practices of Indigenous families and communities.

One of the legacies of colonization, residential schooling and child welfare involvement is poverty. A comment that stands out most, perhaps, is from a young man who said, "mostly we're taken away by child welfare because of poverty and this translates into neglect by them" (Project 1). For Indigenous Peoples, poverty is a direct result of the economic destruction of Indigenous societies caused by colonization. It may be, then, that the solution to parenting challenges is not child protection services that lead to the removal of children from their families and communities, but rather economic stability, healing and a return to Indigenous control of caring for children.

The youth who participated in these research projects also acknowledged that there may be times when it is best for everyone that children live with people other than their parents. However, they emphasized that child welfare blames individual Indigenous families for their situations and reinforces the colonial view that the mainstream way of raising children is the only acceptable way, while inflicting violence upon communities by removing children and placing them in the care of white families. As children are sometimes abused and almost always distanced from their families and cultures by having to live outside of their communities, the effects of colonization continue. It is the need to escape such ongoing oppression that leads young Indigenous people to leave government care for the streets.

These youth also recommend changes to legislation and social policy. They realized that the creation of Indigenous child protection agencies with Indigenous workers is not enough. Indigenous child and family service agencies are to be praised for picking up the responsibility of child welfare and attempting to incorporate traditional knowledge into their work. However, many colonial legacies, such as the Child and Family Services Act, which does not support Indigenous values and limits who can care for children, have been passed on to them and their

work. They must also face unrealistic expectations from both the Indigenous communities they serve and mainstream society and governments (i.e. serving high numbers of families with less human resources and funding than other mandated child protection services) (Hudson & Taylor-Henley, 1995; Bennett et al., 2005).

Prior to colonization, Indigenous people lived as independent nations. Their right to self-determination – which included affairs affecting their families and children – was never given up despite the policies and actions forced upon them by Canadian governments (First Nations Child and Family Task Force, 1993; Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario, 2001; Bennett et al., 2005). Indigenous responsibility and control must go beyond delivering child welfare services, to the creation of legislation and policies that incorporate traditional Indigenous forms of governance which favour the collective over the individual, include the guidance of Elders and insist that everyone is responsible for the raising of children. This is crucial since present legislation and social policies related to child welfare are based on Eurocentric values and worldviews, making them an ongoing tool of colonization. As suggested by the youth, Indigenous people must become policy makers or be involved in the policy making process. Without significant changes to social policies, based on processes of decolonization, the major demand from Indigenous people to keep families together and concentrate heavily on prevention (which includes eliminating poverty) cannot happen.

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25

Waldo 101: Mapping the Intersections of Space, Place, and Gender in the Lives of Ten Homeless Youth

Kristy Buccieri

There is a question that I remember fondly from my childhood. Consisting of a mere two words, it managed to consume the interest of just about everyone I knew. That question is: “Where’s Waldo?” Decked-out in a red and white striped top, round glasses, and a toque that sat atop flowing brown locks, Waldo was the iconic traveler. The purpose of the “Where’s Waldo?” game was to search for this cartoon man hidden among any number of people and objects. He could be in the top left corner, hidden behind an elephant, or standing smack-dab in the middle of the page. You just never knew when or where he would reveal himself.

Despite this little man’s constant wave and goofy grin, he actually has some very insightful lessons to teach. Waldo’s entire existence depends on the fact that he cannot make himself disappear. Despite his best efforts to hide, someone always manages to find him. That we are not asked, “Who’s Waldo?”, “How’s Waldo?”, or even the more philosophical “Why’s Waldo?” but rather, “Where’s Waldo?” implies that Waldo is someone to be found – someone to be searched out, looked at, and pointed to. The first thing that Waldo teaches us is that in public spaces we are nearly always seen, even when we do not want to be. Waldo shows us that occupying public space leads to being noticed. The only way to escape the gaze of others is to be well hidden – and even that only lasts so long before a person is ultimately found.

What one notices when searching for Waldo is that his surroundings matter a great deal in helping to either conceal or reveal him. In less busy pictures Wal-

do sticks out like a sore thumb. The background scene, the people and objects around him, and his location on the page all contribute to making him either very well hidden or particularly easy to spot. The second lesson Waldo teaches us, then, is that when dealing with space and place, context matters in determining whether a person is easily noticed or can remain somewhat hidden from view.

Waldo's talent for moving through any landscape with ease no doubt contributes to his ability to hide. There is a third lesson here. This sense of easy movement is made possible largely because Waldo is, in fact, a Waldo. Would the same unmatched access to these spaces and the ability to move through them with such ease be possible if the question were, "Where's Wanda?" Being a man in contemporary North American society allows Waldo a sort of bodily freedom that many women do not get to experience. Arguably the game would not be nearly as challenging if it were Wanda we were asked to seek.

Off the Page and onto the Street

For a cartoon character, Waldo offers some very interesting commentary on the lived experiences of human beings. This chapter offers up these observations as a way of thinking about the connections between space, place, and gender in the lives of ten homeless youth. At its heart, this is a discussion about embodied difference and spatial practices; that is, our daily routines and the ways in which we move through spaces and places are related to our physical bodies and the meanings that get attached to them. For instance, a person's body may be categorized differently depending on factors such as one's gender, age, race/ethnicity, and physical abilities (among others). The decision to focus on gender in this chapter is meant in no way to deny the many other distinctions that mark individuals as unique (such as age, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, ability, religion, etc.). While some of these factors entered into this research, gender was the one that emerged most clearly¹. Throughout this chapter, I examine the ways in which being young, homeless/poor, and either male or female impacts one's experience of living in Toronto, Ontario while acknowledging that these experiences are affected by other factors that are not actively discussed here.

The research discussed throughout this chapter stems from a study conducted in the spring of 2010. Open-ended interviews were conducted, in which ten participants between the ages of 17 and 24 discussed their experiences of being homeless in Toronto. Five of the participants were female and five were male. It must be noted that with a small population of ten participants the goal is not to pro-

1. Arguably this could be because the participants in the present study were mostly heterosexual-identified, white, Canadian-born, of similar ages, and did not identify any strong religious affiliations or mobility challenges.

vide representative accounts that detail the lives of all young homeless men and women. Rather, the goal of this chapter is to examine the ways in which gender, space, and place intersect in the lives of these ten young people and to see what we may learn from their experiences to better inform our understanding of street life.

Each participant was asked to recall the 24 hour period (from 12:00 am to 11:59 pm) prior to the interview. With this information in mind, the participants sat in front of a map of Toronto and marked their destinations and pathways through the city. As they diagrammed, they discussed where they went, the routes they took, their means of transportation, why they chose to go to different places, and with whom they travelled. What resulted were ten distinct maps that accounted for a 24 hour period in the participants' respective lives. While these maps may not have been completely accurate down to the minute, they provided a sense of how these young people spent a typical day and the ways they travelled through space to get to places that had meaning to them.

Like Waldo, their surroundings were important in helping them either draw attention to themselves or essentially disappear. They moved between drop-in centres, shelters, city parks, shopping centres, back alleyways, and street corners with different levels of ease and purpose in each. When in public they used alternate strategies, trying to blend in with the general public at certain times and in some places, while highlighting their bodies, poverty, and need for support at others. Also like Waldo, the public gaze was upon them. When occupying public spaces and places these young people felt the presence of police officers and housed citizens. This was particularly true when they made themselves visible through their choice of places to hang out (such as in a public park or standing near a social service agency) or when situating themselves in high-traffic spaces (as when panhandling on busy street corners). Some of these youth possessed Waldo's ability to move fairly easily through more hidden spaces, like alleyways, in an attempt to avoid the public gaze. These were generally the Waldos – that is, the men – among the participants. The Wandas had a considerably more difficult time escaping the view of the public and the police. Their inability to freely access the city's hidden spaces without putting their physical safety at risk often left them visibly exposed with nowhere to hide.

Spaces and Places in the City of Toronto

Homelessness is experienced differently by different people. One shared characteristic for most, however, is that it is closely related to frequent movement, either within or between cities (May, 2000). Yet, as Shantz notes, "Despite the images conjured up by names like vagabond, drifter, or hobo, being homeless is an experience of bodily and spatial confinement" (2010:182). How is this contradiction possible? How can those who are homeless move around frequently and yet be

subject to ‘spatial confinement’? The reality of street life is such that homeless individuals, while regularly moving, tend to do so in confining and routinized or repetitive ways (Snow & Mulcahy, 2001). For many homeless youth, life on the street is highly structured around visits to family, friends, and social workers, around social service hours, and on the best times to earn money through activities like panhandling and squeegeeing (Karabanow, 2004). Homeless youth are known to gather in the downtown core of a city, which often houses shelters and social service agencies, while also offering reasonable access to prime spaces (busy areas like main streets) and marginal spaces (such as parks, which are more removed from the heavy foot traffic of the sidewalks) (Ruddick, 2002).

The downtown core of Toronto is an appealing place to many people, whether homeless or not. The fact that the young people in this study spent most of their time there is not surprising. As a major city centre, downtown Toronto is an exciting place. People go there for the food, shopping, nightlife, culture, and people-watching opportunities. One of the biggest draws of moving to Toronto for the young participants was the chance to live in a big city. Once in Toronto, they all decided to use the many assistance programs that operate throughout the city and the social service sector. Despite being fiercely independent and proud of their ability to survive, homeless youth show extremely high reliance on social service agencies.

Living in poverty means that these young people depend on services for their basic needs. They provide a place where homeless youth can obtain food, shelter, and support, all while socializing with their peers. Yet, despite the help they provide, social service agencies in many ways work against their own goals of helping youth find housing, return to school, get a job, and become self-sufficient. They do so in two key ways. First, the geographical location of these agencies means that the youth who rely on them must spend their days contained within the downtown city core. Second, because of operating costs, all of these agencies are limited in the number and types of services they can offer and in the hours in which they can operate. This is particularly important in relation to meal programs, which vary in the days and times they are offered by each individual agency (Dachner et al., 2009). Young people frequently have to move through a circuit of service agencies throughout a given day in order to meet their needs. This creates a kind of enforced movement, as young people are drawn in at specific times (like dinner or shelter curfews) and driven out at others (as when the shelter closes in the morning).

Consider for a moment the two maps shown in Figures 1.1 and 1.2. The first shows the twenty-four hour maps created by the ten participants overlaid upon one another. The highest concentration of activity is clearly in the downtown core. The extended purple and orange lines show the distances some youth travelled to get to this area (while the light blue line shows the

only youth who began in the downtown core and travelled outside it).

Figure 1.1: Participant Maps Combined²

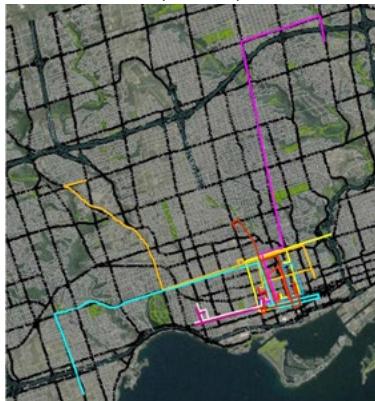


Figure 1.2: Location of Social Service Agencies



The second map, Figure 1.2, shows the placement of the agencies these ten youth collectively visited, as marked by yellow stars. The red square surrounding the majority of agencies indicates the area in which most of the youth spent their 24 hours. What these maps highlight is the degree to which homeless young people's movements are based on their need for services. "It's pretty simple," says Ben, a 24-year old man, (whose day is highlighted in red on Figure 1.1), "I do the same things. Like, see this?" he asks, pointing to the map of his day. "I do that every day."

I Always Feel Like Somebody's Watching Me

In the City of Toronto, the response to youth homelessness primarily involves a clustering of services in the downtown core. As a result, many young people feel they have no choice but to spend their days in this area, making homeless youth a visible presence in this space. They can be seen sitting in parks, squeegeeing on street corners, and asking passersby for money. Their presence is disturbing to some, creating what Flusty (2001) calls unsettling social encounters with difference. This is not just because they are homeless, but because they are young as well.

Sadly, the unintended outcome of the system that aims to help these young people is that it also in many ways leads to animosity against them. The criminalization of homelessness has become an increasingly common strategy for dealing with the large number of young people living and working on the streets of To-

2. All maps were constructed using ESRI ArcGIS mapping software (student version) and on-line extensions. For more information please refer to <http://www.esri.com>

ronto (O'Grady et al., 2011). The high concentration of homeless youth in the downtown core means that police pay close attention to their presence and their actions. As Berti and Sommers (2010) note, however, from the point of view of a homeless person, the law exists to protect other people from them, not to protect them from other people. Although some homeless youth report positive experiences with the police, these kinds of interactions are rare (O'Grady et al., 2011). "I find that police feel that they have a lot of power and sometimes go on power trips," says Jordana, an 18 year-old participant who has been on and off the streets for three years. "I mean every once in awhile there's a good cop," she continues, "but there's a huge power trip going on and...everyone's just trying to get rid of us." The police are largely thought of by these youth as disciplinary, controlling, and not as a source of protection (Herbert, 2001).

It is not only police, however, who keep homeless youth under surveillance. Negative and accusatory news media portrayals of the homeless (Klodawsky et al., 2002) stir up the public imagination, making these young people seem threatening to those who are more privileged. As a result, many members of the general public, and often business owners, tend to look upon homeless youth with suspicion. Homeless bodies – those that appear disorderly, dirty, and dangerous - notes Wright (1997), are viewed as objects of repulsion but also as objects of fascination. These young people are not generally able to entirely escape the public gaze. Being fixed in the downtown core, as a result of reliance on services, means that completely disappearing is not an option for these youth.

As Kelly and Caputo (2007) suggest, as a result of police observation (and arguably the hostile gaze of other, housed, citizens), homeless youth sometimes attempt to make themselves invisible. They do so by blending in and not drawing attention to their poverty and homelessness. Mike, for instance, discusses a common approach he uses when he sees police, stating, "I just stand-up and look like I'm busy, like I'm on a phone or something...maybe like I'm looking through a phone or something like that or just, like, something like any other regular person would be doing." Hiding in plain sight is also a strategy mentioned by Paige, who at the time of the interview was actively avoiding police because of an outstanding arrest warrant. Says Paige, "Main streets I feel a lot less sketched on 'cause there's so many people...who aren't well off so, it's a lot easier to blend in. You can be a normal civilian." In downtown Toronto these youth sometimes try to blend in with other "regular" and "normal" people, as Mike and Paige have said. For homeless youth, this kind of blending is one valuable and common strategy (Radley et al., 2005; Roschelle & Kaufman, 2004).

However, as these young people know all too well, it is not always easy to blend in. Some places and spaces are less suitable for hiding. Becoming invisible is

virtually impossible when spending long periods of time in public places and/or while engaging in non-traditional activities like panhandling and squeegeeing. The amount that one can hide (or conversely the amount that one gets noticed) is directly related to the amount of time spent in public places and spaces as well as the activities engaged in while in front of other people.

The Places & Spaces in Which Even Waldo Could Not Hide

To be in a public place or space subjects a person to observation (or at the extreme, surveillance) by other people. Ultimately, someone will be watching. This is definitely true in relation to homeless youth, who are frequently watched by police and the general public. Their reliance on services in the downtown core means they are often bound to this area and are present in relatively large numbers. While a single youth may be able to get by unnoticed, a group of youth sitting together makes their presence known. There are many places where homeless youth stand apart from their housed peers. Three places and spaces in particular should be highlighted in this regard – while youth are in parks, in front of or near social service agencies, and on street corners engaging in money-making activities. In some of these settings homeless youth do not try to hide, instead choosing to let their homelessness show and be put on display.

Figure 1.3: Parks Visited by Participants



Given their constant presence downtown, it is not surprising that youth favour the parks located within this area. Public parks provide a cost-free space where these young people can spend their time when agencies are closed. In the 24 hour periods mapped by the participants, many parks appeared (as seen in Figure 1.3). While gathering in parks may be an enjoyable way for these young people to spend time with friends, relax, and get fresh air, parks are also public spaces in which their presence does not go unnoticed. Young people are often under surveillance in pub-

lic (Sibley, 1995) and this is especially true of some youth more than others (Hil & Bessant, 1999). Because homeless youth often engage in personal and private activities in these parks, like taking a nap or relieving oneself, they become prime sites for the policing of homeless youth (Karabanow, 2010; Snow & Mulcahy, 2001).

Kelling and Coles (1997) write that when street people take over parks and make them seemingly unusable by families and children this is a police problem, even if street people are not committing major crimes. It seems that public spaces, like parks, are made more enjoyable for some by forcing out others who might try to share these spaces (Flusty, 2001). According to the study participants, the police frequently seek out homeless youth in public parks. Lucy, for instance, tells a story from her 24 hour period in which three police officers questioned her friends in a popular Kensington Market park.

Three bike cops came in and they went right to that group of twelve people [that I was with]. Like, directly to them ‘cause it was a group of, like, twelve young kids, right. So, they’re, like, “What are these kids doing in the park?” The police gotta understand that it’s a park... Pretty sure that’s what it’s there for. They have benches and stuff.

At certain times members of the general public take on the role of supervising the activities of homeless youth as well, appointing themselves agents of the police. Paige, for instance, notes that she feels uncomfortable in public parks because, “there’s always a chance there’s a paranoid parent” who will see her with friends and report to police that, “there’s a gang in the park.” Public parks are one specific kind of space that resists attempts by homeless youth to hide. Police and some members of the general public tend to keep these young people under close watch. However, parks are not the only locations that draw the attention of on-lookers.

Social service agencies are an essential part of the response to youth homelessness in most cities. In many instances, homelessness agencies are distanced from mainstream social spaces (Radley et al., 2005), and located instead in unsafe neighbourhoods with entrances in back alleys (Thompson et al., 2006). However, as previously shown in Figure 1.2, the agencies these young people favoured were all located in the downtown core, with most housed in highly visible, accessible buildings with large signs. While this may be helpful in encouraging young people to access these services, it has the negative effect of drawing attention to those in and around the buildings as service recipients. For some this can be highly stigmatizing. As Takahashi (1997) notes, stigma is attached not just to the bodies of homeless persons, but to the service facilities they use as well. Some of the agencies accessed by the youth are pictured in Figures 1.4 to 1.6.

Figures 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6: Social Service Agencies



Service agencies are places that make it hard for homeless youth to hide. While youth may be able to go inside and find a degree of privacy, being in or around a building that is a known social service agency often makes them more visible to police and the general public. Marcus, a 24 year old man who works and goes to school, rarely encounters the police in the course of his day. However, while he has only limited experience with the police, the times he has encountered them have always taken place near the shelter in which he temporarily lives. Speaking of the last encounter, Marcus says, “I was in the [shelter], in the back and I was... eating some food or whatever... They go there sometimes...because it’s a shelter.”

Much like the police, members of the general public may be aware of buildings that are clearly marked as social service agencies. Being near these buildings may serve to identify a person as a client. Mike, for one, was acutely aware of this and tried to hide his association with the shelter he was staying in by smoking his cigarettes in the nearby alley instead of out front.

I don't want to stand in the front...no one says nothing but it's just the overall, the overall vibe. It's...as if I feel like everybody knows what place that is and who you are and why you're there...And who knows if somebody might just happen to be passing by or driving by and notice you? It's like, [I'd rather] avoid all that right from the get-go.

Social stigma can result from making one's association with particular places known (Pillow, 2000). Blending in is considerably more difficult when standing in front of or near places that draw attention. The use of social service agencies, while helpful and necessary, may have the unintended effect of reinforcing social stigma by drawing attention to individual clients and limiting their ability to blend into the crowd.

In public spaces and places people are inevitably seen. However, some places offer more cover than others. Public parks and social service agencies are not among them. In much the same way, busy intersections in downtown Toronto, while crossed by millions of people, offer little anonymity for those who choose to remain rather than pass through them. The money-making strate-

gies of some homeless youth demand that they make their presence known in these very public spaces. Many homeless youth are acutely aware that marketing their own poverty and homelessness can increase their earnings from panhandling and squeegeeing, by playing on the sympathies of passersby (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002). In this regard, they avoid hiding and make themselves obvious instead. By sitting on the sidewalks of downtown Toronto, these young people place themselves directly in the view of authority figures. While being seen is the goal, being seen by everyone is not. Young people may earn more money by making themselves visible in these spaces, but it comes at a cost.

As a group, street youth tend to feel alienated and marginalized (Karabanow, 2004). For many, earning money in very public ways can be a further stigmatizing and demoralizing experience (Kidd, 2007). Ben, for instance, says, "Sometimes [I] panhandle. I don't like doing it, though...it's degrading." Panhandling is a source of stigma for many of these young people. They display their bodies, showcasing homelessness and poverty, to the people who pass by. Selecting a location in which to do so requires finding a balance between being seen (by those who might offer money) and not being seen (by police or those who might call the police). The youth understand this contradiction well, like Paige, who says, "I don't think you make the best money on main streets per se. You kinda gotta find a corner that's busy but not too busy." Some streets and intersections are favoured for their high traffic and familiarity, like the corner of Queen Street West and Spadina Street and in front of Much Music, as shown respectively in Figures 1.7 and 1.8.

Figures 1.7 and 1.8: Popular Panhandling Locations



While youth sometimes try to blend in with other citizens in the downtown core, it is not the best strategy to employ when trying to earn money through panhandling or squeegeeing. Instead these youth have to make their presence known in certain busy spaces. Of course, there is always the risk of being seen by the police and some citizens. The outcome of being seen, however, is not the same for all youth engaged in informal money-making practices. In this regard there are clear gender differences, with young homeless men and women drawing different responses. The most common public discourse around youth homelessness (in the media, for example) tends to portray panhandlers and squeegeers as aggressive people who hold the

public hostage (Hermer & Mosher, 2002). Vulnerable female citizens are identified as the victims of these supposedly dangerous young men (Glasbeek, 2010).

In the media, it is almost always men who are portrayed in this negative light³. However, very rarely are the young women who earn money in these ways recognized. When faced with females who panhandle or squeegee, it appears the police and public are at a loss about how to respond. It is generally believed that police officers treat homeless women better than homeless men (Novac et al., 2009). Part of this may stem from a belief that the street is a masculine space and not one that is meant for women. As Paige says, “There’s been a few times I was squeegeeing...[the police are] like, ‘Oh, you’re too pretty to be doing this. What are you doing with your life?’”

When women make themselves visible by engaging in non-traditional money-making activities in highly public spaces, they draw attention not only to themselves but to their violation of feminine gender norms. This behaviour can elicit strong reactions from the general public. Some passersby will try to go out of their way to help them by offering food or extra money. Relying on public sympathy in this way is a strategy many young women take advantage of (O’Grady & Gaetz, 2004). Just as frequently, however, members of the general public will take offense to these women’s very public behaviour. As is often the case with women on the street, reactions are riddled with uncertainty, as observers try to maintain the expectations of femininity and womanhood they are used to, even as these categories are violated before their eyes (Cresswell, 1999).

Homeless women may draw more attention than men and this is not always beneficial to them. In one Toronto-based study, women were more likely to report having been verbally abused, attacked, or threatened because of their homelessness (Novac et al., 2009). One participant from this study reports that passersby frequently comment on her appearance and sexuality while she is panhandling. Jordana says, “I’ve been called everything. I’ve been called a homeless slut. I’ve been called a street whore. I’ve been called fat. I’ve been called a freak.” Working in any form on the street can lead to criticism about their failure to properly act “feminine”. Accepting money from strangers is a primary means of survival, but it also exposes women to predators who may expect something from them in return (Bender et al., 2007). For Anne this problem occurs often. She says,

There’s a lotta creepy people here. Especially when you’re trying to pan and [you] get, like, all these guys coming up like, “Oh, I’ll give you this much

3. One recent exception is the highly publicized trial of panhandler Nicole Kish, who was found guilty of second degree murder in the stabbing death of Ross Hammond.

[money] if you come and do this with me." Like, I don't do that type of stuff, sorry, keep moving along. And then they just keep bugging you and bugging you... You get those creepy men that want just... (laughs). I've seen some guys harassing my friends too and it's just like, "Leave us alone. We're saying no."

When confronted with the hostile public gaze or the watchful eyes of the police, it is understandable that young people would sometimes want to find a way to escape. The ability to hide in this way, however, is often a privilege reserved for men. As Wardhaugh (1999) notes, men have the ability to claim the street as their own in a way women generally do not. It is this power that allows men to slip into the city's hidden spaces, concealing themselves from view.

Living in Waldo's World

As Wright (1997) notes, not all bodies are treated equally nor do they occupy the same social and physical spaces. This largely has to do with whether or not a person feels physically threatened. Whether exposed or hidden, the men felt relatively assured that they were not in danger. In contemporary North American society, men often have the privilege of not constantly thinking about where they put their bodies. This can lead them into a number of spaces where women may feel vulnerable, such as the downtown Toronto alleys in Figures 1.9 and 1.10. Ray, for instance, a twenty-one year old man, actively enjoys spending time in back alleyways. He says,

I like the alleys a lot more. I think that the art and the graffiti and you never know what you're really going to see in an alley. "Oh look, a box of needles! Wahoo! Don't step on that" (laughs) or something like a mattress that somebody slept on. It's like, "Oh, wonder what that smells like?" or something. I don't know. Somebody making a deal with somebody else or somebody just listening to music in an alley... Like, I find you can savour the moment more in an alleyway.

Figures 1.9 & 1.10: Alleys Frequented by Male Participants in Toronto



This same sense of adventure and ability to fade into the shadowy spaces was not shared by the women. Victimization is common on the street and women

are very aware of the high risk of sexual assault (Gaetz 2004; Gaetz et al., 2010). This fear is especially pronounced at night, when darkness creates the ideal conditions for an attacker to hide. Jordana discusses the ways gender, space, and time can interact to threaten women and keep them exposed. She states, “Maybe I’m just being an insecure, scared, little girl but I hate going anywhere in this city after dark...I won’t go out alone.” Anne echoes Jordana’s sentiment, stating,

I don’t really know much of the side streets and I know like some alleyways to go down to and cut through to make the trips a little shorter. It’s just sometimes I don’t like going down them ‘cause I’m a girl and alleyways and stuff. Especially when it’s, like, kinda getting later at night. You never really know.

Koskela (1997) warns against over-generalizing women’s fear, arguing that a woman’s awareness of danger signs means that she need not be afraid at all times and in all places. This is certainly true of the women in this study who showed no hesitation in walking down main streets and sitting in parks during the daytime. However, the geography of women’s fear must be compared with their geography of danger (Cresswell, 1999); in fact, the places and spaces women fear the most tend to be the ones in which they are most likely to be victimized.

Their own personal experiences have warned them of a dangerous dilemma – while men may not generally fear being outside at night, a woman on the street is at risk whether she tries to hide herself or remains exposed. Paige recounts one incident in which she tried to hide herself at night behind a church, stating, “The first time I slept alone I almost got raped...That was really scary and since then I’ve never slept alone...and before that I never slept alone...I guess I make sure I’m never alone.” The women were careful not to enter hidden spaces and even those they occupied freely in the daytime had the potential to become frightening at night.

As Beneke (1995) argues, the fear of rape changes the meaning of the night, making the same parks, agencies, and streets these young women visit during the day sources of fear. This is true for Lucy, who says, “I avoid parks at night when I’m by myself just ‘cause, like, I know how it can be...I’ve had it happen to my friends before where they’ve gotten raped and stuff in parks.” Julia reports being sexually assaulted twice while on major downtown streets just steps away from a social service agency she frequents. Of the second encounter, Julia says, “These guys, like, they came up to me...late at night...it was actually down Queen Street, like right down here...They, like, held this weapon against me.” She adds, “I just try to stay away from those spots.”

In general when faced with the threat of victimization, it has been noted that women restrict themselves, staying indoors at night, not walking alone, and avoiding

certain parts of town (Pain, 1991). While these are practical options for housed women, they are not all possible for those living on the street. Being young and homeless means that street youth, whether male or female, often lack the means to protect themselves (Gaetz, 2004). However, men are generally less concerned for their safety and can navigate the streets in different ways than women. This inequality is something both men and women are keenly aware of. For instance, when asked if he worries for his safety when travelling alone at night, Marcus responds,

No, I don't think so. I think it's the other way around...like, 'cause I'm a male, right? So it's really it's the female that, you know, they're alone. That's the typical scenario...I don't think I've ever heard any stories in the paper where, I don't know, a man getting attacked or whatever you know at midnight so... That's not even on my mind. That's the least of my worries.

Unless faced with an immediate threat, the men generally felt free to engage in Waldo's sense of unrestricted adventure.

Many, however, felt it was their duty to protect their female friends and were willing to relinquish their freedom of movement to ensure women were comfortable. Women's perceived vulnerability is believed to evoke a kind of chivalrous masculinity in some men (Day, 2001). Many of the young men in this study talked about changing their own routes when in the company of women. Rather than taking shortcuts through alleys, they reported staying on the main streets to ensure the woman's sense of safety. For example, when asked if he changes his routine at all when with female friends Ray responds, "Oh, yeah, definitely because I'm not scared to go certain places and a woman might be." Mike agrees, stating, "Most of the time [females] are just not...willing to...go to places that they're not really familiar with." The threat of sexual violence has a tremendous impact on the ways in which women experience their surroundings (Beneke, 1995). By adapting their movements when in the presence of female friends, men get a slight glimpse of the oppressive social and spatial conditions that frequently limit women's movements through the city.

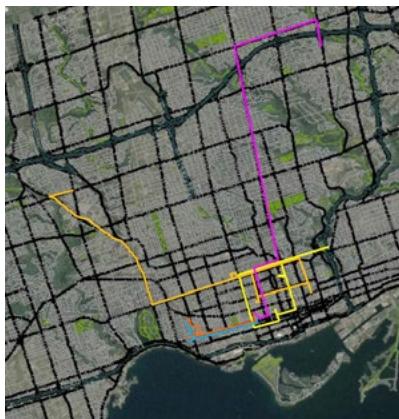
More often than not the women credited men as being their protectors. However, spending time with male friends and boyfriends was only one strategy the women used to protect themselves. Whereas the men in this study remained in the downtown core after nightfall, the women all travelled to more suburban parts of the city where they could stay either in a shelter or with a boyfriend. When comparing the maps of the men's movements (Figure 1.11) with the maps of the women's movements (Figure 1.12), it is clear that the women in this study travelled considerably greater distances to get to – and then out of – downtown Toronto.

Leaving this area was a safety strategy for the women – one that required access to transportation (which they often could not afford and were forced to sneak onto). All but one female travelled with a dog, which was a source of security and comfort but also made it difficult to access necessary social services (which often do not permit pets on the premises) and could interfere with taking public transportation (when drivers refuse entry). For instance, Lucy noted that only some drivers allow her dog on while others do not. Jordana, as well, stated that she often tries, “not to take [transit] during rush hour” when drivers are less likely to let her dog on. When she has to take transit during peak hours, she says, “Sometimes I’ll just sneak him on the back.” The safety strategies of women, while meant to protect them, unfortunately at times increased the risks of victimization by making them travel long distances at night, denying them access to social services, and leaving them without access to public transportation to get around the city.

Figure 1.11: Male Participant Maps Combined



Figure 1.12: Female Participant Maps Combined



Putting Research into Action: Locating Waldo in Policy Decisions

From Waldo’s adventures it is possible to extract some valuable insights into the lived experiences of homeless youth. First, he shows that in public spaces we are nearly always seen, even when we do not want to be. At times the young people in this study tried to hide themselves by blending in with what they called “regular” and “normal” citizens. Unlike Waldo, however, at other times they chose not to hide, making their presence known by highlighting their poverty through panhandling and squeegeeing. Second, where one stands largely determines whether one will be seen. As a result of social services being clustered in the downtown core, many homeless youth gather there and are seen by the police and general public. Some of the places and spaces favoured

by these young people, like parks, social service agencies, and street corners make it impossible to hide. Finally, Waldo's ability to conceal himself matches the homeless men's experiences of accessing hidden spaces like back alleyways without fear, even at night. The women, on the other hand, felt they had to limit their access to certain spaces and places, especially when alone after dark.

These findings alert us to the need for several policy-based initiatives and interventions. Specifically, this research shows that there is a need for diversely located services, stigma reduction initiatives, improved police engagement, and additional supports for women and the dogs they travel with for companionship and protection.

Diversely located services. The young people in this study were all drawn to the downtown core of Toronto during daytime hours because of the concentration and number of accessible services. While there, they were largely limited to areas near the agencies, not wanting to travel too far away and miss crucial operating hours (such as mealtimes). Unfortunately, being in large numbers, they tended to attract the attention of police and the general public. Locating more social services throughout the city of Toronto could help in three key ways. First, young people would not be bound to one area but could travel more freely, knowing agencies would be accessible to them throughout the city. Secondly, this would decrease the number of young people downtown and consequently the attention they draw from the public and police. Finally, young people would not have to rely as much on public transportation, which would reduce their financial burden and decrease the number of women alone downtown at night. This recommendation is not to suggest that services be taken away from the downtown core or decentralized completely, but rather that more service agencies be added to suburban areas of the city.

Stigma reduction initiatives. Social service agencies are a necessary resource for homeless youth. However, as many participants stated, accessing highly visible services can be a source of stigma for those who become identified as clients. The solution is neither to make these agencies less visible nor to have entrances in hidden areas like alleyways (this is both a source of further stigmatization and a threat to the safety of clients). Social service agencies must make their presence known in the local community in positive ways. This could be accomplished directly through public education campaigns or indirectly by participating in events like community clean-up days. The main priority is to dispel misunderstandings the public may have about the clientele and reinforce the need for the agency and its services.

Improved police engagement. As one consequence of clustering service agencies, homeless youth gather in one area and become more visible to the police. Research has shown that there is a great deal of contact between homeless youth and the police and that these encounters are generally negative (O'Grady et al.,

2011). The youth in this study often felt harassed for simply being in public spaces and places. As a highly victimized population, homeless youth should feel they can rely on police to protect and not harass them. The police are an essential service and should be available to protect all citizens, including those who are homeless. Efforts must be made to bring police together with youth representatives, perhaps through a formal council with regular discussion meetings. This should include not only those personnel at higher levels who make policy decisions but also those who work in the primary and community response units.

Additional supports for women and their dogs. Suggesting that there is a need for additional supports for women is in no way intended to suggest men are not in danger on the street or that they do not need essential social services. However, as this research has shown, men and women experience the street in different ways. While the men feel they have considerable freedom, the women tend to be restricted in the places and spaces they can go and the times of day in which they can travel alone. As a result, many women rely on three strategies – they leave the downtown core at night, travel with dogs, and travel with boyfriends or other men. Women need to have access to safe places they can go once it gets dark. While shelters help in this regard, not all women live in (or want to live in) shelters. Night-time drop-in hours (whether available to everyone or women only) must be made available in the downtown core. This could be the responsibility of one agency or operate on a rotating basis.

As a further measure of safety, social service agencies need to change their policies to allow dogs to accompany women. Travelling with a dog can offer a considerable degree of protection but it can also serve to isolate a woman who is unwilling to leave her dog unattended outside an agency. Offering women the opportunity to bring a dog inside shelters, drop-in centres, and other agencies could increase the chances that women will use these services, especially in the evening. This small initiative could go a long way to improving safety for women on the street.

Sometimes lessons come from the most unexpected sources. In his own way, Waldo has opened the door for a conversation about space, place, and gender in the lives of homeless youth. The ability of ten young people to navigate the city of Toronto reconfirmed what Waldo has taught us – that to be in public is to be seen; that the ability to blend in depends on one's surroundings; and that gender is a critically important factor in one's visibility and freedom of movement. It seems that Waldo's uncanny ability to hit the road can teach us a lot about life on the street.

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26 Policy Challenges to Homelessness Among Caribbean Youth in Toronto

Joseph Springer, Janet Lum, Terry Roswell

Introduction

The primary goal of this research project is to identify patterns related to homelessness among Caribbean youth between the ages of 15 and 25, and to advance policy proposals that would alter these pathways. This chapter examines the research literature on homelessness in Canada generally, and on youth homelessness specifically, in order to learn about the racialized dimensions of youth homelessness in Canada. The term “racialization” is used here to describe the discriminatory treatment of homeless Caribbean youth based on race. We also add a more focused examination of racialized immigrant groups arriving after 2000 and ask whether young people in this category share particular characteristics that make their route to homelessness distinct. The chapter builds on the current state of knowledge regarding the evolution of the homelessness crisis in Canada (Gaetz, 2010b) and the suggested policy proposals designed to address homelessness on a national or local scale (Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012; Golden et al., 1999; Shapcott, 2007).

Between September 2005 and January 2006, 43 in-depth interviews were conducted with homeless Caribbean youth aged 15 to 25. The participants were reached through seven agencies serving homeless youth in Toronto. The data allowed us to develop a greater understanding of the socio-demographic characteristics (age, education, economic background) of homeless Caribbean youth, their pathways into homelessness, their support systems, their interactions with police,

their vulnerabilities, and the impacts all these factors have on their self image and sense of control they have over their own lives. To conclude, this chapter offers suggestions on how to improve relationships between Caribbean communities and many of the institutions in our society, especially the public school system and the police, as a way of addressing the needs of homeless Caribbean youth.

Background: Homelessness in Canada

In the past decade, while Canadian researchers have studied the issue of homelessness, basic statistics on the numbers of people who are homeless are uncertain. In part, the uncertainty lies in the various definitions of homelessness used in the literature. For example, homelessness can be defined very narrowly as “being out on the streets” with no shelter. In contrast, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 2012) offers a very broad definition of homelessness: a lack of housing that is “adequate for health and well-being.” In addition, figures on homelessness tend not to capture homeless people who do not use social services (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002), as well as women in transition houses (Du Mont et al., 2000). In the absence of an agreed upon definition, data on total numbers of homeless people, let alone homeless young people, are at best rough estimates (Chamberlain et al., 2007; City of Toronto, 2006; City of Saskatoon, 2008; O’Grady et al., 2011; Hulchanski et al., 2009; Laflamme, 2001; Peters & Robillard, 2007). According to the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS), there are between 200,000 and 300,000 homeless people in Canada (HIFIS, 2007). This number includes anywhere between 65,000 and 150,000 homeless youth (DeMatteo et al., 1999). In Toronto, the number of homeless youth ranges from 1,700 to over 2,000 (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002). In this chapter, youth are defined as homeless if, at the time of the interview, they lived in shelters or described their own living conditions as highly insecure and unstable, such that they could easily be in a shelter, on a friend’s couch, or on the street within a month.

Much of the research on street populations has focused on young people under the age of 25. Researchers have linked the existence of street youth in developed countries to poverty, family violence, the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children, and the non-conformity and rebelliousness of youth themselves (Baron & Hartnagel, 2002; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Besides identifying some of the complex background factors that lead some youth to homelessness (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2002; Springer et al., 1998), studies have also focused on the experiences of homeless youth while living on the streets, including their attempts to access community and/or government-based resources (Morrell-Bellai et al., 2000), means of survival such as theft, panhandling and/or abus-

ing substances (Basso et al., 2004; DeMatteo et al., 1999; Parnaby, 2003), the criminalization of homelessness (Tanner & Wortley, 2002, Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002), and the overlap between racial and social profiling in homeless people's interactions with the police (Gaetz & O Grady, 2006; O'Grady et al., 2011). Racial profiling refers to the discriminatory treatment or greater surveillance of individuals by police because of race or skin color. Social profiling refers to the differential treatment or greater surveillance of individuals by police because of their perceived social status (e.g., age, income level, being homeless). Racial and social profiling together tend to result in Black youth generally, and Black homeless youth in particular, being stopped, questioned and ticketed by police for a range of minor offences such as loitering, trespassing, or public intoxication more often than white youth or white homeless youth.

Generally, studies have found that most Canadian street youth are male (Kufeldt & Nimmo, 1987; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997) and live in major Canadian cities (Brannigan & Caputo, 1993). In the broader literature on homelessness, recent attention has also highlighted other groups such as women (Du Mont et al., 2000), Aboriginal people (Baron & Hartnagel, 2002; Report of the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force, 1999), and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual and queer (LGBTQ) youth (Ray, 2006).

Noticeably absent from Canadian research is an analysis and understanding of homelessness through a racial lens. Little discussion has emerged on the particular homeless experiences of racialized groups, despite international research indicating that homeless populations are made up of a diversity of people who become and remain homeless for a variety of reasons (Daniel, 2002; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002). For example, studies on homeless populations in Canada tend not to identify to which ethnic and racial categories homeless people belong. For this reason, it is difficult to point to the particular impacts of homelessness on different populations and thereby, identify policy solutions suited to specific groups (Basso et al., 2004; Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002). Indeed, studies that have noted a strong presence of racialized groups in their sample have failed to comment on whether the experiences of racialized homeless people differ from that of mainstream homeless populations (DeMatteo et al., 1999; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Tanner & Wortley, 2002).

A few studies have commented on the different factors that increase the vulnerability to homelessness of visible minorities, including immigration, education, employment, housing, or the criminal justice system (Anisef & Bunch, 1994; Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Springer et al., 1998). For example, Anisef and Kilbride (2003) noted that the needs of newcomer (immigrant) youth have not been adequately met, especially in the education system.

They identified in the Ontario education system some structural and ideological barriers, which do little to encourage achievement among minority youth. Barriers include school policies (such as the *Safe Schools Act* that allowed schools to expel students automatically for fighting), the discriminatory attitudes of teachers, and a widespread practice in some Toronto schools of assessing Caribbean youth as non-English speaking, resulting in those students being put back several grades or assigned to English as a second language programs. Anisef and Bunch (1994) contend that such barriers have led to poor attendance and feelings of hostility towards school. While the links between such barriers and homelessness remain largely unexplored, a major national US study that included 682 youth who experienced homelessness concluded that school expulsion is among one of the key risk factors for homelessness. Further, the authors suggest that a lack of education makes it less likely that youth will reintegrate into society and more likely will become chronically homelessness (Shelton et al., 2009).

Examining the issues facing newcomers is important because immigrants are a major presence in the Greater Toronto Area. In 2006, foreign-born residents made up 50 percent of the city of Toronto's population (Statistics Canada, 2007). The immigrant population in the city grew at a rate roughly twice that of the overall population over the previous 10 years. In other words, the city's overall rate of population growth was 4.5 percent for the period of 2001 to 2011, while its visible minority population grew by 10.6 percent over the same period (City of Toronto, 2012). Many immigrants to Canada are racial minorities coming from countries such as the People's Republic of China, India, the Philippines and Pakistan. It is important therefore to broaden the discussion of youth homelessness to include dimensions of race and immigrant status. Anisef and Kilbride (2003) found that homeless youth from minority communities are more reluctant than white homeless youth to access community or government resources for assistance, preferring first to take advantage of their informal social networks. Thus, visible minority youth who are recent immigrants and may not have well-developed informal networks in Canada may be at even greater risk.

Homelessness, Poverty and Immigrant Status

Immigrants are more likely than people born in Canada to be vulnerable to housing insecurity, and possibly homelessness (Springer et al., 2011). They depend on rental housing, since they are mostly unable to buy houses, and face unique challenges in finding acceptable housing, in part because of poverty: they are more likely to spend at least 30 percent of total household income on housing (Preston et al., 2007; Preston et al., 2009). For immigrants who have lived in Canada for fewer than ten years, this is even more likely to be the case. Among immigrant households who landed in Canada between 1991 and

2001, 40 percent owned a home. Of the remaining population who rented, only 56 percent secured affordable rental housing (i.e. under 30 percent of total household income); 20 percent paid 30-50 percent of their income and almost 25 percent paid more than half of their income in rent. These statistics, which demonstrate the very serious housing affordability challenges for newcomers to Canada (Hiebert & Mendez, 2008), are supported elsewhere in the research literature. Murdie et al., (2006) covered housing and immigration issues from 1990 to 2005, and found that affordability challenges were a major barrier for most immigrants in finding adequate and suitable housing. Poverty, immigrant status and a shortage of affordable housing can stretch the resources of immigrant parents and potentially increase the risks of homelessness for immigrant youth, particularly when tensions at home become unbearable.

Shelter use is one indication of homelessness and poverty well documented in the research literature. Data from the City of Toronto Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (2009) system show that youth make up 19 percent (5,020) of shelters users. Of significance to this study is the relationship between newcomer status, poverty and shelter use: among families using emergency shelters, 24 percent were refugee claimants and 9 percent of families were newcomers to the city. In addition, single newcomers to the city accounted for 3 percent of shelter users, as did single refugee claimants (City of Toronto, 2001). Despite these alarming statistics, most newcomers who stayed in shelters were able to leave within a relatively short period of time: the majority of recent immigrants needed only four days to two months to leave the shelter system. Nonetheless, 6 percent did stay in the system for a year or longer (Springer et al., 1998).

Recent arrival in the city has also been found to be an important contributor to homelessness. The *Report of the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force* (1999) noted that, in 1997, 16 percent of shelter users had arrived from other parts of Ontario, 17 percent from other provinces, and 14 percent from outside of Canada. Similarly, Springer et al.'s analysis of the characteristics of the homeless population in Toronto found that slightly under half of the shelter users studied had lived outside of the City of Toronto one year before their use of shelters. Indeed, one of the most common reasons for shelter use was that many of the users were new to the City of Toronto: approximately 30.7 percent of total shelter users stated this as their reason for using the service (Springer et al., 1998).

Research Method

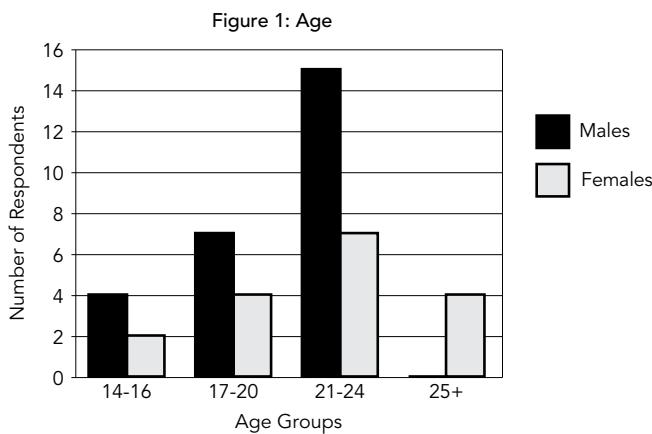
Between September 2005 and January 2006, in-depth interviews were conducted with Caribbean youth aged 15 to 25 who self-identified as homeless. At the time of the interview, these young people either lived in shelters or believed

that their current living conditions were so uncertain that they could be in a shelter, on a friend's couch, or on the street within a month. The sample was drawn from young people who were willing to participate and who accessed services from seven community agencies serving homeless youth in Toronto. While the sample was not random, attempts were made to ensure that enough women were included. We used a detailed questionnaire to probe for socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, ethnicity, education, etc.) of this homeless Caribbean youth sample. Questions addressed reasons for being homeless, previous episodes of homelessness, family background, hopes and goals, feelings of safety, experiences of racism and discrimination, sources of social and financial support, and community resources accessed during periods of homelessness. Sixty interviews were attempted, yielding 43 usable results (26 males and 17 females). Each participant was given thirty dollars for their participation.

Study Results: Demographics & Histories of Homelessness

Age and Sex

Twenty-six of the 43 respondents (61 percent) were between 21 and 25 years of age, including 15 males and 11 females; 11 (26 percent) were aged 17 to 20; and 6 (14 percent) were between 14 and 16. In total there were 26 males (60 percent) and 17 females (40 percent) in the sample. As stated in the methods section, our sample deliberately overrepresented women. In most North American research on homeless youth, there are twice as many males as females. A 2006 Public Health Agency of Canada Report notes that males outnumbered females by a ratio of approximately 2:1 among homeless youth. As well, almost two-thirds of our sample was over 21 years of age, which is consistent with the age distribution of homeless youth in other studies (O'Grady et al., 2011).



Immigrant Status

Of the sample, 35 (81 percent) were born outside Canada, while 8 (19 percent) were born in Canada. Fifteen (35 percent) were citizens; another 15 (35 percent) were landed immigrants; 7 (16 percent) were undocumented; and 5 (12 percent) were refugee claimants. Eighteen of the 35 immigrant youth in the sample (51 percent) had been in Canada for fewer than 5 years, with 8 (19 percent) having been here less than 2 years. Although all respondents were born in the Caribbean or to Caribbean parents, forty percent thought of themselves as “Canadian.”

Race/Ethnicity

It is important to note that the Caribbean population is racially mixed. The Caribbean’s history of slavery and indentured labour brought large numbers of enslaved people from a variety of African countries, as well as Indian and Chinese indentured labourers. Caribbean populations in the diaspora (such as in Canada) reflect this diversity, as well as a variety of combinations of these populations with French, Spanish and English colonial masters.

Our sample of homeless youth was overwhelmingly Black. Indeed, 33 of the 43 (77 percent) respondents identified as Black, 7 (16 percent) as mixed-race, 2 (5 percent) as East Indian, and 1 (2 percent) as Chinese. All respondents were either born in the Caribbean or to Caribbean parents in Canada.

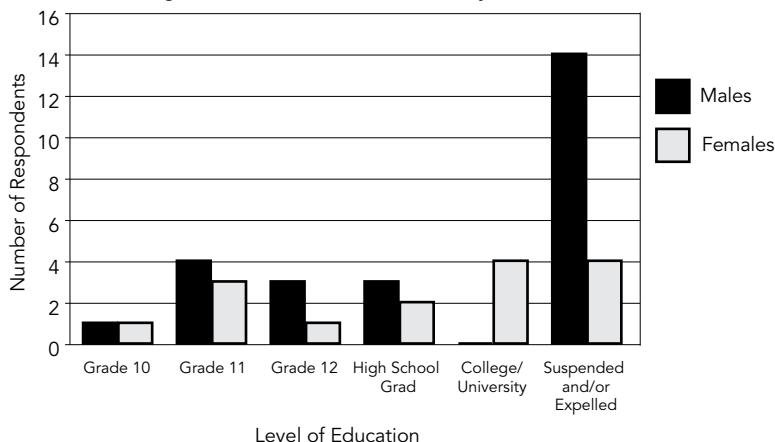
Education

At the time the survey was conducted, 18 (42 percent) of the youth had been either suspended or expelled from school, mostly for fighting under the zero-tolerance policy of the *Safe Schools Act*. Not surprisingly, this problem was more common among the males in the sample. Of the 25 others, five (12 percent) reported having graduated from high school; 4 (9 percent), all female, had some college or university education. Thus only 9 of the 43 (19 percent) had completed high school. Thirteen (30 percent) had completed Grade 12 or less, although only two (4.7 percent) reported having less than a Grade 10 education.

Academically, while the majority of respondents (37, or 86 percent) reported receiving grades of “C” or better during their time in school, 15 (35 percent) had dropped out at some point. It is noteworthy that 34 (79 percent) planned to continue or complete their education. We suspect that the 26 older youth between 21 and 25 years of age are unlikely to re-enter the traditional high school system given their age and relationship with the school system.

Other studies find similar educational backgrounds to those of the homeless youth in this study. Tarasuk et al.'s study (2005) of 261 homeless youth found that most had not completed high school; 7 (3 percent) reported that they were currently attending school, but only 2 were in school full-time. Only 10 percent of Hagan and McCarthy's sample of 482 youth (330 in Toronto and 152 in Vancouver) (1997) and 10 percent of Gaetz and O'Grady's sample of 208 youth (2002) had completed high school.

Figure 2: Educational Achievement by Sex



Family Background

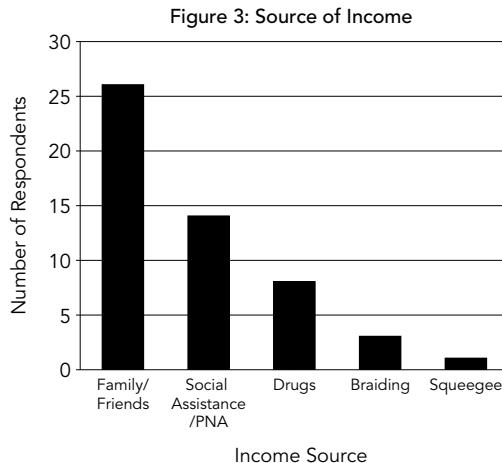
Out of the 43 respondents, 40 (93 percent) were raised by family members. Ten (23 percent) had been raised by both parents, 16 (37 percent) by single mothers, 13 (30 percent) by other family members, and 1 (2 percent) by a single father. One respondent reported being raised by a non-family member and two did not respond to this question. None of our youth reported any history with institutions such as Children's Aid Society. Twenty-six of those interviewed (61 percent) had two or more siblings.

The employment status of their parents was remarkably stable. Most of their parents were gainfully employed: 29 of the youth (67 percent) had parents who worked full time and just 7 (16 percent) had parents who worked part-time. Only 3 (7 percent) had parents who were unemployed; none of their parents were on social assistance.

Income

Without question, this group of youth had experienced financial hardship. At the time of the survey, 37 of the 43 in our sample (86 percent) were

unemployed; 14 (33 percent) received either social assistance or a personal needs allowance (PNA), but 29 (67 percent) did not receive any such support. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that approximately two-thirds of the unemployed youth would have been receiving no social support at the time of the study, leaving them with no official income.



Twenty-six of the youth (61 percent) claimed they got some financial help from family and/or friends. All reported having less money than their peers. Mothers were the main providers in 60 percent of cases; fathers in 12 percent. Some young women (3) braided hair to earn extra money; 8 youth reported having sold drugs at least once. None reported panhandling or prostitution as sources of income, but one spoke of squeegee activity.

Present Housing

As stated above, the homeless Caribbean youth in this study lived in shelters or unstable housing arrangements, but not on the streets. This is an important point because it distinguishes between homeless youth who manage to access temporary shelters or insecure accommodations from those who sleep on the streets, that is, “sleep rough.” None of our respondents was without shelter or “sleeping rough” at the time of interview. Studies conducted by Tarasuk and Dachner (2002, 2006, 2009) showed that homeless youth sleeping rough (as compared to homeless youth in shelters) had more severe challenges, especially in meeting daily nutritional needs, tended to have longer arrest records and were more likely to use “harder” drugs than marijuana.

Twenty-eight respondents (65 percent) were living in a shelter or group home during the study period. While 2 were living in rooming houses and

5 (12 percent) in shared apartments with others, they felt that their living arrangements were highly unstable and transient and for this reason, identified as homeless. An additional 8 (19 percent) described their living arrangements as “couch surfing.” The lengths of time that the members of our sample had been homeless varied, but were of considerable duration. Almost 60 percent had been homeless 9 weeks or more. The most frequent duration of homelessness cited by the respondents was 9 to 24 weeks.

For most, this was not the first episode of homelessness. Twenty-five (58 percent) had been homeless more than once, with 10 (23 percent) experiencing homelessness more than 3 times and 8 (19 percent) more than 5 times. Despite contact with family, a slim majority (22, or 51 percent) did not return home once they had left, claiming they had not returned home between episodes.

Reasons for Homelessness

Participants in our survey said that “family breakdown” was the most common reason for homelessness. This was the main reason given in 17 (40 percent) cases. “Family breakdown” was the catchall phrase describing family interpersonal dynamics and conflicts, which escalated to such levels that young people felt they had little option but to leave home. Family breakdown included problems with parents, partners, other family or guardians, sometimes relating to abuse and/or sexual identity. For example, two Black youth who self-identified as LGBT youth reported being “kicked out of the house” because of their sexual identity. The next most reported reason was eviction due to an inability to pay rent, cited 25 percent of the time.

Personal Safety

Respondents reported witnessing drug dealing, car theft, fights (both with and without weapons), threats with weapons, and sexual assault. About 11 (25 percent) had previously been part of a gang that “looked out for each other.” Only 2 confided that they were still part of a gang. Ten of the youth in the sample had faced threats of physical injury, including death threats, more than once; half of the females had been attacked without a weapon. Eleven respondents experienced unwanted sexual touching; of these, 3 males and 5 females had faced unwanted or forced sex; 5 females reported past sexual abuse by a family member. In response, 4 (10 percent) respondents carried knives for their own protection.

The geography of personal assault differed by gender. Women were most likely to be assaulted in the home. Indeed, 8 of 13 assaults on women reported by participants took place at home; 7 of the 8 assailants were males over

30; and in 5 of the 7 cases, this adult was a family member. By contrast, 12 of 15 assaults on males took place outside the home. In each of the 12 assaults outside the home, there were 2 or more other male attackers. Some assaults were based on race, others on sexual orientation. About 17 (40 percent) respondents reported experiencing non-physical assaults such as ethnic slurs.

Discrimination and Racism

There was a very strong perception among respondents that racism and discrimination were pervasive in social institutions. Thirty-eight (90 percent) voiced a belief that police discriminate on the basis of race, and that some racial groups are treated more harshly than others. Moreover, 33 (77 percent) respondents thought police targeted males more often than females, and almost half believed racism had affected their grades in school. Respondents' own contact with police had been overwhelmingly negative. Without question, males bore the brunt of this. Twenty-two (50 percent) of the 43 youth in our sample had been arrested at least once; 27 (66 percent) had been stopped and questioned at least once but not arrested; and 10 (25 percent) had been searched more than 10 times but never arrested. A study by O'Grady et al., (2011) found that about 44 percent of the sample of homeless youth they surveyed had been stopped or arrested in the previous year, compared to 11 percent of housed youth. The Caribbean homeless youth in our sample were stopped or arrested at a considerably higher rate than housed youth, and at a higher rate than homeless youth in other samples that were not mostly Black. Many of the stops by police were part of a process of "carding," a practice whereby police routinely stop and question individuals, and collect personal data, which are then entered into a database. Since Black youth were more likely than white youth to be stopped and questioned, they were also more likely to be arrested than white youth. It is thus not difficult to see how they have come to see carding as police harassment.

Self-Image

Despite their housing status, respondents generally had a positive self-image. Their self -image was based on responses to three statements. When asked whether they had "control over the bad things that happen to them", 22 (50 percent) believed that they had control; 33 (77 percent) believed that they had "control of their future"; 35 (80 percent) considered that they could "do things as well as others". This overall optimism was reflected in their identification of preferred jobs; 20 (47 percent) chose the skilled trades or skilled professions as the form of employment they would ultimately like to achieve, while only about 5 (12 percent) expected to be in the lower-paid service sectors. The youth in our sample did not see their existence as aimless. Indeed, 29 (67 percent) disagreed with the statement that "they

lived life day to day with little thought for the future.” Their responses reflected a willingness to take responsibility for their circumstances and behavior.

Nevertheless, 23 (54 percent) described themselves as self-centered, acting without regard for their impact on others; 22 (50 percent) admitted that they lost their temper easily; and 20 (44 percent) agreed that they often acted impulsively, without stopping to think.

Social Supports

According to the survey respondents, mothers were the primary source of support in 25 (60 percent) cases, other family in 11 (26 percent), and fathers in 5 (12 percent) cases. Almost 26 (60 percent) respondents claimed they received small amounts of help from friends; 25 (58 percent) stated they had 2 or more close friends. These tended to belong to the same race, sex, and social class as the respondent, even if they lived in different parts of the city. Only 6 (14 percent) participants reported they had no close friends.

Summary

The homeless youth in this study were all Caribbean, either born in the Caribbean or having parents born in the Caribbean. They were poor, unemployed and poorly educated. While poverty, unemployment and low education may characterize the general homeless youth population, what is distinctive in this sample is that most were Black, mixed-race or Asian; 18 (43 percent) had been suspended from school; and most reported negative interactions with the school system and the police - experiences they attribute to racism, which set them on the path to homelessness and prevented them from seeing a path out of homelessness. The combination of skin color, age, homelessness and poverty subjected them to what May describes as a position of “multiple structural disadvantage” (2000:613). Nonetheless, they retained both a positive self-image and a sense of optimism.

Looking Forward – Policy Implications

There are key policy concerns that flow from the results of this study. The first policy challenge addresses what our respondents identified as a principal trigger that set them on the pathway to homelessness. Here we point to the *Safe Schools Act* that was introduced in 2000 and continued until April of 2007. Although the Act has since been abolished, it carries lasting consequences that are still affecting youth and that still need to be corrected. The second policy challenge focuses on what our respondents identified as negative experiences with police: the practice of “carding,” that is, stopping and questioning individuals and collecting details

on their appearance, age, gender, location, mode of transportation and skin colour. “Carding” continues into the present in Toronto. Finally, we look at policy initiatives for the community that would provide young people with better access to housing, health and other basic social supports. While respondents were by and large optimistic about their futures, given the challenges they face on the street, supportive services are important to help them maintain a positive outlook regarding future life possibilities. While such initiatives support all homeless youth, the roots of some of the youth programs offered as examples here can be traced to communities with large Caribbean populations, such as Eva’s Phoenix, a community-based service agency in Toronto spearheaded by a Jamaican woman to address a need that had not been previously acknowledged by the Caribbean community: to help shelter, support and guide homeless Caribbean youth.

Initiatives for Schools

The public school system needs to work more vigorously to bridge the social and cultural gaps that face immigrant youth entering the education system. This assistance may be especially critical in schools with growing immigrant populations. Systemic racism in public schools presents structural barriers that overwhelmingly disadvantage Black males. A policy that was especially destructive for young Black males in Toronto was the 2000 *Safe Schools Act*, which was in place when this study was conducted. As noted above, 18 respondents had been either suspended or expelled from school, reflecting the strained relationship between respondents and the school system. The main cause for the suspension or expulsion was fighting, which, under the zero-tolerance policy of the *Safe Schools Act* resulted in automatic expulsion, with no intermediate or alternative solutions. Other studies (Bhattacharjee, 2003) in Toronto have similarly suggested that the Safe Schools Act, coupled with “zero tolerance,” has resulted in higher numbers of Black students being suspended and expelled in comparison to white students. Ruck and Wortley’s study (2002) of Toronto high school students agreed that Black students were more likely than white students to perceive discrimination in treatment by teachers, school suspension practices, school authorities’ decisions to call in police, and police treatment at school. This perception is supported by research in other areas, particularly in the U.S. (The Advancement Project and the Civil Rights Project, 2000), all of which contributed to reversing the zero tolerance policy in schools in 2007. Our study suggests that after school expulsion and experiences of homelessness, young people are not likely to return to school without significant intervention. As noted above, there is some evidence in the literature to suggest that a lack of education heightens the likelihood of chronic homelessness (Shelton et al., 2009).

More constructive strategies need to be put in place to keep racialized youth in schools. Using anti-racist approaches to education, and providing counselling

that targets young people at risk of leaving school, as well as “go-to” mentors and role models that youth can turn to when their home situation sours, can go far in helping youth avoid homelessness. An example would be to add to the curriculum illustrations of positive contributions and heroes of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural and religious groups. Another example would be to address the underrepresentation of racialized groups among teachers and administrators in schools. Broader community-based outreach programs that encourage immigrant parents and children to become engaged in extra-curricular school activities (see Boys and Girls Clubs, discussed below) can also help correct the damage done by the zero tolerance elements of the *Safe Schools Act*, especially for those students whose education was interrupted during the 2000 to 2007 period, who are still out of school and now homeless.

One example of a proactive initiative is the Pathways to Education model. This collaborative community-government program, founded in Toronto in 2001, was designed to help youth in low-income communities stay in school and graduate to post-secondary education. By combining academic, financial, social and mentoring supports, the program helps prevent the frustrations that lead to fighting and expulsion, and secondly, helps draw young people who have dropped out of school back to their studies. The program has produced impressive outcomes, such as higher school attendance and participation in extra-curricular activities, lower dropout rates and increased college enrollment among program participants. Most heartening is the beginning of Pathways programs in ten more low income communities across Toronto and other cities including Ottawa, Kitchener and Montréal, with close to 4,000 students getting positive results. In the long run, such programs promise to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness, and enable broader social change (Pathways to Education, 2012).

Another example of a constructive educational outreach program is the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada (BGCC), a national non-profit organization with provincial and local branches. These Clubs successfully build community capacity by teaching people to optimize a community’s internal resources. For example, the Clubs recruit local volunteers to act as mentors, and find local facilities that can be used for recreational and sports programs. In doing so, the Clubs help overcome society’s structural barriers for children and youth from all economic, cultural and social backgrounds (Boys and Girls Club of Canada, 2012). The Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada are also in the process of adapting the Pathways model described above to make mentorship support available to a wider community (N. Price, personal communication, April 10, 2012). While such programs may be broadly applicable to all youth, Pathways was specifically designed to respond to issues facing Caribbean youth, many of whom live in low income, high-risk social housing communities. Dedicated mentoring addresses feelings of alienation; financial

support tackles poverty; and tutoring improves academic performance, thereby helping to change the low expectations of teachers. Taken together, programs that encourage and support youth to complete their education go far to prevent homelessness among Black youth by breaking the cycle, which triggers homelessness: economic inequality, low expectations for achievement in schools, and fighting as a response to frustrations and family tensions, leading to expulsion from school. Importantly, Boys and Girls Clubs also reach out to homeless shelters, group homes and the streets, responding to the support needs of homeless youth.

Initiatives for the Streets

Issues of race and racism are critical in understanding the life terrain that all Black youth must navigate. Whether they are born in Canada, Africa or the Caribbean, Black youth face the same issues of institutional and individual racism. Perhaps as a reaction to institutional and individual racism, Caribbean youth may tend to rely on informal social networks, as discussed earlier, rather than community resources.

Carding

In an investigative journalism series by the *Toronto Star* (2010), reporters outlined the procedure and impact of “carding.” In Canada, police can approach and ask anyone to answer questions about personal information, other persons of interest, or about what one is doing. Also documented are details on appearance, age, gender, location, mode of transportation and skin colour (O’Grady et al., 2011).

In Toronto, these data, gathered by police in mostly non-criminal encounters, are entered on contact cards and then stored in The Master Names Index (MANIX) & Field Information Reports (FIR). According to *Toronto Star* (2010) reporters, race is a key factor in carding. The number of contact cards filled out where skin colour was Black is three times higher than the proportion of Blacks in the population of Toronto. The document card rate for white people is proportional to the white population. When age is factored in, young males of every skin colour are disproportionately carded. Black males, aged 15-24, seem to be documented at a rate of 13 times higher than non-Black males of the same age, while the rate for Brown males is 7 times higher. Importantly, *Toronto Star* reporters also found that, of the people carded between 2008 to mid-2011, fewer than one in five had been arrested or charged in Toronto in the previous decade (Winsa, 2012; Winsa & Rankin, 2012).

What is the connection between carding and homelessness? What are the implications for policy strategies? First, because of negative relations between police and racialized youth, law enforcement officers are not seen as trusted authority

figures or as a source of help when these youth find themselves in distress and homeless. Recall that in our study, contact with police had been overwhelmingly negative. Over 50 percent of those in our sample had been arrested at least once; 66 percent had been stopped and questioned at least once; and 25 percent had been searched more than 10 times, with males bearing the brunt of the negative contact with the police. Clearly carding is part of this negative experience for young Black males generally, but particularly for street youth. The extensive literature on policing and racial profiling (Gaetz, 2002, 2009; O'Grady et al., 2011; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2011; Wortley, 2003, 2004, 2005; Sylvestre, 2010) validates such perceptions and experiences of discrimination. Secondly, because homeless Caribbean youth often find themselves living in neighbourhoods that are subject to high levels of police surveillance, they are at greater risk of negative interactions with police. As a group, they are overrepresented in the court and correctional systems (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2006).

Recognizing that current police practices focus too much negative attention on racialized youth, whether homeless or housed, there needs to be greater oversight to ensure that the carding process is strictly monitored and controlled. Officers should be trained to avoid stopping youth not otherwise involved in illegal or inappropriate behavior without sound and defensible reasons. Furthermore, enhanced training can teach police officers the negative impact of their carding actions. The carding process should allow law enforcement officers to ensure public safety without undermining racialized youth's overall trust in authority. In this vein, O'Grady, Gaetz and Buccieri have recommended alternative policing strategies and practices that would have "a more positive outcome on the lives of people who are homeless, and which would make the streets safer for all citizens" (2011:82). They propose community policing and "diversion strategies...that avoid entanglement in courts" (O'Grady, Gaetz & Buccieri, 2011:82).

Prioritizing community policing has tremendous potential as a strategy to help homeless Black youth by encouraging officers to get to know the community and its residents better. One significant benefit is a possible shift in police attitudes so that officers come to see homeless Black youth as vulnerable persons in need of assistance rather than as potential criminals who should be controlled or removed. O'Grady et al., (2011) note that in only 13.6 percent of cases did youth report being stopped by police as supportive. By the same token, homeless Black youth can come to see police as a source of assistance rather than harassment. Community policing can help break the cycle of surveillance, negative contacts, and carding, and allow mutual trust and respect to develop instead.

Similarly, youth diversion programs are an alternative strategy that can help break the cycle of homelessness, petty crime, fines and imprisonment. In 1999,

Ontario passed the *Safe Streets Act*, which enables police officers to issue tickets for minor offences such as “aggressive panhandling”. However, as O’Grady et al., (2011) report, 80 percent of Safe Streets tickets issued between 2004 and 2010 were for non-aggressive panhandling. In other words, homeless youth resort to panhandling or squeegeeing to survive but get fined for their efforts. In addition, youth in this study were ticketed for drinking in public or for loitering, and charged for drug use or shoplifting. Applying punitive justice for such petty crimes is both expensive and unhelpful. Youth face fines that they are unable to pay and the system wastes resources in trying to pursue the matter. Youth diversion programs offer young offenders, homeless or not, paths away from substance abuse, negative peer associations (“falling in with a bad crowd”), attitudes in favour of criminal conduct and a lifetime of cycling in and out of jail.

One positive example of intervention and diversion is the Ottawa Police Service Youth Intervention and Diversion initiative, operated through the Ottawa Boys and Girls Club and the John Howard Society of Ottawa (2012) and funded by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services. After police conduct a risk assessment analysis, young offenders who are identified to be at low or moderate risk to reoffend are diverted out of the criminal justice system. They must admit responsibility for the criminal incident and must also agree to individualized courses of action that focus on improving and rehabilitating the root causes of the offending behaviours. Action plans may include community service hours, a letter of apology to the victim or another form of restitution (compensation) and/or participating in classroom programs. Diverted youth may also have to participate in intervention services that address their specific risk factors (e.g., drug or alcohol counselling, anger management counselling, recreational engagement, victim-offender mediation). Diversion programs claim to promote positive behaviors and environments, reduce rates of reoffending, complement community policing efforts, and enhance community safety (John Howard Society of Ontario and Wellesley Institute, 2012). Such programs, however, depend on a host of non-profit community-based agencies offering a wide array of supportive services, and on the efforts of outreach workers to help homeless youth navigate their way back into the social mainstream.

Initiatives for Communities – Outreach and Supportive Structures

In our study, the majority of youth (51 percent) did not return home after episodes of homelessness. Over half (58 percent) had been homeless more than once and 65 percent were living in a shelter or group home. What community initiatives can better remedy youth homelessness? What particular aspects of community initiatives can help Caribbean homeless youth?

Non-profit community-based agencies provide an essential safety net for homeless youth and have the local knowledge to tailor their services to the specific needs and challenges of youth in their particular areas. Knowing the neighbourhood and having the capacity to harness local resources such as volunteers, role models and fundraising are strengths of the community sector. For example, Eva's Phoenix is a community-based service agency in Toronto that offers transitional housing and training for 50 youth aged 16 to 24, with a particular focus on Caribbean youth. Staff at Eva's Phoenix provides a range of services to help youth achieve and maintain self-sufficiency including counselling, mentorship, job placement assistance, help in finding adequate and affordable housing, and follow-up support. Such barrier-free access to community supports and programs that connect youth to education, employment, health and legal services is critical to help youth transition from homeless to housed. Agencies that serve youth of all backgrounds need solid anti-discrimination policies and procedures.

For racialized or otherwise marginalized subgroups within the homeless population, community outreach workers who are rooted in these communities (for instance, the Black community, or the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/transgender, or queer community) and their cultures play a vital role in effectively targeting and drawing homeless youth into supportive community structures and services. As reported in the literature, the two gay Black youth in our sample may carry a double stigma of race and sexual identity, and may avoid shelters and support services for fear of discrimination (Abramovich, 2012; Cochran et al., 2002). There is not one shelter among Toronto's 14 youth shelters geared to LGBTQ youth. Dedicated community outreach workers can redirect homeless Black and LGBTQ youth away from a range of risky behaviors by offering realistic alternatives and culturally appropriate guidance and role modeling.

Community agencies and outreach workers may also help homeless Caribbean youth reconnect with their families. Eva's Initiatives Family Reconnect Program highlights the important role of the family not only in preventing youth homelessness, but also in re-housing homeless youth through family mediation and reconciliation (Winland et al., 2011). The success of family reconciliation rests in large part on bringing together a range of services "upstream," before young people become homeless, by identifying and helping to resolve family conflicts before they hit a crisis point. Winland et al., (2011) have documented benefits of this approach in three major areas: family relationships, socioeconomic conditions, and health (17 percent moved back in with family; housing improved for 42 percent; employment for 15 percent; self-care for 28 percent; social skills for 18 percent; and mental and physical health improved for smaller numbers of youth).

To what extent can reconnection initiatives be used with racialized youth? As we

noted, family breakdown, the primary reason for homelessness for 17 (40 percent) respondents in our sample, included problems with parents, partners, other family or guardians, sometimes relating to assault and sexual identity. In some cases, where the reason for leaving involves issues such as sexual abuse, divisions within families may be irreconcilable. Reconciliation may not be possible or even desirable. For others, family reunification may be possible. Recall that although 22 (51 percent) respondents had not returned home despite maintaining contact with family, 49 percent did in fact return home after episodes of homelessness. Mothers (60 percent) and other family members (26 percent) helped support respondents. These findings suggest that family does matter: family reunification may be a workable, even vital, response to Caribbean youth homelessness.

Funding for outreach workers, community-based agencies such as Eva's Phoenix and programs like Family Reconnect rely heavily on municipal, provincial and federal governments for a large portion of their operating budgets. In the present economic climate of government fiscal restraint, these agencies that are already operating on shoestring budgets face serious financial cutbacks. Aside from the "top-line" costs to homeless youth in lost life opportunities, there are the "bottom line costs" for society. As a report from *Raising the Roof* on homelessness in Canada (Barr, 2009) asserts, in 2001, it cost an estimated \$30,000 to \$40,000 per year to keep a youth in the shelter system. The cost of keeping one youth in detention is estimated at over \$250 a day, or \$100,000 a year. Supporting agencies that help youth to access education, employment, health and legal services, and housing makes more economic sense than spending tax dollars on emergency services such as hospitals, shelters and detention centers. From both economic and social perspectives, funding front line agencies and dedicated outreach workers to support and to house homeless youth is a better investment than leaving youth homeless. Winland et al., (2011), writing about Eva's Initiatives Family Reconnect Program (cited above), reached similar conclusions. The authors stated that in 2009, the cost of helping 32 young people return home, move into stable housing (and for some, preventing them from becoming homeless in the first place) was \$7,125 per youth. If they were to remain in the shelter system for a year, the total cost would have been well over \$30,000. The costs would have been even higher if the expenses for health care, mental health and addictions support, and corrections that are a direct result of being homeless were also considered. In fact, research on the general homeless population in the United States suggests that, aside from the benefits to society, the economic costs of housing homeless people are more than offset by savings on emergency room visits, hospital in-patient stays, emergency shelters, and prisons (Culhane et al., 2002; Proscio, 2000).

The Caribbean youth in this study believe that issues of systemic racism in schools, police harassment, and a shortage of affordable housing contributed to their

homelessness. This study suggests that the path out of homelessness for Caribbean youth lies not only in remedying the distinctive problems affecting racialized young people in schools and on the streets, but also in building community supports with which homeless Caribbean youth can identify. As can be seen, this includes optimizing the capacity of local Caribbean communities, drawing Black leaders and role models from the community, providing opportunities and strategies to engage immigrant parents and encouraging local facilities to share resources.

Recommendations

Recommendations from our research on Caribbean homeless youth include the following.

- Establish outreach programs working out of schools to correct the damage done by the *Safe Schools Act*. This is especially important to those students whose education was interrupted during the period between 2000 and 2007 when the Act was in effect. Such outreach programs also importantly bridge the social and cultural gaps that immigrant youth face when entering the education system. For example, the Jamaican Canadian Association offers classes that help students in a variety of academic areas. These classes are frequently taught by Caribbean youth who volunteer (Jamaican Canadian Association, 2012). This assistance may be especially critical in schools outside the city core, where immigrants are increasingly making their homes.
- Re-examine the problems with English language assessments that result in putting Caribbean youth back several grades or assigning them to English as a second language programs because they are seen as “not speaking English”. Explore innovative programs that can help improve language skills without the awkward discomfort of being older than everyone in the class (after being put back several grades) or in an ESL (English as a second language) class when English is one’s first language.
- Expand the practice of community policing to help change the “culture” of policing and reduce racial profiling by building connections between police and local residents.
- Make greater use of youth diversion programs in the criminal justice system to replace punitive measures with positive actions that can help turn around the lives of homeless youth.
- Manage and monitor the practice of “carding” so that officers have sound and defensible reasons for stopping youth not otherwise involved in illegal or inappropriate behavior. Recently

there have been some positive steps forward. The Toronto Police Services Board now requires the Police Chief to report carding statistics to the Board every three months. The impact on the relationship between homeless Caribbean youth and police will depend on how these policies are implemented.

- Recognize and adequately fund the vital role of community based agencies and outreach workers in targeting and connecting homeless Black and racialized LGBTQ youth to supportive services, and where appropriate, to help them reconcile with family.

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SOLUTIONS

27 Ending Youth Homelessness in Canada is Possible: The Role of Prevention

Stephen Gaetz

What do we mean when we say we can end youth homelessness? Is it even possible? When making this assertion, we *do not* mean that there will never be young people in crisis who need emergency/temporary housing. Rather, *ending youth homelessness* means *eliminating* youth homelessness as a broad social problem that traps young people in an ongoing state of emergency, without access to permanent housing and necessary supports, and which leads to declining health and well-being, and most certainly an uncertain future.

Ending homelessness as a concept has gained traction internationally (Quiggars et al., 2011; FEANTSA, 2010; NAEH, 2002; 2012; USICH, 2010a; b). This is also true in Canada, where many communities and key national and regional organizations have declared this not only a possibility, but a priority¹.

The thought of ending youth homelessness can feel like an impossible task given the overwhelming scope of the problem and its apparent complexity. However,

1. This includes jurisdictions such as Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa, Victoria, the province of Alberta, as well as organizations such as the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, the Canadian Homelessness Research Network, etc.

a lot is known about effectively responding to youth homelessness. In this concluding chapter, we will focus on the role of prevention. And by prevention, we mean doing what we can to stop young people from becoming homeless in the first place, and when this is not possible, to ensure that the experience is short and that they do not become mired in homelessness or the street lifestyle.

While most people can easily comprehend the importance of prevention in reducing the harms of smoking, for instance, it is more challenging when thinking about preventing homelessness. What do we mean by prevention? What does prevention look like? This chapter summarizes some international research on effective prevention strategies, and identifies key factors that enable effective implementation. And, as we will see, prevention can mean many things. Preventive strategies can involve programming that strengthens protective factors amongst adolescents by enhancing engagement with school and building their problem solving and conflict resolution skills, for instance. Prevention also entails stopping the flow of young people from institutional care (child protection, mental health, corrections) into homelessness. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it means designing and implementing effective early intervention strategies so that when young people become homeless (or are at imminent risk) they are given supports that either help them return home or move into new accommodation (with supports) in a safe and planned way.

A review of systems level and program responses to youth homelessness in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States² reveals a wealth of innovative and effective programs, strategies and approaches that can be applied to the development and implementation of a Canadian model of prevention for ending youth homelessness.

The prevention framework for ending youth homelessness presented here³ outlines key components that can be implemented at the national, provincial or community levels and is intended to shift the emphasis from managing youth homelessness, to prevention on the one hand, and rehousing on the other.

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2. The methodology for this chapter includes: A scoping review of academic literature on youth homelessness, its causes and conditions, as well as responses from the English speaking world. Grey literature was also examined. Second, policy documents that focus on responses to homelessness generally (and to youth homelessness in particular) in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States were collected, reviewed, compared and analyzed. Third, qualitative interviews were conducted with policy makers, decision-makers and service providers in a number of communities across Canada in order to understand current thinking on how to address youth homelessness.
 3. This chapter is a summary of research presented in the report: Gaetz, S. (2013). *Coming of Age – Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press. The content is reproduced with the permission of the author.

Setting the Stage for Ending Youth Homelessness

Implementing a strategy to end youth homelessness invariably means doing things differently. Creating change means building on existing strengths, and being unafraid to implement new approaches and/or cease doing what clearly does not work, or is counter-productive (the criminalization of homelessness (O’Grady et al., 2011; this volume) is an example of the latter). Leadership and active participation by key stakeholders is essential to managing change.

So, how can we restructure and rebalance our response to youth homelessness? Broadly speaking, there are three main approaches to addressing homelessness. First, one can focus on ***prevention***, which is to invest in supports and the coordination of services so as to reduce the likelihood that people will become homeless in the first place. This means working ‘upstream’ to identify those at risk of homelessness, and develop interventions that reduce the risk that young people will become homelessness.

The second approach, the ***emergency response***, is the set of interventions available once someone becomes homeless. The goal here is to provide emergency supports in order to address basic and pressing needs for shelter and food, for instance, in order to lessen the immediate impact of homelessness on individuals and communities. Some communities have emergency shelters and supports designed specifically for youth, others do not. The ‘emergency response’ can also include the use of law enforcement.

The third response supports rapid transitions out of homelessness through the provision of appropriate ***accommodation and supports***. The goal is to get people into housing and give them the supports needed (income, health care, etc.) to ensure they do not fall back into or languish in a state of homelessness. For young people, for whom staying with parents or caregivers may no longer be an option, it means ensuring a planned and safe exit via appropriate accommodation and supports (if necessary).

A mature and developed response to homelessness ideally involves all three approaches, with a stronger emphasis on prevention and strategies that move people quickly out of homelessness, supported by emergency services that bridge the gap.

While there are notable exceptions, most communities in Canada do not take such an integrated approach, but rather, put much of their energy and resources into the emergency response, if they are doing anything at all about youth homelessness. While emergency services are important and necessary, we cannot rely on this as our ‘system’ if the goal is to end youth homelessness. It can

be argued that an emphasis on the emergency response – shelters, day programs, law enforcement – merely manages the problem, rather than eliminates it (Gaetz, 2008; 2010). One might say that we have become all too comfortable with this approach; we believe that our current emergency response is effectively dealing with the problem, when really at best it is a stop-gap measure.

We also know that the longer young people remain homeless, the worse their problems become and the greater their challenge in moving off the street (Karabanow & Naylor, this volume; Saewyc, this volume; O’Grady et al., 2011; Public Interest, 2009). Several of the chapters in this book demonstrate how this can include worsening mental health (McKay, this volume; Kidd, this volume), hunger (Tarasuk & Dachner, this volume), addictions (Buccieri, this volume; Kirst & Erickson, this volume), involvement in crime (Baron, this volume), criminal victimization (Gaetz et al., 2010) and sexual exploitation (Saewyc, this volume), for instance. We need to question whether keeping young people in a “state of emergency” is really helping them? Is it enough to treat the symptoms while ignoring the causes?

Effective strategic responses attempt to reduce a problem, rather than simply manage it. In moving towards a more strategic and coordinated response to youth homelessness in Canada, a shift from emergency services (which may unnecessarily prolong the experience of homelessness) to prevention and accommodation (with necessary and appropriate supports) must be a priority. Importantly, this means doing what we can to stop the flow of young people into homelessness.

Changing Course: Integrating Prevention into a Broader Strategic Response

The effectiveness of prevention is amplified when it is more broadly integrated into a coordinated strategic response. That is, in contrast to relying on agency-based prevention strategies, it is possible to approach the issue in a more strategic and integrated fashion. This is done by bringing together a range of services and approaches that work across the street youth sector, and ideally, engage with programs, services and institutions ‘upstream’ (that is, before a young person becomes homeless).

A review of integrated and strategic responses to youth homelessness from the UK, Australia and the United States identifies several core institutional components that are necessary to support a prevention strategy (Minnery & Greenhalgh, 2007; Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2002a; b; c; 2004; Communities and Local Government, 2005; Australian Government, 2008a; b; USICH, 2010a). These five key components are presented below.

1) Develop a Plan

The first step is devising and implementing a plan or strategy that is *inclusive* in its process, *strategic* in its objectives, sets real and measurable *targets for change*, is *clear* to all stakeholders and leads to *real changes* in young people's lives. The "10 Year Plan" approach, which originated in and has proven to be successful in the United States, has been adapted and applied in over ten Canadian communities, including most cities in Alberta. The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness' *A Plan Not a Dream* (2012) outlines key elements of a successful community plan to end homelessness; ideas that can easily be incorporated into a youth focused plan.

Any plan to end youth homelessness should include a statement of guiding principles and core values, for these shape how one responds to the needs of young people. As with the Ten Year Plan model, an effective youth homelessness strategy must have clearly articulated goals and objectives, timelines, responsibilities and benchmarks, as well as measurable targets. The right players must be engaged in the development and implementation of the plan, and importantly, young people must be involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation. It is important to include their voices in any quality assurance system.

2) Create an Integrated Systems Response

Central to an effective plan is the implementation of an integrated systems approach. That is, services within the homelessness sector need to be coordinated and integrated, so that different agencies and programs have clear roles and mandates, and work together as providers for the same clients. Systems coordination also has to extend beyond the homelessness sector to include mainstream services, whether health care, supports for those with addictions and mental health challenges, housing services, child welfare and corrections. ***The community-based services in the homelessness sector cannot alone solve homelessness.***

This is referred to as a "**System of Care**" approach. Originating in children's mental health and addictions sectors, the concept can be defined as: "an adaptive network of structures, processes, and relationships grounded in system of care values and principles that provides children and youth with serious emotional disturbance and their families with access to and availability of necessary services and supports across administrative and funding jurisdictions" (Hodges et al., 2006:3). So, as opposed to a fragmented collection of services, an integrated systems response requires that programs, services and service delivery systems be organized at every level – from policy, to intake, to service provision, to client flow – based on the needs of the young person. Integrated

service models are typically client-focused and driven, and designed to ensure that needs are met in a timely and respectful way.

3) Facilitate Active, Strategic and Coordinated Engagement by All Levels of Government, and Interdepartmental Collaboration

In countries that are showing success, there is recognition that partnerships are key to ending homelessness. This requires that all levels of government (including Aboriginal governments) be at the table, and engaged in the strategic responses. And within government, interdepartmental collaboration and responsibility must be seen as part of the solution. Homelessness is a “fusion” policy issue, and must necessarily involve health, corrections and justice, housing, education and child welfare, for instance. Communities cannot necessarily address all of the factors involved (health and mental health, child protection, corrections, affordable housing supply, etc.) without the direct engagement of higher levels of government. Finally, it is essential that governments create a policy and funding framework that allows for such change. A great plan means nothing if adequate resources are not made available, and if funding practices do not support and enable change.

4) Adopt a Youth Development Orientation

The needs of young people who become homeless are substantially different from those of adults (see the introduction to this book). Street youth, unlike homeless adults, leave homes defined by relationships (both social and economic) in which they were typically dependent upon adult caregivers. Becoming homeless then does not just mean a loss of housing, but rather it means leaving *home*; an interruption and potential rupture in social relations with parents and caregivers, family members, friends, neighbours and community.

For these reasons and others, an effective strategy to end youth homelessness must be distinct from the adult sector, and must focus on addressing the needs of adolescents and young adults. Homeless youth – especially those under the age of 18 – typically lack the experience and skills necessary to live independently. Just as importantly, many homeless youth will be in the midst of important physical, cognitive, psychological and emotional development. As such, we need to build youth homelessness strategies that prioritize healthy adolescent development, and shift the goal of the work from a transition to *independence*, to a successful transition to *adulthood* and *well-being*.

Finally, we need to take diversity into account, and acknowledge that the needs of young women are profoundly different from those of young men (Buccieri, this volume). Sexual and racial minorities face discrimination that

mainstream youth do not (Abramovich, this volume; Springer, this volume). Young people from new immigrant and Aboriginal communities face special challenges (Baskin, this volume). A successful strategy must ensure that diverse needs are met. One size does not fit all.

5) Incorporate Research, Data Gathering and Information Sharing

It should go without saying that research and evidence ought to influence any significant social or economic problem within our society. In communities that have the most successful response to homelessness, there is a growing respect for the role of research, evidence and data management. Research, such as that presented in this book, can impact on the solutions to homelessness by providing a deeper understanding of the problem, strong evidence for solutions, and promising practices from elsewhere that can be replicated and adapted locally.

Integrated data management systems are seen as essential to supporting systems approaches. [Homelessness Management Information Systems](#) (HMIS) have been developed for the homelessness sector and enable the coordination of services, tracking of clients and impact measurement of service delivery models. In Canada, a newly updated version of the [Homeless Individuals and Families Information System](#) (HIFIS) is currently being rolled out, and has many of the same capabilities for supporting service integration. It is designed to “enhance services providers’ ability to manage their operations and collect information about the population using shelters, such as: client bookings, provision of goods and services, housing placement, and case management and will be made available for free” (Government of Canada, 2013).

Preventing Youth Homelessness: What Do We Know, What Can We Do?

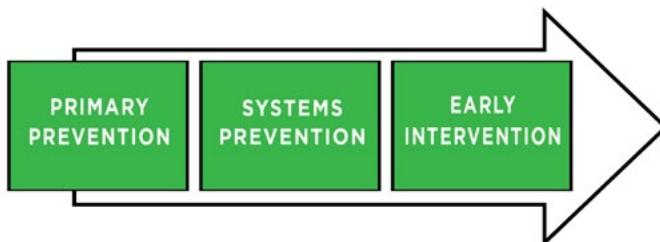
Preventing youth homelessness means stopping young people from becoming homeless in the first place. While it is safe to say that many Canadians now understand that homelessness prevention is a good idea, it is often harder to pin down exactly what this means or what it looks like. Countries that have demonstrated greater success in addressing youth homelessness, such as the UK and Australia, invest heavily in prevention. This requires a coordinated and strategic systems approach that necessarily engages, includes and mandates action from mainstream systems and departments of government, as well as the homelessness sector. No solution to youth homelessness can or should depend only on the efforts of those in the homelessness sector.

The evolution and conceptual framing of prevention-based approaches are built

upon experimentation, innovation and research, and have been underpinned by important legislative and policy shifts. In the UK, Hal Pawson has written extensively on the meaning of prevention and the roles and responsibilities of different sectors in implementing a successful strategy (Pawson, 2007; Pawson et al., 2006; 2007). Legislation such as the Homelessness Act (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2002a) and the Children's Act (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2004) has emphasized the need for a prevention focus. Evaluative studies of youth homelessness prevention programs, such as the Safe in the City program, have offered evidence-based insights into what works (Dickens & Woodfield, 2004). Quilgars' extensive research has added additional conceptual knowledge, as well as an evidence base that identifies and highlights program effectiveness (Quilgars et al., 2008; 2011). In Australia, MacKenzie and Chamberlain⁴ (2004; 2006; National Youth Commission, 2008) have articulated the importance of family connections and mediation, early intervention and the role of schools. The extensive program development and evaluation of Australia's Reconnect program (to be discussed in greater detail below) has also contributed to understanding youth homelessness prevention and the role of schools (Evans & Shaver, 2001; Ryan & Beauchamp, 2003). In the US, Culhane et al., (2010) have written a seminal document for the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness outlining the meaning of homelessness prevention, as well as the challenges to program implementation and outcomes measurement. These resources are influential in shaping strategic responses, and point the way towards a preventive approach to youth homelessness in Canada.

The framework presented here focuses on three interconnected domains related to youth homelessness prevention: ***primary prevention***, ***systems prevention***, and ***early intervention***. As will be seen, prevention necessarily involves addressing the personal and structural factors that contribute to a young person's homelessness.

Diagram 1: A Framework for Preventing Youth Homelessness



4. McKenzie and Chamberlain helped direct the National Commission on youth homelessness.

I) Primary Prevention

It is commonly understood that it is preferable to prevent any social or health problem from occurring than it is to reverse it after it has occurred. The goal of primary prevention is to address the root causes of homelessness and protect individuals and families well before there is a high risk of becoming homeless. The main responsibility for the primary prevention of youth homelessness lies well outside the homelessness sector, and includes those institutions and sectors that can potentially have a significant impact on the lives of children, youth and families.

Youth homelessness prevention addresses the structural factors that contribute to youth and family homelessness, including poverty, lack of affordable housing, racism (Baskin, this volume; Springer, this volume), homophobia (Abramovich, this volume) and other forms of discrimination, lack of educational engagement and achievement and addictions and mental health issues within the household.

A preventive strategy should enhance **protective factors** and **resilience** for young people. Protective factors include individual qualities and personality traits that help someone persevere in the face of stress, traumatic events or other problems (Smokowski et al., 1999; Crosnoe et al., 2002; Bender, 2007; Gilligan, 2000; Ungar, 2004). Protective factors help reduce or mitigate risk, and ultimately contribute to health and well-being and may include decision-making and planning skills, as well as higher levels of self-esteem (Lightfoot et al., 2011), positive family and peer relations, engagement in school and other meaningful activities, and lower levels of drug use or criminal involvement (Thompson, 2005). Protective factors can contribute to and enhance resilience, which

is the likely outcome of a child's both having qualities that are inherently protective (e.g. intelligence and positive coping skills) and having access to resources and networks of support that promote and help maintain a process of healing and psychological wellness. (Herrenkohl, 2008:94).

Prevention strategies that involve families, schools and communities, enhance protective factors in youth by building problem solving skills, supporting engagement in meaningful activities, strengthening educational and community engagement, and reducing family conflict.

The Role of Families

It should go without saying that family does matter in the transition process from youth to adulthood. However, since histories of family conflict and/or abuse are so prevalent amongst street youth, the sector often ignores family as part of the solution to youth homelessness (Winland et al., 2011; Winland, this volume). In fact,

many services operate on the assumption that young people need to be protected – and isolated – from their families. Families are framed as ‘part of the past’, rather than as resources that young people can and should draw on as they move forward.

Youth homelessness prevention must necessarily focus on the harms that undermine families and healthy childhood and adolescent development and encourage proactive work with families in order to address the factors that lead to conflict, and more seriously, abuse. While those who are ‘chronically disconnected’ may have few familial resources to draw on, it can be argued that for the majority of youth there is an opportunity to draw non-abusive family members in as part of the solution.

The Role of Schools

Virtually every young person who becomes homeless was once in school. Moreover, educators are often the first adults outside of the family to suspect and/or become aware of underlying problems that may lead to youth homelessness. Whether this means bullying, educational disengagement, signs of abuse, trauma and/or family conflict, teachers are often able to identify young people at risk. The problems begin when teachers lack the knowledge base, resources or supports to intervene.

The prevention strategies that address youth homelessness in Australia and the UK recognize the central role that schools play in young people’s lives. In communities across both countries, a number of programs and resources that are delivered by non-profit organizations in schools and community centers receive government support. In Australia, the government funded Reconnect Program delivers education and prevention services to young people in schools (more on this later). In the UK, community-based organizations develop and implement programs within a prevention framework that is supported and funded by the central government. Importantly, this prevention work begins in schools and targets youth *before* they turn 16.

Finally, there are preventive programs designed to provide information about homelessness, help people work through and identify risks (both students and teachers), and inform them of available supports if ever there is a crisis. The presence of agencies in schools also provides teachers with key points of contact when they suspect something is wrong. In their review of preventive strategies in the UK, Quiggars et al., (2008), argued that such programs provide a means to:

- increase young people’s awareness of the ‘harsh realities’ of homelessness and dispel myths about the availability of social housing;
- challenge stereotypes about homeless people, particularly regarding their culpability;

- educate young people about the range of housing options available to them after leaving home and raise awareness of help available;
- emphasize young people's responsibilities with regard to housing;
- teach conflict resolution skills that may be applied within and beyond the home and school (Quilgars et al., 2008:68).

The **Homeless Hub** website offers a range of free resources for primary, intermediate and secondary teachers. This includes lesson plans across a number of subject areas, backgrounders, supplementary resources such as videos, and resources for students. It is worth considering how these resources might be used (and expanded) as part of a broader school-based prevention strategy. (<http://www.homelesshub.ca/Education/>)

II) Systems Prevention

Stopping the flow of young people from state care into homelessness should be part of any youth homelessness strategy. Many young people become homeless upon leaving the care of child protection services or when discharged from corrections and/or mental health services, without adequate plans for housing and other supports.

Transitions from Child Protection

Research consistently points to the high percentage of homeless youth who have had some involvement with child protection services, including foster care, group home placements or youth custodial centres (Baskin, this volume; Dworsky & Courtney, 2009; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Gaetz, 2002; Gaetz, O'Grady & Buccieri, 2009; Karabanow, 2004; Karabanow & Naylor, this volume; Raising the Roof, 2008; Serge et al., 2002). For instance, in three separate studies, the percentage of homeless youth who reported previous involvement with foster care or group homes ranged from 41 to 43 percent (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Gaetz, 2002; Gaetz, O'Grady & Buccieri, 2010).

It is both the experience of being in child protection, and the transition from protection to independence that account for many of these problems. Some young people choose to leave because of bad experiences and inadequate support in group homes or in foster care. Other youth simply 'age out'⁵ of the foster care system and are left to fend for themselves, lacking necessary resources and family support. Many leave care with underdeveloped independent living skills, inadequate

5. In Canada, child protection legislation is a provincial responsibility, and there are significant jurisdictional differences meaning that the actual age at which the State remains responsible for young people in care varies from province to province. In Ontario, for instance, young people 'age out' at 18, but can also voluntarily withdraw from care at 16.

education, lower levels of physical and emotional well-being and lack of supports and resources that we know young people rely on when moving into adulthood (Courtney et al., 2001). Difficult transitions from care often result in a range of negative outcomes, including, lack of educational engagement and achievement, involvement in corrections, lack of skills and potentially, a life of poverty.

As Nichols addresses in this volume, ineffective discharge planning and supports, as well as a lack of institutional coordination means that many young people leaving care ‘slip through the cracks’, and fall into homelessness (Nichols, this volume). It is also true that in many jurisdictions, child protection legislation has not kept pace with the social and economic changes that make it much more difficult for young people to live independently at an early age. Child protection services that cut off support for young people at the age of 18 or even 21 leave young people in jeopardy and at risk of homelessness.

In Canada, child protection is a provincial responsibility, with legislation and practice varying from province to province. Indeed many provinces continually update their legislation. The recent Blueprint for Fundamental Change to Ontario’s Child Welfare System outlines a number of key recommendations by former crown wards for updating provincial legislation (Youth Leaving Care Working Group, 2013). Irwin Elman, director of the Office for the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, argues that effective reforms, including extending the age of child welfare support to 25, would cost about 26 million dollars, but see a savings of 132 million dollars over 40 years (Monsebratten, 2013).

Leaving Corrections

We know from extensive research that young people who are homeless are on average more criminally involved than domiciled youth (Baron, this volume; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Tanner & Wortley, 2002), and at the same time, receive much more police attention regardless of their criminal involvement (O’Grady et al., 2011; this volume). Many become involved with the criminal justice system, either as juvenile offenders or as adults. A growing body of Canadian research focuses on the bidirectional relationship between homelessness and prison (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2006; 2009; Novac et al., 2006; 2007; Kellen et al., 2010), meaning that people who are homeless are more likely to become imprisoned, and are over-represented in the prison population. Additionally, because of the inadequacy of discharge planning and reintegration policies and practices, both for those who are convicted and those awaiting trial on remand, many ex-prisoners are discharged directly into homelessness.

While research shows that attention to discharge planning and support for reintegration to independent living for people leaving corrections has ben-

efits in terms of reduced recidivism, increased public safety and reduced homelessness (Harrison, 2001; Visher & Travis, 2003; Petersilia, 2001a; b; Travis & Petersilia, 2001), the evidence often collides with ‘get tough on crime’ policies that achieve the opposite (this is particularly important in the Canadian context, where we are implementing policies that follow from the mistakes made in the United States from the 1970s to 1990s).

Ensuring access to safe, affordable housing for young people discharged from prison not only improves their life chances, but also builds better, safer communities, as recidivism rates decline. In other words, providing housing for released young offenders is both a housing and crime reduction issue. In Canada, Wood’s Homes and the Calgary John Howard Society are piloting an innovative program for young offenders that incorporates a Housing First philosophy (Gaetz, 2013).

Discharge Support from Hospital and Mental Health Facilities

Those who work in the homelessness sector are well aware that individuals are often discharged from hospitals and mental health facilities into homelessness. There are two main consequences to this. First, the mental health and well-being of such individuals is likely to worsen, and second, staff in emergency shelters and day programs are not well equipped to provide necessary and appropriate supports for people in such situations. As Forchuk suggests, emergency shelters – even well run shelters – are “not appropriate places for recovery from mental illnesses” (Forchuk et al., 2006:301). Many of the problems we associate with shelters – lack of privacy, low resident/staff ratios, exposure to drugs and the sex trade, and in some cases overcrowding – can exacerbate problems for psychiatric survivors. Unfortunately this happens all too often. In their study of people discharged from psychiatric wards in London – a mid-sized Canadian city – they found that 167 of 1,588 (10.5%) individuals within a single year were discharged with no fixed address (Forchuk et al., 2006). Structural factors, including a trend towards shorter hospital stays, and a dramatic reduction in the availability of affordable housing in most Canadian cities, contribute to this situation.

Research from Canada and the United States suggests that reforms and interventions can dramatically reduce the risk of homelessness for those discharged from mental health facilities, with a resultant improvement in mental health and well-being (Forchuk et al., 2008; 2011; Herman et al., 2011; Kasprow & Rosenheck, 2007; Goldfinger et al., 1999; Susser et al., 1997). A randomized control trial by Herman et al., (2011) demonstrates that Critical Time Interventions (CTI) can: “prevent recurrent homelessness and other adverse outcomes following discharge in two ways: by strengthening the individual’s long-term ties to services, family, and friends; and by providing emotional and practical support during the critical time of transition” (Herman et al., 2011:2).

In a London, Ontario pilot study, patients at risk of being discharged with ‘no fixed address’ were provided with a timely intervention (Forchuk et al., 2008; 2011), including: 1) assessment and immediate response to client need (it is argued that a determination of risk of homelessness should be made upon admittance); 2) goal planning and advocacy to coordinate supports; 3) assistance in finding affordable housing, 4) a streamlined process (including fast tracking) so that individuals could receive government benefits to pay for first and last month’s rent.

III) Early Intervention

The importance of early intervention cannot be underestimated. This is true not only when considering discharge from institutional settings, but in other contexts, as well. Early intervention means **identifying and addressing the physical, emotional, material, interpersonal, social and educational needs of young people who are at imminent risk of, or who have just become homeless**. This is the point at which prevention and emergency services intersect, for early intervention strategies can take place before a youth becomes homeless (when one is at imminent risk) or immediately after. So, while some of these interventions will be delivered by emergency services, they are considered preventive in that the goal is to provide proper supports so that a person’s experience of homelessness is as short as possible, and hopefully non-recurrent.

The goal of early intervention is to address the immediate risk of homelessness, provide young people and their families with necessary supports and importantly enhance resilience while reducing the potential for negative outcomes. For those who do indeed leave home, early intervention also means reducing the risk of protracted homelessness (more than a month).

Diagram 2: Early Intervention Framework

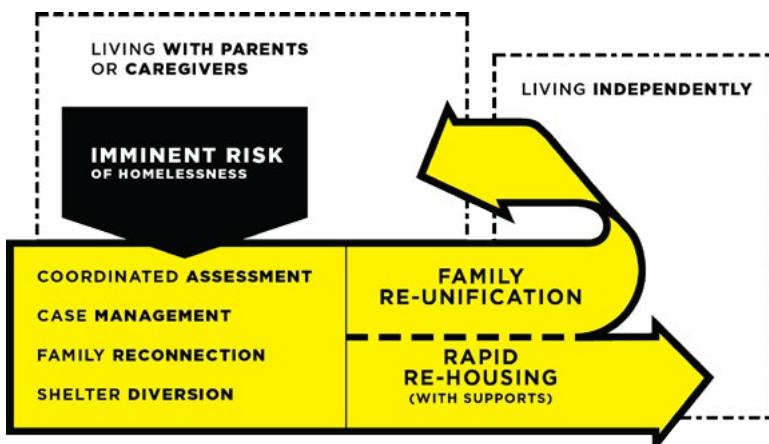


Diagram 2 identifies four key and interrelated strategies of early intervention, including: Common Assessment, Case Management, Family Reconnection and Shelter Diversion. Together these interventions are designed to reconcile and support relationships so that young people can move home or in with other family members, and when this is not possible (for safety reasons), help them move into independent (and supported) accommodation in a safe and planned way. The goal is to intervene before a young person is forced to leave their community and find themselves on the streets or in an emergency shelter. Once on the streets, a young person may be drawn into the street lifestyle, and become entrenched in their homelessness.

a) Coordinated Assessment

Coordinated Assessment (also known as Coordinated Intake, and Common Assessment in the UK) is key to delivering integrated and focused early interventions for young people at risk of homelessness. It is a standardized approach to assessing a young person's current situation, the acuity of their needs and the services they currently receive and may require in the future, and takes into account the background factors that contribute to risk and resilience, changes in acuity, and the role parents, caregivers, community and environmental factors play on the young person's development. The National Alliance to End Homelessness argues that coordinated assessment supports a more efficient and effective homelessness response by:

- Helping people move through the system faster (by reducing the amount of time people spend moving from program to program before finding the right match);
- Reducing new entries into homelessness (by consistently offering prevention and diversion resources upfront, reducing the number of people entering the system unnecessarily); and
- Improving data collection and quality and providing accurate information on what kind of assistance consumers need (NAEH, 2012).

The key to coordinated assessment is to employ it system-wide, having all agencies use the same assessment framework and instrument in order to standardize current practices and provide comprehensive and consistent client information. This can reduce duplication of assessments and enable effective case management, such that clients get timely access to the most appropriate services based on need. Common assessment also enables the pooling of information in order to facilitate systems coordination. Since the information is shared, this means that young people will not have to retell their story multiple times.

Coordinated Assessment is often supported by some form of **centralized intake** or a single point of entry, which could be the first emergency shelter someone shows up at, a dedicated assessment facility, or through a dispersed model (Gardner et al., 2010). Given advances in technology, the basic principles of “Single Point Access” could be provided in a more decentralized fashion through web-based supports and/or a more diverse range of agencies and services. Such an approach would require a common assessment framework, a shared data management system and a communication and promotion strategy, and ideally would be made available through schools, community centers and other places frequented by young people.

There are available resources to support the development of coordinated assessments, both from the United States and the UK. The NAEH has developed a [**Coordinated Assessment toolkit**](#) to help communities plan for, implement, and evaluate a coordinated assessment system. The toolkit is designed to allow individual communities to modify and tailor the tool to fit their individual needs. In the United Kingdom there are also a number of resources to support the development and implementation of their [**Common Assessment Framework \(CAF\)**](#).

b) Case Management

As part of an early intervention strategy, case management is a comprehensive and strategic form of service provision whereby a case worker assesses the needs of the client (and potentially their family) and, where appropriate, arranges, coordinates and advocates for delivery and access to a range of programs and services designed to meet the individual’s needs. The National Case Management Network of Canada (NCMN) defines case management as a:

[...] collaborative, client-driven process for the provision of quality health and support services through the effective and efficient use of resources. Case management supports the client's achievement of safe, realistic, and reasonable goals within a complex health, social, and fiscal environment
(National Case Management Network of Canada, 2009:8).

A client-centered case management approach ensures that the young person has a major say in identifying goals and service needs, and that there is shared accountability. The goal of case management is to empower young people, promote an improved quality of life, reduce the risk of homelessness and/or help young people achieve housing stability by facilitating timely access to the necessary supports.

Case management is well established in social work and health care, and there are many different approaches and practices. Case management can be short term (as

in the Critical Time Intervention) or long term and ongoing, dependent upon an identified need for crisis intervention related to problematic transitions, or for supports around chronic conditions. Critical Time Intervention (CTI) models are key to early intervention practice in that they are designed to prevent recurrent homelessness and help people transition to independence (Baumgartner & Herman, 2012; Schutt et al., 2009; Herman & Mandiberg, 2010). This is achieved through:

strengthening the individual's long-term ties to services, family, and friends; and by providing emotional and practical support during the critical time of transition. An important aspect of CTI is that post-discharge services are delivered by workers who have established relationships with patients during their institutional stay (Critical Time Intervention, 2009).

A case management approach, then, necessarily works best within a system of care approach, where links are made to necessary services and supports, based on identified client need. In reviewing case management as a key component to ending homelessness, Milaney (2011a; b; 2012) identified it as a strengths-based *team* approach with six key dimensions:

1. Collaboration and cooperation – a true team approach, involving several people with different backgrounds, skills and areas of expertise;
2. Right matching of services – person-centered and based on the complexity of need;
3. Contextual case management – interventions must appropriately take account of age, ability, culture, gender and sexual orientation. In addition, an understanding of broader structural factors and personal history (of violence, sexual abuse or assault, for instance) must underline strategies and mode of engagement.
4. The right kind of engagement – building a strong relationship based on respectful encounters, openness, listening skills, non-judgmental attitudes and advocacy.
5. Coordinated and well-managed system – integrating the intervention into the broader system of care, and
6. Evaluation for success – the ongoing and consistent assessment of case managed supports.

c) Family Reconnection

The goal of family reconnection is to mobilize family relations as a 'natural' resource that can help prevent youth homelessness, rapidly rehouse those who become homeless, and secure stable housing for youth who have been homeless over a long period of time. The underlying ethos of a 'family reconnection' approach is

that family is important to almost everyone and that by reconciling damaged relationships, family can play a role in helping street youth move forward with their lives. For the majority of young people who are homeless (those who are ‘temporarily disconnected’ or ‘unstably connected’), this is a particularly important kind of intervention to consider as part of every case management plan.

Until recently, the possibility and potential of reconnecting with family has, unfortunately, rarely been prioritized in the Canadian response to youth homelessness, and in fact, has often been ignored (Winland et al., 2011; Winland, this volume). Emergency services tend to focus on providing refuge for young people, and helping them reach self-sufficiency and independence. This is perhaps not surprising, nor entirely unreasonable, given that so many homeless youth flee households characterized by physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse, and/or the child protection system. In such a context, family is often seen as part of the young person’s past⁶, and moving home may be neither desirable, nor possible.

While it is easy to dismiss the role of family in the lives of young people who have had difficult pasts, we need to be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak. In reframing our understanding of the potential role of families in the lives of street youth, we need to consider that the families defined as problematic may themselves be complex and diverse in composition. So, while a young person may experience conflict (even violence) with one or more members of their family, there may potentially be important, supportive and/or redeemable relationships with other family members; individuals that can play an important role in a young person’s transition to independence. It is also important to consider that relationships characterized by conflict are not always irreconcilable, and that many underlying conflicts can be addressed with the right supports and interventions. The point is that even when conflicts lead to young people leaving home, we should not forego the possibility that those conflictual relations can improve (Winland et al., 2011; Winland, this volume).

While there are very innovative and successful programs in Canada that focus on reconnecting homeless youth with their families (Kelowna, Calgary and Halifax, for instance), one of the best known is Eva’s Family Reconnect program in Toronto, which assists young people aged 16-24. Eva’s Family Reconnect offers individual and family support for youth in order to address and potentially resolve family conflict through individual and family counseling, referrals to other agencies and services, psychiatric assessments, psychological assessments for learning disabilities, as well as accompaniment and advocacy (Winland et al., 2011). This

6. In implementing any family reconnection strategy the ultimate guiding principle is necessarily the protection and safety of the young person.

orientation towards family connection has been adapted and integrated across all eight Boys and Girls Club of Calgary programs for homeless youth.

The effectiveness and underlying logic of program-based family mediation and reconnection models suggests that a more ambitious application of the basic tenets of the program is possible when implemented more broadly at a ‘systems level’. That is, in contrast to developing an agency-based program or response, it is possible to approach the issue from a more integrated early intervention system approach that includes common assessment, centralized intake and case management, and in doing so brings together a range of services and approaches that work across the street youth sector, and ideally, engage with programs, services and institutions ‘upstream’ (that is, before the young person becomes homeless). No young person should access emergency shelters and supports without undergoing an assessment to determine the potential for family reunification.

Scaling up family reunification programming can thus be seen as a key preventive approach to youth homelessness. There are several key features to an integrated, systems level approach to family reconnection.

- Systems level approaches require strong institutional support by all levels of government, ensuring that family reconnection programming is widely available across jurisdictions. In other words, young people should have access to such interventions wherever they live.
- Programming requires systems-based cross-sectoral collaboration between child protection services, the education system, the mental health sector, housing, settlement and corrections, for instance.
- A prevention and early intervention model requires an integrated jurisdictional approach with strong communication links, so that appropriate and timely interventions can take place.
- Finally, an intervention program such as family reconnect must be widely available – and in some ways targeted – to young people who are *under* the age of 16.

In both Australia and the UK, family reconnection is not simply a program model, but more significantly is seen as a philosophy underlying their response to youth homelessness. The key here is that family intervention is built in to their integrated systems approaches, and in the case of Australia, has been scaled as a national program. Both of these examples point to the possibility of moving beyond a program based model, to an integrated systems approach in Canada⁷.

7. For more detailed accounts of these program approaches, refer to Winland et al., 2011:62-72, and Gaetz, 2013.

In Australia, the goal of the “[Reconnect Program](#)” is to work in schools with young people between the ages of 12-18 who are identified as ‘at risk’ of homelessness and help them to stabilize their living situation, and “improve their level of engagement with family, work, education and training in their local community” (Australian Government, 2013). The program is a classic example of a systems level approach to early intervention, in that it is widely available across the country, and works across institutional jurisdictions to provide young people who become – or are at risk of becoming – homeless with the supports they need to stay at home, or find alternative supportive living arrangements. There are over 100 reconnect programs, and some specialize in services for sub-populations, such as Aboriginal youth, refugees and new immigrants, and lesbian, gay and bisexual youth. While funded by the central government, these programs nevertheless operate through a network of community based early intervention services that share the goal of helping youth stabilize their current living situations, as well as improve their level of engagement and attachments within their community (Australian Government, 2009).

In the United Kingdom, family reconnection is a feature of their strategic and integrated approach to youth homelessness and is based on the philosophy that for most youth life chances generally improve the longer they stay with their families, and the more ‘planned’ their transition is to living independently.

Key elements of ‘what works’ include flexible and client-centered provision, close liaison with key agencies, and building in support from other agencies when necessary. The need for timely intervention was also highlighted, as was the need for active promotion of the availability of the service and early contact with clients on referral (Pawson et al., 2007:14).

Reflecting the ‘partnership’ approach of the UK strategy, local governments are expected to develop interventions that are delivered in collaboration with key partners including Children’s Services, the youth service and not-for-profit sectors, and importantly, schools. This collaborative, cross-sectoral approach is seen as necessary in supporting young people and their families and to prevent homelessness. Most of these programs operate on a referral basis, and common elements of such programs include optional family mediation, parenting support and housing options counseling. While the goal is to resolve family disputes, there is also recognition of the necessity of finding suitable accommodation for young people who are leaving home and who do not intend to, or cannot return.

The family-based prevention programs in the UK have also been evaluated. A cost-benefit analysis by DePaul UK projected that an investment in prevention-based early intervention strategies would save on average £9,493 (\$14,838 CAD) per youth (Insley, 2011a).

d) Shelter Diversion

Shelter diversion refers to the provision of alternative temporary housing options, supports and interventions designed to reduce the likelihood that young people who become homeless will have to leave their communities and/or rely on emergency shelters. There are compelling reasons to consider strategies that help young people avoid this seeming eventuality. Because most small communities lack emergency shelters, moving to one often means not only leaving home, but leaving – and losing – one's community. This invariably has a negative impact on an individual's social capital, in that the natural resources and supports (family, friends, teachers and other adults) that might help someone move forward and avoid longer term homelessness become strained and weakened. A second thing to consider is that most emergency shelters for youth bring together a mix of young people, some who are new to the streets and some who have been on the streets for years and have very complex challenges relating to mental health, addictions, criminal involvement, etc. The challenges for shelter staff are considerable, and reducing exposure of young people who are new to the streets to crime, sexual exploitation, violence and addictions can be a difficult challenge. There is every reason to want to help young people avoid becoming mired in street youth culture. Third, because many young people who use shelters are fleeing difficult, conflictual and potentially traumatic situations, life in an emergency shelter may be experienced by some as 'freedom' and a relief. Without adequate support to address the underlying issues that created the crisis, or help moving into housing with appropriate supports, it is all too easy for young people to become stuck in the street youth lifestyle, surrounded by other youth who may offer companionship and support, but who have weak capacity to really help them move forward with their lives.

The underlying goal of shelter diversion, then, is to help young people stabilize their lives and prevent longer term homelessness. This is best done by providing young people with locally-based supports, drawing on the resources that exist in the community, and by giving young people temporary housing options (with extended family, friends, religious institutions, etc.), thus allowing time to work through the problems that led to homelessness, ideally with case management support.

A program model for shelter diversion should integrate other elements of early intervention, including common assessment, case management and family reconnection. Again, as part of a 'system of care', there should be an effort to develop the program drawing on mainstream supports in the education and health care systems, for instance. We need to do what we can to keep young people in their communities and close to home (if it is safe to do so) where they can draw on their natural supports.

An effective model of shelter diversion that could be adapted more broadly in Canada is referred to as **respite accommodation**. The goal of respite housing, which is well established in the UK (sometimes referred to as ‘Time Out’ housing) and is becoming more popular in the United States through Host Home programs, is to provide young people with temporary, short term accommodation with lots of supports. It is considered particularly appropriate for young people under the age of 18, is intended as an alternative to the youth shelter system, gives young people a break from their family, or temporary shelter while looking for a place to stay, and also helps young people avoid getting caught up in street youth culture. The actual service delivery model and approach to accommodation can take different forms – it can involve small, purpose built facilities (similar in some ways to shelters), but more often, young people will be placed in households that have a spare room.

In North America, **Host Home** programs have been implemented in many jurisdictions. The State of Minnesota has developed Host Home programs in many areas of the state and significantly, in the Twin Cities they have a program targeting LGBTQ youth. It is a particularly effective model in rural areas – especially those that lack emergency shelters because it allows young people to remain in their community (Baker Collins, this volume).

The development of respite housing stems from the knowledge that young people sometimes become homeless because unresolved family conflict can erupt into a crisis. Temperatures rise, angry words are said, and parents ask the young person to leave or conversely, the youth makes the decision to leave home. In such cases (and in particular where there may be family conflict, but no history of physical, sexual or emotional abuse) a ‘time out’ space is needed, where young people and their families can work on repairing relations so that the youth can return home, or conversely, provides them with accommodation while they work out longer term housing support. Respite accommodation, then, is designed to provide:

safe, high quality accommodation for a short period of time to give them and their families a ‘breather’, and provide a supportive environment for all parties to rebuild their emotional resilience and renegotiate relationships (Quilgars et al., 2011:8).

Nightstop is a good example of an effective respite housing program, in the UK. Depaul UK operates 40 Nightstop services, working with over 500 volunteer hosts. Young people aged 16-25 are able to stay with an adult or family for up to twenty-one days.

Nightstop provides an opportunity for a young person who is homeless to stay with a volunteer, in their home, whilst family reconciliation work is undertaken and/or more settled accommodation secured. Young people are given their own room, a toiletry pack and can have their clothes washed if needed. They are also given an evening meal and breakfast. They are normally asked to vacate the host's property during the day; at what time is a decision for the individual hosts (Insley, 2011b:7).

An evaluation of the housing outcomes revealed that after staying at Nightstop, 21% of the youth returned to their families, 36% moved into supported housing, 14% obtained private accommodation, 11% moved into social housing, and 14% moved in with a friend (Insley, 2011b).

An interesting shelter diversion program in Canada that brings together many of the elements of prevention discussed here is the Youth Reconnect program, located in the Niagara region of Southern Ontario. The goal is to help young people stay in their communities, and prevent them from eventually migrating to larger cities, by which time their exposure to a range of risks, including addictions, hunger, crime (Gaetz et al., 2010) and sexual exploitation, make moving on with their lives that much more difficult. "The initiative helps clients' access resources and increases their self-sufficiency, by assisting adolescents to maintain school attendance, secure housing and develop a social safety net in their home community" (RAFT, 2012:1).

The program targets young people between the ages of 16 and 19, who are referred by high schools, community partners, social service agencies and police services. The young person is then met by a reconnect worker to assess their needs and develop a community-based plan of action designed to draw on local supports, enhance protective factors, reduce risk and stay in school.

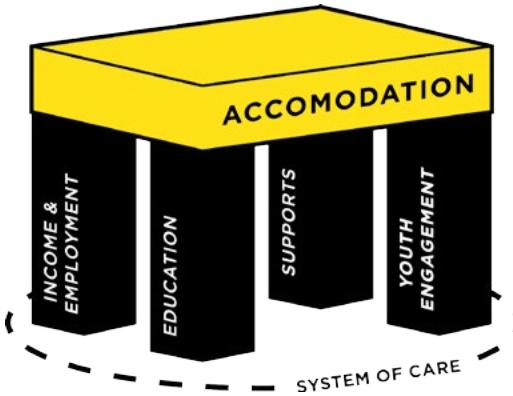
By creating a localized support network and keeping youth within their home communities, the youth reconnect initiative is able to help youth remain connected to their communities, with the support they need, instead of forcing youth to relocate to a larger urban area, where they are more susceptible to engaging in high risk behaviours (RAFT, 2012:2).

For Those Who Cannot Return Home...

When young people leave home and moving back is not an option, the ultimate goal should be to support them to move into more permanent accommodation in a safe and planned way. This must be done with recognition that the needs of young people are diverse enough to require a range of housing

options. The second and equally important point is that any effective approach to the provision of accommodation must be situated within a solid understanding of the needs of a developing adolescent. That is, programs must offer more than shelter, and an opportunity for ‘independence’. A more comprehensive model of accommodation and supports should be built upon four pillars, which are embedded within a broader system of care.

Diagram 3: Accommodation as Part of a System of Care



Income and Employment

In Canada, most young people experience great challenges in earning sufficient income to live independently, as they are often trapped in low-wage job sectors, where full time permanent employment is rare. When a young adult with inadequate education is able to enter the formal labour market, it usually results in precarious employment, often on the margins of the economy. It is for this reason that over 42% of young Canadians between the ages of 20 and 29 continue to live with their parents (Statistics Canada, 2012a).

All of this suggests that a key task of responding to youth homelessness is to enhance the employability of youth through effective job training and employment programs. However, traditional models of employment training that focus narrowly on skills development and motivation will be unlikely to meet the needs of young people who have experienced homelessness. It also means that even when young people are employed, they may need additional income supports. In Canada, there are several inspiring examples of programs designed specifically for homeless youth, including the highly successful Choices for Youth in St. John's, Newfoundland, a ‘green jobs’ employment and accommodations program, and BladeRunners in Vancouver, which provides Aboriginal youth with training opportunities in the construction and cultural industries. There are also examples of effective strategies to engage the corporate sector in the provision of employment opportunities for homeless youth (Noble, 2012; Noble & Oseni, this volume).

Education

Educational engagement and achievement should be at the centre of accommodation and support models. Unfortunately, education is often an afterthought

when young people become homeless; something that is part of the young person's past. We know that a high percentage of homeless youth do not complete high school – up to 65% (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Gaetz, O'Grady, Buccieri, 2010). We also know that in Canada, education matters now more than ever, and that early school leavers face a competitive disadvantage in the marketplace (Sum et al., 2009; Statistics Canada, 2010; 2012b; c). For instance, during the recent economic downturn in 2008/2009, the unemployment rate amongst dropouts was more than twice as high (23.2%) as it was for high school graduates (11.9%) (Statistics Canada, 2010). While the rise of 'credentialism' (Côté & Bynner, 2008) has resulted in a steady decline in drop out rates in Canada (7.8% in 2011-2012) (Statistics Canada, 2012b), the drop out rate for homeless youth remains incredibly high at over 65% (Gaetz, O'Grady, Buccieri, 2010). Though homeless youth experience incredible barriers to obtaining education, we do know some of the factors that promote school engagement (Liljedahl et al., this volume). For a long term and sustainable solution to youth homelessness, we must broaden our focus from youth independence, to re-engagement in school.

Case Management and Supports

As is the case with early intervention, young people, once housed, may need continued case management. Required supports should be driven both by the nature of the young person's needs, but also their desires. This may include transitional supports (funds to pay for rent, furniture, help obtaining a lease, bank account, etc.), life skills and for some, supports with mental health and addictions issues. A client-driven, flexible and open ended model is encouraged (Rosengard et al., 2007), where young people work with a counselor or case manager to develop a plan and identify their goals, as well as the activities, resources and supports that will help them achieve those goals.

Youth Engagement

When one talks about supporting a young person's transition to adulthood, there is a concern not only for their achievement, but equally important, their well-being. All adolescents and young adults need to feel connected, and believe that they matter. One of the things that supportive parents and families do is help nurture positive relationships and connections between youth and the members of their community. Youth engagement also includes activities that are meaningful and fulfilling, whether leisure-based (sports, the arts) or different forms of civic engagement. So when we talk about meaningful engagement, there is an opportunity to nurture a sense of belonging, which is a critical component to helping young people feel accepted, competent, valued and part of something beyond one's self (Schonert-Reichl, 2008).

In other words, providing young people with a roof over their heads, income

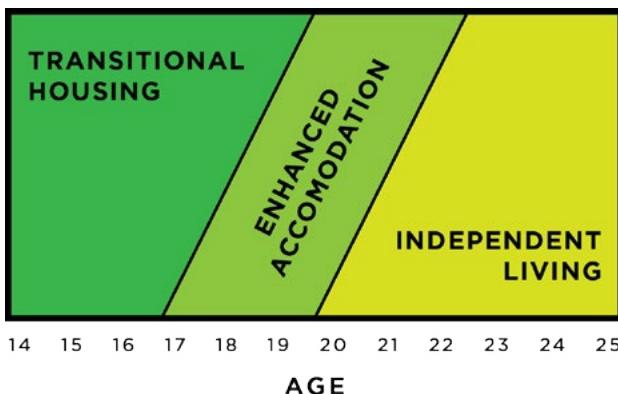
and supports is not necessarily enough. The outcome of efforts to house youth should not result in a young person sitting alone in an apartment, bored, isolated and without meaningful relationships. This is particularly important to consider because for young people deeply involved in street life, finding accommodation can ironically mean yet more losses, as young people leave friends behind (often by choice) (Karabanow & Naylor, this volume).

Models of Accommodation

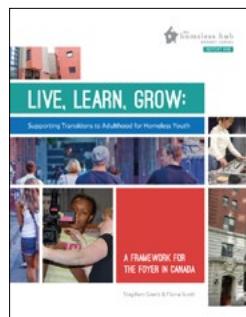
When considering models of accommodation for young people, it should be stated up front that there is no single or ideal housing option that will meet the needs of all youth (Millar, 2009; 2010; Eberle et al., 2007). An effective response to youth homelessness should give young people choices and options based on their age, experience, level of independence and need. Based on a range of factors, and depending on the individual, some housing options will be more appropriate than others. Some young people may require high levels of support, and are suitably housed in more institutional congregate facilities, with common areas and adult support present 24 hours a day. Youth who are chronically disconnected, with few family supports and a history of institutional involvement (child protection or corrections) may have high support needs, but not be ideally suited to an institutional congregate setting. Older youth who are ‘temporarily disconnected,’ but who have independent living skills and low support needs may simply require assistance in obtaining their own housing, with very little additional supports. A large number of young people will fit somewhere in between these circumstances.

Ideally, then, there should then be a range of housing options for young people. Diagram 4 demonstrates three broad (and overlapping) accommodation and support options for young people.

Diagram 4: Accommodation Options for Homeless Youth



The **Foyer** is a transitional housing model with a strong track record in the United Kingdom and Australia, and is one that can easily be adapted to the Canadian context. The CHRN report on Foyers (and accompanying tool kit) lays out in great detail what a Foyer is, what the research says about its effectiveness as a model of accommodation and supports, and how we can develop it here. What makes the Foyer an effective model of transitional housing is that it is designed to meet the needs of developing adolescents and young adults. Young people can stay for extended periods, in order to develop life skills, stay in school, nurture positive relationships and participate in meaningful activities. It is a model of accommodation and supports built to nurture the transition to adulthood in a safe, respectful and meaningful way.



FOYER REPORT: www.homelesshub.ca/foyer

FOYER TOOLKIT: www.homelesshub.ca/foyertoolkit

The first is ***transitional housing***, which for many young people is a fitting option because they may not be ready for independent living (Novac et al., 2004). That is, they lack the skills, confidence, maturity and experience to move immediately into independent living. Transitional housing is typically time limited, but is accompanied by a range of supports to help young people prepare for independent living.

The **Foyer** represents an interesting and effective model of transitional housing for youth (Gaetz & Scott, 2012). There is considerable research and evaluation that demonstrates the effectiveness of the model, which combines a longer period of tenancy with a focus on education, the building of life skills, youth engagement and efforts to socially integrate young people into the community. A recent Homeless Hub report, “Live, Learn and Grow” (Gaetz & Scott, 2012), articulates a model for the broader adaptation of the Foyer model in the Canadian context.

At the other end of the spectrum, and certainly the goal of all models of accommodation and supports for young people, is ***independent living***, where young people obtain and maintain their own permanent housing in either the social housing sector or private market, and their use of supports and services is minimal. Many young people will need supports in order to get into housing in the first place, but their needs will lessen once they are housed, and as they grow older. Other young people may need ongoing or floating support.

An intermediary level between transitional housing and independent living can be referred to *enhanced accommodation*. This describes a situation wherein young people obtain their own accommodation in a non-institutional environment, but may require some level of ongoing support, whether financial, social or health related.

As Housing First grows in popularity, several places in Canada – including Toronto, Halifax, Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton – are experimenting with its applicability for young people. For instance, in Calgary both the *Boys and Girls Club* and *Woods Homes* have implemented Housing First programs for youth, with promising results after the first year (minimum 85 per cent housing retention rate). However, the chapter by Forchuk et al. (this volume) on a youth-focused Housing First program in London, Ontario suggests that while many young people thrive in a Housing First context, it does not work for everyone. Those with mental health and addictions issues (or a combination of both) sometimes find the choice and independence offered by the model too much to handle, and a ‘set up for failure’ (Forchuk et al., this volume). That is, some young people find independent living to be isolating and may enable drug use, and therefore prefer to address other developmental/health issues prior to independent living. Forchuk and her team conclude that a ‘one size fits all’ approach proposed by some advocates is actually quite limiting and ignores the incredible variability in needs and circumstances of young people who are homeless.

Conclusion

There are indeed solutions to youth homelessness, and prevention can and should be central to these solutions. The review of programs and practices from around the world reveals that innovation combined with passion can lead to good results. Many Canadian communities and provincial governments are now interested in moving towards strategic responses to addressing the problem; understanding how we can stop the flow of young people from child protection, mental health facilities or juvenile detention into homelessness; identifying a stronger role for schools as part of the solution; helping strengthen families, and offering young people a way back home. We also understand that many young people can no longer return home, and in some cases have no home to go to. For these young people, we need strong models of accommodation and supports that will help them move forward with their lives.

Underlying all of this is the need to make some broader changes in Canadian society. We need to ensure that there is an adequate supply of affordable housing. We need to ensure that young people have the opportunity to earn a suf-

ficient income to pay the rent, purchase food and have fulfilling lives. We must ensure that every young person has the opportunity to go to school and fulfill his or her dreams. And finally, we must push for a society where young women, LGBTQ youth and those who experience racism are not discriminated against and held back, but where all young people can unleash their potential.

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Youth homelessness is a seemingly intractable problem in Canada.

In communities across the country, people are increasingly aware of the sight of young people who are without a home, sleeping in parks, sitting on sidewalks or asking for money. What do we know about these young people, and what should we do?

Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice aims to fill a gap in the information available on this important issue by providing an easily accessible collection of the best Canadian research and policy analysis in the field.

If we are going to solve youth homelessness in a meaningful way, we need solutions that are informed by the best research. This book has been written with this in mind. In this volume, leading Canadian scholars present key findings from their research on youth homelessness. In an effort to make this research accessible as well as relevant to decision-makers and practitioners, contributing authors have been asked to address the 'so whatness' of their research; to make clear the policy and practice implications of their research so as to better inform the efforts of those working to address youth homelessness.

The contributors to this book are committed to supporting the development of more effective solutions to youth homelessness. Not only can we do things differently, we need to. And research on youth homelessness can help make a difference.