



United Way
Kingston, Frontenac,
Lennox and Addington



Youth Out Loud:

Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness in Kingston and Area



Acknowledgements

This document has been developed over the course of 2013-14 as part of the initiative to end youth homelessness in Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington. Kingston area was selected to be one of the first two communities (the other being Kamloops B.C.) to participate in a national pilot project, with the objective to develop a plan on mobilizing local capacity to end youth homelessness in mid-sized communities. Eva's Initiatives, the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, and the Catherine Donnelly Foundation are partners in this new program to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness in communities across Canada. The facilitator of the MLC project in Kingston is the United Way of KFL&A, who worked with a steering committee and a youth planning committee on this Action Plan.

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Youth Out Loud: Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness in Kingston and Area

Executive Summary of Goals and Action Strategies

Purpose of the Action Plan

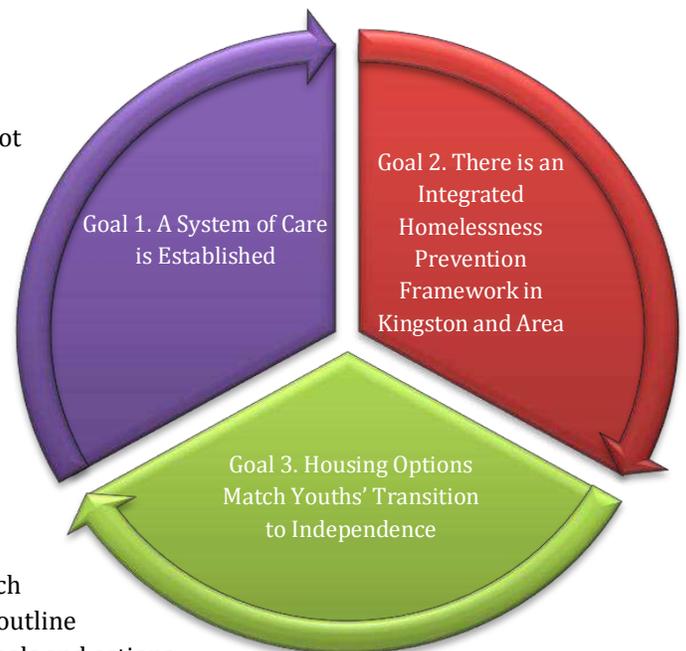
The Action Plan serves to support the development of a shared vision to end youth homelessness in Kingston and area. The plan brings clarity and understanding to the complex social issues that underpin youth homelessness, and illustrates the type of strategies and contributions that are needed in Kingston and area to address these issues.

Snapshot of the Action Plan

This Action Plan is a local response to a national issue. It is not intended to prescribe a “one-size fits all” approach to end youth homelessness. It is, however, intended to serve as a catalyst for collaboration and knowledge mobilization.

The Action Plan is situated within a Positive Youth Development Framework¹. In contrast to traditional approaches, which often focus on the deficits of youth experiencing homelessness, this framework focuses on strengthening the assets, protective, and resiliency factors all young people need to lead a healthy life and transition to adulthood.

There are three key goals outlined in the Action Plan. For each goal, there is a list of action strategies. The action strategies outline what is needed in Kingston and area to meet each goal. All goals and action strategies are of equal importance – the order in which they appear is not intended to suggest that some goals are more important than others. Just as the environments that youth interact with intersect to influence youth experience, so too do the strategies in this Action Plan. This Action Plan assumes that all three goals will be worked toward simultaneously, as success in one area will depend on the success in another. Importantly, this Action Plan is the first step, not the last step, in establishing a clear agenda to end youth homelessness in Kingston and area. It will continue to evolve and to become more concrete over-time. Ongoing changes to the Action Plan will demonstrate the developmental nature of community-based work and systems change.



¹ http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthopportunities/steppingstones/youth_policy_about.aspx

Goal 1: A System of Care is Established

The Definition

Establishing a system of care means that services within Kingston and area are coordinated and integrated. Different agencies and programs have clear roles and mandates, and work together as providers for the same clients. As opposed to a fragmented collection of services, a system of care demands an integrated systems response whereby programs, services and service delivery systems are organized at every level – from policy, to intake, to service provision, to client flow – based on the needs of the young person².

Action Strategy 1.1. Establish a Coordinated Access and Assessment System

- When a youth or family "touches" the system, be it through mental health, addictions, child welfare, corrections, or housing services, they are immediately assessed, their needs are identified, and client-centered plans are put in place through a common assessment tool.
- As youth move through the sector, different agencies work collaboratively to help meet intersecting needs and prevent them from becoming homeless and/or move them out of homelessness as quickly as possible.
- It is a system-wide response designed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable first (triaging).

Action Strategy 1.2. Establish Collective Principles and Values

- What youth require to lead healthy, productive, and meaningful lives is considered in the establishment of collective principles and values that guide systems of care work.
- All stakeholders incorporate systems of care principles and values into daily operations.
- Common principles guide actions and lend focus to systems of care work. Common values help to ensure that youth are receiving the same messages across the system.

Action Strategy 1.3. Create a System to Collect and Share Localized Research

- A system for ongoing learning is established.
- The system allows for real-time reporting on the total number of homeless youth in Kingston and area, the length and causes of their homelessness, their demographic characteristics and needs, and the services they receive.

² Mobilizing Local Communities to End Youth Homelessness in Canada. *Essentials to End Youth Homelessness*.

Goal 2. There is an Integrated Homelessness Prevention Framework in Kingston and Area

The Definition

Prevention means stopping youth from becoming homeless in the first place. An integrated prevention framework includes activities that remove or reduce risk factors as well as promote protective factors to ensure wellbeing³.

Action Strategy 2.1. Establish Mechanisms for Family Counselling and Mediation

- Family counselling and mediation is offered as soon as youth are flagged as being at risk of homelessness or as soon as youth leave home.
- The goal is not only to support youth, but to also support family members to develop a strong understanding of their family relationships, how to manage and negotiate in challenging situations, and how to develop supportive, meaningful, and sustainable relationships within the family.
- This strategy may include counselling families on how to support youth experiencing mental health and addictions issues.

Action Strategy 2.2. Support Youth Engagement in School

- Youth at risk of disconnecting from their education are re-engaged with their education and offered greater educational support.
- Youth have "voice and choice" over their education, including autonomy over course work as well as options for classes/the opportunity to participate in educational programs that match their skills and interests.

Action Strategy 2.3. Promote Universal Mental Health Prevention and Promotion Programs

- Well-being is promoted by helping all youth cope with the stressful experiences of adolescence.
- Youth will be given the knowledge and skills that allow them to live their lives more fully, and to feel vital and strong without getting "stuck" along the way.
- This includes efforts to reduce stress, distress, sadness and worry, combined with efforts to open up dialogue and raise awareness about youth experiences.

Action Strategy 2.4. Create a School and Community Awareness Strategy

- Information about youth homelessness is brought to the community, and to youth gathering places in particular, and common messages are communicated.
- The development of the awareness strategy includes consultation with system of care organizations (mental health, addictions, housing, educational organizations) to build core messages.
- Examples of topics that will be covered in the strategy include: dealing with family conflict; financial stress and worry; peer and romantic relationships; navigating social services; mental health and addictions; dealing with landlords; and housing options.

³ Mobilizing Local Communities to End Youth Homelessness in Canada. *Essentials to End Youth Homelessness*.

Action Strategy 2.5. Enhance Youth Employment and Career-Readiness Programs

- Youth have the opportunity to make money, explore different interests, identify life learning goals, and harness strengths within themselves.
- This includes support for building resumes and developing interview skills, as well as with networking, connecting to employers, and identifying further education or training requirements.
- Employers are also prepared to support youth in maintaining their jobs and receive training about how to connect with youth, communicate with youth, and motivate them to carry out their responsibilities.

Action Strategy 2.6. Ensure Youth are Not Discharged into Homelessness

- Correctional Services and Children and Youth Services (i.e. foster care, group homes), as well as Health Services (hospitals, mental health and addictions facilities) collaborate with case managers to ensure discharge planning includes permanent housing with longer term supports.
- Permanent, affordable housing is available to youth.

Goal 3. Housing Options Match Youths' Transition to Independence

The Definition

The housing options available to youth permit them to transition from one housing program to another according to their individual preference and developmental stages⁴.

Action Strategy 3.1. Enhance the Role of Emergency Housing Services

- Emergency shelters in Kingston and area are used as a central access point/outreach service.
- Once youth receive basic supports, they are directed to the appropriate services within the community that will support them to be quickly re-housed.
- Family counselling is emphasized so that early intervention can occur.

Action Strategy 3.2. Increase the Amount of Transitional Housing Available

- Youth have increased access to transitional housing units.
- Lengths of stay is flexible based on an individual's unique situation and their ability to locate and prepare for permanent housing.

Action Strategy 3.3. Make Housing First a Housing Option for Youth

- Permanent housing is made available to youth.
- Youth development is considered in the design and implementation of Housing First in Kingston and area (the values, principles, and key elements of Housing First are adopted and adapted for youth).
- There is fidelity to the model by all members of the system of care.

Action Strategy 3.4. Ensure Access to Affordable Housing Units

- There are more affordable housing units available in Kingston and area and youth have access to these units.
- Youth disconnected from educational institutions that provide housing support do not compete for affordable housing.
- Youth without access to parental co-signers have access to affordable housing.

⁴ Mobilizing Local Communities to End Youth Homelessness in Canada. *Essentials to End Youth Homelessness*.

Action Strategy 3.5. Ensure Continuous Case Management and Follow-Up Support

- Case management is immediate so that youth receive the support they need to get housed quickly and consistent so that youth have meaningful relationships with their support team.
- Case management is flexible across the different forms of housing, so that youth have the opportunity to shift from one form of housing to the next without compromising their support.
- Youth who are living in permanent and affordable housing or who have reunited with their family do not lose all form of case management as soon as they become independent or return home.
- Ongoing needs of youth are identified and the services they receive are adjusted as needed.

Moving Forward

The next step in the Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness project is to identify key objectives for putting each action strategy outlined in this Action Plan into practice. This requires clarity around how each action strategy will be specifically implemented, selecting existing practices that will be built upon, and identifying who will take leadership in each area. As part of establishing objectives for each action strategy, timelines for implementation and measures to assess progress will also be selected. While there is still work to be done, this phase of the Action Plan is one step in the larger goal to end youth homelessness in Kingston and area. As a result of this phase of the Action Plan, United Way KFL&A and partners will have advanced three key outcomes that will support the obtainment of this goal. Firstly, Kingston and area's expertise and knowledge about youth homelessness has been strengthened through effective research and knowledge exchange practices. Secondly, collective priorities among youth, social service, government, and non- governmental stakeholders to end youth homelessness in Kingston and area have been established. Thirdly, there is strengthened momentum to put strategies to end youth homelessness in Kingston and area into action.

Youth Out Loud: Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness in Kingston and Area

Draft Action Plan

Project Background

The Youth Out Loud: Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness in Kingston and Area (Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness) project is part of a national program being led by Eva's Initiatives, the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, and the Catherine Donnelly Foundation. The national program is called Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness in Canada (MLC program) and the purpose of the program is to significantly change the course of youth homelessness locally and across the country. Over a five-year period, the project will draw on the resources of this unique partnership to:

- ❖ Build community awareness about youth homelessness;
- ❖ Support and assist communities to develop and implement plans that will prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness;
- ❖ Facilitate linkages and foster effective networks and collective action to combat youth homelessness;
- ❖ And promote systemic change to Canadian public policies impacting on youth homelessness.

In 2012, Kingston and area was selected to be one of two communities (the second being Kamloops B.C.) to participate in the national program. United Way of KFL&A is facilitating the program locally in close collaboration with a diverse Steering Committee. The program focuses on youth between the ages of 15-24 years.

A significant amount of work has been completed to date that tells the story of youth homelessness in Kingston and area. Beginning in January of 2013, United Way KFL&A led a research project, the Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project, which placed youth voices at the forefront of all discussion. As a result of this research project, information about *what* youth homelessness looks like in Kingston and area, *who* it touches and *why*, has been collected. Solutions to address youth homelessness have also been proposed. This Action Plan translates some of these ideas into action and helps to create a plan for moving forward.

Definition of Youth Homelessness

The Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness project is being guided by the following definition of youth 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."

Homelessness describes a range of housing and shelter circumstances, with people being without any shelter at one end, and being insecurely housed at the other. That is, homelessness encompasses a range of physical living situations, organized in a typology that includes:

- ❖ **Unsheltered**, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation;
- ❖ **Temporarily Sheltered**, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence;
- ❖ **Provisionally Accommodated**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, and finally;
- ❖ **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.

The Research Process

The Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project was designed to better understand the experiences of homeless youth in Kingston and area, as well as what youth believe is needed to end youth homelessness all together. The research process included four key elements: the development of a Steering Committee and three methods of data collection. Each element is described in more detail below.

Steering Committee

United Way KFL&A recruited a Steering Committee made up of representatives from key stakeholder groups. These groups include:

- ❖ Children and Youth Services Planning Committee;
- ❖ Municipal Government;
- ❖ School Boards;
- ❖ Police, Justice and Diversion programs;
- ❖ Housing and Emergency Services;
- ❖ Mental Health;
- ❖ Family & Children Services;
- ❖ Social service agencies;
- ❖ Youth.

The Steering Committee is coordinated and supported through United Way KFL&A. The Committee meets monthly and membership continues to evolve. The Steering Committee has guided the project from its inception and helped to ensure the project has widespread support in the community. Importantly, this Committee has also provided input into recommendations and strategies to include in the Action Plan. An outside facilitator (Taylor Newberry Consulting) was invited to one meeting to lead a discussion about what is most needed in Kingston and area to end youth homelessness, followed by additional sessions to provide input into these strategies.

Youth Focus Groups

In the fall, nine focus groups were conducted with a total of 79 homeless youth and those at risk of becoming homeless. These youth were recruited from community agencies and programs working with at-risk and homeless youth in Kingston and area. The focus groups were held at these agencies and programs so that the setting was comfortable and familiar to youth. The agencies and programs involved in the focus groups were:

- ❖ Kingston Youth Shelter;
- ❖ Home Base Housing - In From the Cold Emergency Shelter;
- ❖ Kingston Community Health Centres - Youth Space;
- ❖ Home Base Housing - Youth Services (Rise@one4nine);
- ❖ Family and Children's Services of Frontenac, Lennox & Addington;
- ❖ Youth Diversion-SNAP program and Algonquin Lakekshore Catholic District School Board-Ace Program;
- ❖ Limestone District School Board-Progress Program;
- ❖ Limestone District School Board-Street Smart Program;
- ❖ Limestone District School Board-Second Chance Program.

The focus groups served three key purposes:

- ❖ To learn about the pathway to youth homelessness in Kingston and area.
- ❖ To identify the key challenges that youth experiencing homelessness in Kingston and area face, and what would help to alleviate those challenges.
- ❖ To identify possible strategies to prevent youth homelessness in Kingston and area.

The focus groups were conducted by representatives of the Steering Committee.

Point-in-Time Count

United Way KFL&A carried out a Point-in-Time count on March 6th-7th, 2013 and March 5th-6th, 2014. Shelter and transitional housing providers were asked to provide a count of homeless youth for the evening of March 6th through the morning of March 7th, 2013 and for the evening of March 5th through the morning of March 6th, 2014. At these same times, United Way KFL&A and Committee members consulted with local high schools, their adolescent care workers, and alternative education teachers to get their perception of how many youth attending school were homeless or precariously housed. The shelter numbers are used for an actual count of youth in shelters and high school numbers provide an estimate of high school students who may be precariously housed.

Youth Community Forum⁵

A Youth Planning Committee was formed, including those with lived experience of homelessness, to plan and organize a Youth Community Forum. The event, entitled: "Youth Out Loud!" was held on November 14, 2013. One hundred high school students who were selected by the school boards attended the event. The attendees were diverse, including a mix of male and female students, youth at-risk, student leaders, and youth not considered at-risk of homelessness. There were three key purposes of the event:

- ❖ To hear the stories of youth experiencing homelessness in Kingston and area.
- ❖ To promote the strength and resiliency of homeless youth.
- ❖ To learn about what youth think is needed to end youth homelessness in Kingston and area.

A variety of approaches were used to support youth engagement, including icebreakers, games, and small group discussions. The break-out sessions were designed and facilitated by students of the St. Lawrence College Social Work program.

⁵ A second community forum is currently being planned and will be used to refine and further the Action Plan.

Key Findings

Data collected through the Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project was organized and analyzed by United Way KFL&A. A summary of the findings is presented below. These findings are also referenced throughout the Action Plan.

Youth Focus Groups and Youth Community Forum

Five key themes emerged from discussions with youth. These themes are: family conflict; mental health; addictions; education; and employment and training. These themes arose out of discussion about the pathway to homelessness and the challenges that youth experiencing homelessness face. Each theme is outlined in more detail below. Youth voice has been captured verbatim to the greatest extent possible.

Family Conflict

Family conflict was identified as the leading cause of youth homelessness in Kingston and area, with 52% of youth focus group participants naming family conflict as the reason they don't have a place to live. Many youth (40%) also identified as being "alone" and stated that they have no family support. Youth shed light on practices that families can implement in order to prevent youth from becoming homeless. These practices included:

- ❖ To be understanding of each other's differences.
- ❖ Sit and talk.
- ❖ Family dinners.
- ❖ Family game night.
- ❖ Counselling.
- ❖ Empathy within the family.
- ❖ Hugs.
- ❖ Compromise with family members.
- ❖ Loyalty and respect within families.
- ❖ Listening to each other more.

Youth also outlined supports that would help families keep youth housed and off the streets. These supports included:

- ❖ Food assistance.
- ❖ More education for parents and families (parent councils in schools).
- ❖ Family and individual counselling.
- ❖ Peer support programs.
- ❖ Telephone support.

Mental Health

Thirty-six percent of youth focus group participants identified experiencing mental illness. Five of the 9 focus groups also highlighted that mental illness is a leading factor contributing to homelessness in Kingston and area. Youth shed insight about what is needed to alleviate the stresses associated with mental illness and outlined specific ways this could be achieved.

What Needs to Be Done

- ❖ Speak out against stigma.
- ❖ Don't pre-judge and stress that mental health is not your fault.
- ❖ Portray that there is nothing wrong with having a mental health issue.
- ❖ Less segregation of individuals with mental health issues.
- ❖ Show that mental health is a journey, not a disease.
- ❖ Use positive language around mental health issues.
- ❖ Treat youth with respect and compassion around the issue.

How it Can Be Done

- ❖ Increase the number of community forums that occur.
- ❖ Offer resources regarding mental health and what mental health is.
- ❖ Continue to highlight the issue and that there are lots of people struggling with mental health issues.
- ❖ Hear people's stories (having youth tell their stories) and present prevalence rates at assemblies at school or through theatrical performances.
- ❖ Have an after school group led by teachers/counsellors to talk about mental illness.
- ❖ Hire volunteers to help those with mental health issues.
- ❖ Teach individuals about the different types of mental health issues/illnesses.
- ❖ Help parents get educated to become open-minded (open houses at the various agencies to educate parents).
- ❖ Educate about mental health in schools at a younger age, i.e. gr. 6/7.
- ❖ Use Social Media and online resources:
 - Facebook with an Adolescent Care Worker leading discussion.
 - Facebook pages educating people on resources available in Kingston.
 - You Tube/Vine videos on mental health (signs, symptoms, resources).
 - Text help line.
 - Phone/tablet App to get contact information for community resources.
 - Anonymous live chats online.

Addictions

Twenty-seven percent of youth focus group participants identified as having an addiction. Seven of the 9 focus groups also explained that addiction is a leading factor contributing to homelessness in the Kingston and area. Similar to the conversation surrounding mental health, youth provided insights about how to address some of the issues associated with addictions. These insights fell into three categories: supports for youth; supports for families; supports in the community.

Supports for Youth

- ❖ More people to come to the schools to raise awareness.
- ❖ More comfortable/casual environment for counseling in schools.
- ❖ Drug counseling for teachers and not just "counsellors".
- ❖ Peer support groups.
- ❖ Workshops and forums.
- ❖ Guest speakers.
- ❖ Media awareness.

Supports for Families

- ❖ Support for families learning to help an addict.
- ❖ Provide a non-judgmental environment for youth/families to speak about their experiences.
- ❖ Partner up families with those they can relate to.

Supports in the Community

- ❖ Youth only needle exchange stations/programs.
- ❖ Aiding parents in gaining knowledge of what addiction is.
- ❖ Live-in treatment centers for youth (long term).
- ❖ Have professionals seek out youth rather than youth coming to them.
- ❖ Reward programs.

Education

Forty-one percent of youth focus group participants indicated that they were still in high school and 29% indicated that they had "some high school education" but were not currently attending. Youth emphasized that greater support is needed to keep youth in school because an education is required to get a job, which in turn helps youth stay housed. The following suggestions were made for supporting youth with school:

- ❖ Make youth aware of resources.
- ❖ Provide extra academic help.
- ❖ Use guidance counsellors.
- ❖ Student voice and choice-allow students to have a say or a part in decision making about school.

Employment and Training

Forty percent of youth focus group participants indicated that the reason they do not have a place to live is because they can't afford a place to rent. Youth further emphasized that support with accessing employment would be a valuable solution to this challenge. Youth said that the following supports would be most useful:

- ❖ Help with resumes/cover letters.
- ❖ Teach youth how to network.
- ❖ Teach youth professionalism.
- ❖ Teach youth stress management.
- ❖ Help youth connect to employers-provide youth with a contact number for job search purposes.
- ❖ Provide youth with Internet access for job searching.
- ❖ Skills training.
- ❖ Support youth to get the education they need to get a job.
- ❖ Educate employers about how to work with youth.

Point-in-Time Count

The results of the count in March of 2013 showed that 20 youth were staying in shelters with an additional 25 youth residing in transitional housing. Sixty-four youth attending high school were also estimated as being precariously housed. There were roughly an equal number of female and male youth experiencing homelessness (the findings from the 2013 Point-in-Time count are outlined in Tables 1-3 below).

Table 1. Youth Shelter Count on the Evening of March 6th to the Morning of March 7th, 2013

<u>Youth Count March 6th 2013</u>					
	<u>Female</u>		<u>Male</u>		
Homeless Shelter	15-19	20-24	15-19	20-24	
Kingston Youth Shelter	0	0	5	2	
HBH - In From The cold	0	1	0	6	
Kingston Interval House	1	0		0	
HBH - Lily's Place	1	3	0	0	
Ryandale Shelter	0	0	0	0	
Salvation Army Harbour Lights				1	
Dawn House Women's Shelter	0	0	0	0	
Totals	2	4	5	9	20
Total Females	6				
Total Males	14				

Table 2. Youth Transitional Housing Count on the Evening of March 6th to the Morning of March 7th, 2013

<u>Youth Count March 6th 2013</u>					
	<u>Female</u>		<u>Male</u>		
Transitional Housing	15-19	20-24	15-19	20-24	
Elizabeth Fry Society	4	5	0	0	
KIH - Robin's Hope Transitional Housing	1	2	0	0	
HBH - Rise@one4nine	5	0	3	0	
HBH - Journey House	0	0	1	3	
Ryandale - Transition House	0	0	0	1	
Totals	10	7	4	4	25
Total Females	17				
Total Males	8				

Table 3. Perception of Number of Precariously Housed Youth on the Evening of March 6th to the Morning of March 7th, 2013

Limestone District School Board	Female		Male		Total
	15-19	20-24	15-19	20-24	
Precariously Housed Youth	29	9	21	5	64
Total Females	38				
Total Males	26				

The second count, conducted in March of 2014, identified a smaller number of youth. However, the numbers are still higher than they should be. On March 5th, 2014 there were 20 youth staying in shelters, with an additional 16 youth residing in transitional housing. Forty-one youth attending high school were also estimated as being precariously housed. In March of 2014, overall there were slightly more female youth than male youth experiencing homelessness (the findings from the Point-in-Time count are outlined in Tables 4-6 below).

Table 4. Youth Shelter Count on the Evening of March 5th to the Morning of March 6th, 2014

Youth Count March 5th 2014					
	Female		Male		
Homeless Shelter	15-19	20-24	15-19	20-24	
Kingston Youth Shelter	1	1	5	3	
HBH - In From The cold	0	0	0	1	
Kingston Interval House	1	2	0	0	
HBH - Lily's Place	3	2	0	0	
Ryandale Shelter	0	0	0	0	
Salvation Army Harbour Lights	0	0	0	0	
Dawn House Women's Shelter	1	0	0	0	
Totals	6	5	5	4	20
Total Females	11				
Total Males	9				

Table 5. Youth Transitional Housing Count on the Evening of March 5th to the Morning of March 6th, 2014

Youth Count March 5th 2014					
	Female		Male		
Transitional Housing	15-19	20-24	15-19	20-24	
Elizabeth Fry Society	0	1	0	0	
KIH - Robin's Hope Transitional Housing	0	2	0	0	
HBH - Rise@one4nine	3	0	4	0	
HBH - Journey House	1	1	1	2	
Ryandale - Transition House	0	0	0	1	
Totals	4	4	5	3	16
Total Females					
	8				
Total Males					
	8				

Table 6. Perception of Number of Precariously Housed Youth on the Evening of March 5th to the Morning of March 6th, 2013

Limestone District School Board	Female		Male		Total
	15-19	20-24	15-19	20-24	
Precariously Housed Youth	18	5	14	4	41
Total Females	23				
Total Males	18				

Introduction to the Action Plan

The key findings and themes identified in the Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project, outlined above, have been used to guide the development of the Action Plan. Local findings are woven throughout the Action Plan in order to demonstrate how all recommended strategies to end youth homelessness in Kingston and area are grounded in youth voice and experience.

Purpose of the Action Plan

The Action Plan serves to support the development of a shared vision to end youth homelessness in Kingston and area. The plan brings clarity and understanding to the complex social issues that underpin youth homelessness, and illustrates the type of strategies and contributions that are needed in Kingston and area to address these issues. There are three points to keep in mind when reviewing the Action Plan. Firstly, this Action Plan is the first step, not the last step, in establishing a clear agenda to end youth homelessness in Kingston and area. There is more work to be done and this Action Plan will continue to evolve and become more concrete over-time. To that end, the Action Plan is also not intended to be a static document. As our collective experience and knowledge of youth homelessness evolves, so too must our definitions and approach to the issue. Ongoing changes to the Action Plan will demonstrate the developmental nature of community-based work and systems change. Lastly, the Action Plan is not intended to prescribe a "one size fits all" approach to end youth homelessness. Local action must reflect the specific priorities, assets, and context of Kingston and area. However, the Action Plan is intended to represent a foundation upon which the youth homeless movement can align local and national priorities in order to emphasize the essentials to end youth homeless in Canada. The Action Plan can also serve as a catalyst for collaboration across "peer" communities participating in the MLC program.

Purpose of a Youth Focused Action Plan

Alongside this project, the City of Kingston has developed a 10 Year Municipal Housing and Homelessness Plan. The City and United Way KFL&A have worked together to ensure the Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project will inform the youth homelessness component of the 10 Year Plan. The 10 Year Plan has been valuable in helping Kingston and area refocus its efforts from managing homelessness to ending homelessness. As part of this refocus, the 10 Year Plan acknowledges that youth are a particularly vulnerable population in Kingston and area and there is a need to prevent youth from becoming homeless so that they do not "become tomorrow's chronically homeless adults". The 10 Year Plan also recognizes the unique developmental needs of youth and states that "youth are best served by youth-specific services, not by being treated as adults". Ineffective and misdirected services lead to increased costs on the system and wasted taxpayer dollars.

As outlined in the Municipal 10 Year Plan, approximately 1 in 3 persons experiencing homelessness in Canada are unaccompanied youth, defined as those between the ages of 16 and 24 who are without adult supervision. Twenty-seven percent of the city's total shelter users are in this group⁶. This finding is concerning given that youth are among the most vulnerable of groups who experience homelessness. Their level of development and life experience renders them particularly vulnerable to entrenchment into street life⁷. Youth are physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually and socially still developing. This means they are entering homelessness at a time when they are still forming their identity and trying to understand who they are and what they value⁸.

⁶ 10 Year Municipal Housing and Homelessness Plan.

⁷ Worthington, C. A., & MacLaurin, B. J. (2009). Level of street involvement and health and health services use of Calgary street youth. *Can J Public Health, 100* (5), 384-88.

⁸ Larson, R. W. (2000). Toward a psychology of positive youth development. *American psychologist, 55*(1), 170.

Consequently, homeless youth are particularly vulnerable to criminal victimization and sexual exploitation⁹. Youth also often enter homelessness with fewer life skills, such as employment, cooking, or money management skills¹⁰. The lack of skills in these areas means it is more difficult for youth to transition from homelessness to independence without considerable support. Researchers have found that without effective intervention within the first two weeks of street involvement, youth will likely become entrenched within two months¹¹. Entrenched street youth face more serious risks, are more heavily involved in illegal activities, and are more difficult to engage and to serve¹². There is a need for innovative programs and projects that target young people who are within this two-week critical intervention period.

Youth is also characterized by different experiences than adulthood. Adolescence is a period when youth are drawn to exploration and experimentation¹³. It is therefore imperative that young people are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to experiment and explore without life-altering consequences. There are key building blocks of healthy development, known as Developmental Assets, which outline what environments need to offer youth so that they can become independent and positively transition to adulthood. For example, environments need to offer:

- ❖ Meaningful participation;
- ❖ Opportunities for engagement;
- ❖ Constructive use of time;
- ❖ Healthy and caring relationships;
- ❖ Supportive mentors and role models;
- ❖ Positive peer influences;
- ❖ High expectations;
- ❖ Safety;
- ❖ And accessibility (universal, physically and financially accessible, and available at the times needed)¹⁴.

When young people experience the assets outlined above, they are less likely to engage in a wide range of high-risk behaviours and are more likely to thrive. For example, research shows that youth with the least assets are most likely to engage in problem alcohol use, violence, and drug use^{15,16}; issues that have been found to put youth at risk of homelessness¹⁷. On the other hand, when youth have higher levels of assets, they are more likely to do well in school and be civically engaged^{18,19}; factors that are correlated with housing stability²⁰. These

⁹Worthington, C. A., & MacLaurin, B. J. (2009). Level of street involvement and health and health services use of Calgary street youth. *Can J Public Health, 100*(5), 384-88.

¹⁰ *The state of homelessness in Canada 2013*. Homeless Hub, 2013.

¹¹ Worthington, C. A., & MacLaurin, B. J. (2009). Level of street involvement and health and health services use of Calgary street youth. *Can J Public Health, 100*(5), 384-88.

¹² Kidd, S. A. (2003). Street youth: Coping and interventions. *Child and adolescent social work journal, 20*(4), 235-261.

¹³ Larson, R. W. (2000). Toward a psychology of positive youth development. *American psychologist, 55*(1), 170.

¹⁴ Scales, P. C., Benson, P. L., Leffert, N., & Blyth, D. A. (2000). Contribution of developmental assets to the prediction of thriving among adolescents. *Applied developmental science, 4*(1), 27-46.

¹⁵ Leffert, N., Benson, P. L., Scales, P. C., Sharma, A. R., Drake, D. R., & Blyth, D. A. (1998). Developmental assets: Measurement and prediction of risk behaviors among adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science, 2*(4), 209-230

¹⁶ Fergus, S., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2005). Adolescent resilience: A framework for understanding healthy development in the face of risk. *Annual. Rev. Public Health, 26*, 399-419.

¹⁷ Fergus, S., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2005). Adolescent resilience: A framework for understanding healthy development in the face of risk. *Annual. Rev. Public Health, 26*, 399-419.

¹⁸ Leffert, N., Benson, P. L., Scales, P. C., Sharma, A. R., Drake, D. R., & Blyth, D. A. (1998). Developmental assets: Measurement and prediction of risk behaviors among adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science, 2*(4), 209-230.

¹⁹ Fergus, S., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2005). Adolescent resilience: A framework for understanding healthy development in the face of risk. *Annual. Rev. Public Health, 26*, 399-419.

²⁰ Fergus, S., & Zimmerman, M. A. (2005). Adolescent resilience: A framework for understanding healthy development in the face of risk. *Annual. Review. Public Health, 26*, 399-419.

findings underscore the need for an Action Plan that reflects developmental assets and an understanding of what is required to support the positive development of youth. The findings also demonstrate that the needs and characteristics of youth, as well as the assets youth require, pose unique challenges to housing. Just as adults do, homeless youth need safe, accessible, consistent, and appropriate physical shelter. However, the provision of housing alone will not solve the problem. Housing must be coupled with extensive supports that enhance developmental assets and prepare youth for independence. It is also important to consider how variations in age influence housing. In the MLC and Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness projects, anyone between the ages of 15-24 is considered a "youth". There are great differences between 15 and 24 year olds in terms of life experience, desires, interests, and needs. For example, a 15-17 year old may require more supervision and structure than an 18-24 year old. For these reasons, in comparison to adult strategies that may call for fewer options, it is important to incorporate diverse housing options in any housing strategy supporting youth.

Lastly, the average Canadian pays a significant financial price when a youth is homeless. One study found that each youth experiencing homelessness is reflected in an annual taxpayer burden of \$13,900²¹ and an annual social burden of \$37,450²². Once these youth reach the age of 25, it is estimated that they will impose a future lifetime taxpayer burden of \$148,790 and a future lifetime social burden of \$461,020. Altogether, the lifetime cost of each homeless youth is over \$1 million. Creating a plan that focuses on strategies designed to ensure youth are stably and sustainably housed is one way of preventing future chronic homelessness and ending homelessness in Canada altogether.

The Action Plan Framework

Positive Youth Development

As outlined above, it is important that the Action Plan reflects developmental assets and an understanding of what is required to support the positive development of youth. The Action Plan is therefore situated within a Positive Youth Development Framework²³. In contrast to traditional approaches, which often focus on the deficits of youth experiencing homelessness, this framework focuses on strengthening the assets, protective, and resiliency factors all young people need to lead a healthy life and transition to adulthood. Applying this framework requires consideration of the life course of youth and an understanding of theories of human development. All action strategies recommended in this Action Plan are designed to align with the age and developmental needs of the youth populations being served. All activities will take into account young peoples' increasing knowledge base and skill set, and challenge young people to broaden their experiences and aspirations. A Positive Youth Development Framework also requires an understanding of what environments need to offer youth to support healthy development. Environments that support healthy development are those that immerse youth in supportive settings and engage them in a variety of healthy relationships, among other things. A Positive Youth Development approach to ending youth homelessness is supported by current advocates, researchers, and policy makers in the field of youth homelessness.²⁴ The Action Plan assumes that all engaged stakeholders in Kingston and area, from families to schools to communities, are working from this same perspective.

²¹ The \$13,900 includes homeless shelters, hospital bills, legal fees, cost of Children's Aid workers, incarceration, etc.

²² \$37,450 represents all other indirect costs, such as lost taxes, lower productivity, lost wages, marginal excess tax burden, lower economic growth, etc.

²³ http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthopportunities/steppingstones/youth_policy_about.aspx

²⁴ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Outline

The Action Plan is written so as to carry the reader from issue to action. The goal is to outline what is needed in Kingston and area to end youth homelessness, why it is needed, and how Kingston and area can get there. Each heading that is used in the Action Plan is outlined and described below.

Goal

Each goal represents a change that is expected to occur as a result of the Action Plan. The goals are high level and represent areas where improvement is needed. All goals were identified by qualitatively analyzing data collected by United Way KFL&A. This includes data from the following sources: nine focus groups, one point-in-time count, and a youth community forum.

Definition

The purpose of this heading is to describe the goal in clear terms. All definitions were drawn from MLC's "Essentials to End Youth Homelessness" document and revised based on literature and local research findings.

The Need

The purpose of this heading is to demonstrate why it is necessary to meet each goal and to explain each goal in more depth.

Action Strategies

The Action Strategies outline what is needed in Kingston and area to meet each goal. There may be strategies not included in the Action Plan that are relevant to the particular goal. The strategies are intended to reflect locally identified needs and priorities.

The Case for Action

The Case for Action ties the individual strategies within each goal area to local data and literature. The purpose is to elaborate on what is needed, and illustrate why the strategy is nationally and locally important. When possible, examples of how to implement the strategy are provided.

Promising Local Practices

Promising local practices include relevant programs, organizations, and initiatives that are already in place in Kingston and area. The purpose of this section is to highlight what is already happening and what can be built upon to put each action strategy into practice.

Promising National Practices

Promising national practices include programs, organizations, and initiatives that are occurring across Canada. The purpose of this section is to outline what has been effective elsewhere and to highlight what Kingston and area can learn from other cities.

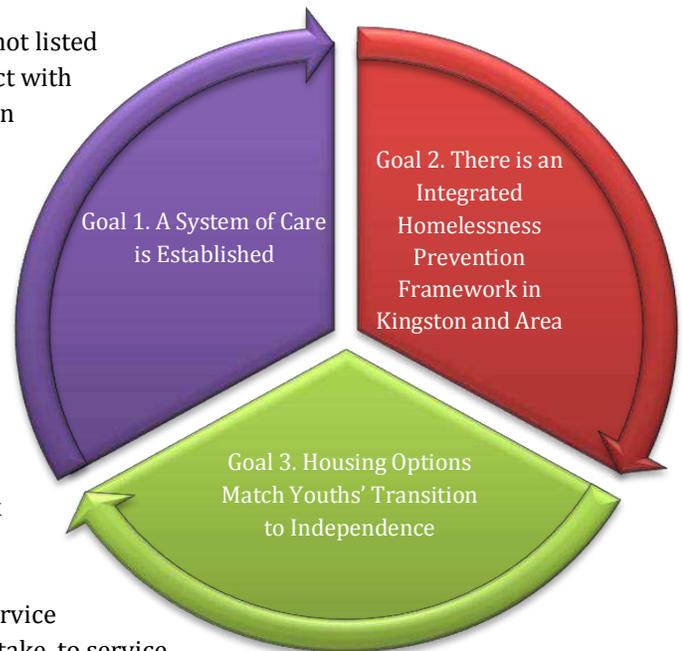
The Action Plan to End Youth Homeless in Kingston and Area

All goals and actions strategies are of equal importance and are not listed according to priority. Just as the environments that youth interact with intersect to influence youth experience, so too do the strategies in this Action Plan. This Action Plan assumes that all goals will be worked toward simultaneously, as success in one area will depend on success in another.

Goal 1: A System of Care is Established

The Definition

Establishing a system of care means that services within Kingston and area are coordinated and integrated. Different agencies and programs have clear roles and mandates, and work together as providers for the same clients. As opposed to a fragmented collection of services, a system of care demands an integrated systems response whereby programs, services and service delivery systems are organized at every level – from policy, to intake, to service provision, to client flow – based on the needs of the young person²⁵.



Goal 1. A System of Care is Established

- **Action Strategy 1.1.** Establish a Coordinated Access and Assessment System
- **Action Strategy 1.2.** Establish Collective Principles and Values
- **Action Strategy 1.3.** Create a System to Collect and Share Localized Research

The Need

The community-based services of the homelessness sector in Kingston and area cannot alone solve youth homelessness. Mainstream services such as health care, addictions and mental health, child welfare, education, and corrections must become

embedded within the youth homelessness sector's coordinated system of care. This is because youth are part of many environments, such as family, school, peer, and community environments, and these environments intersect and influence one another. When there is a breakdown in one environment there is likely a break down in another. An attempt to change one environment can also have side effects on another. This means that increased attention to inter-sectoral partnerships and collaborative service provision is required to ensure holistic and consistent support is provided to youth. A system of care is also important to ensure that the community of helping professionals in Kingston and area take the burden of service coordination 'off the backs' of families and youth. The goal is to better support youth through team work in services and in community planning²⁶.

²⁵ Mobilizing Local Communities to End Youth Homelessness in Canada. *Essentials to End Youth Homelessness*.

²⁶ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

A system of care will also benefit individual agencies and organizations. Collaboration creates a sense of community, whereby service providers are not 'alone' in the support process. There is community ownership for supporting youth, addressing their needs, and promoting their strengths. Agencies can also draw on their unified voice, creating strength and leverage when advocating to governing bodies and policy makers about unmet needs. Furthermore, a system of care reduces duplication of services and allows for greater efficiency. By working together the dynamic needs of youth are met as they flow seamlessly through the system.

Action Strategy 1.1. Establish a Coordinated Access and Assessment System

The Case for Action

With a coordinated access and assessment system, when a youth or family "touches" the system, be it through mental health, addictions, child welfare, corrections, or housing services, they are immediately assessed, their needs are identified, and client-centered plans are put in place through a common assessment tool²⁷. As opposed to there being one door into the system, there are multiple doors, each prepared to support youth as they move through the sector. Different agencies work collaboratively to help meet intersecting needs and prevent them from becoming homeless and/or move them out of homelessness as quickly as possible²⁸. It is a system-wide response designed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable first (triaging) and it creates a more efficient homeless serving system 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 re-entries into homelessness (by appropriately responding to people most in need first, and matching all people to supports and services that meet their needs)²⁹.

A coordinated access system has been identified as being particularly important in Kingston and area due to the complexity of the issues that homeless youth experience. When youth were asked what the main causes of homelessness are for young people living in Kingston and area, they indicated that a variety of issues intersect and threaten housing stability. These issues primarily include drugs and addictions, mental health, a lack of affordable housing, and family conflict³⁰. This means that youth experiencing homelessness can "touch" the system at a variety of points. It also means that while a youth may first touch the system in one particular area, they may require support from another area. The strength of this action strategy is that it leads a youth to be served by the system, not by just one agency. In other words, it provides wrap-around support. Another strength is that it prevents youth and families from needing to retell their story every time they access services. Youth in Kingston and area identified this as being critical to their willingness to accept support, as they are "tired of telling their story over and over again" as they move through the system.

Promising Local Practices

Established Relationships and Partnerships

Key organizations supporting youth, and youth experiencing homelessness in particular, are well known in Kingston and area. For example, Schools Boards and the Kingston Police Service already have established partnerships in the community. By placing an intentional focus on facilitating access and wrap-around support, these partnerships can be strengthened to increase coordination within the system.

²⁷ Raising the Roof. (2009) Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions.

²⁸ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

²⁹ Gaetz, S. (2012) The Real Cost of Homelessness: Can We Save Money by Doing the Right Thing?

³⁰ Youth Out Load: Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project.

More detail about the partnerships and referral pathways that are already in place is provided below.

- ❖ Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board (ALCDSB) and the Limestone District School Board (LDSB)
 - When a youth discloses to a counsellor at school that they are precariously housed, they are referred to the following organizations: Pathways for Children and Youth, KAIROS, or the Youth Outreach Worker from Kingston Interval House.
 - If the youth presents as absolutely homeless, they are referred to Kingston Interval House (female-only), Youth Services at Home Base Housing (male and female), and the Kingston Youth Shelter (male and female).
 - If the youth presents psychiatric crisis, adolescent psychiatry at the hospital is contacted.
 - These referrals to community partners are done on a school-by-school basis, there is no protocol in place at this point.

- ❖ Kingston Police Service
 - Within the schools there is a protocol for a safety threat assessment where police are involved.
 - All officers are equipped to refer the youth they meet on the street to community resources.
 - Relationships with Pathways for Children and Youth, KAIROS, and the Youth Outreach Worker from Kingston Interval House are particularly strong.

City of Kingston's Individual and Family Information System (HIFIS)

In alignment with the City of Kingston's 10 Year Municipal Housing and Homelessness Plan, it has been established that any providers that the City funds will be required to use what is called the Homeless Individual and Family Information System (HIFIS). HIFIS data will be accessible to the system of care, which requires an information sharing agreement among system of care representatives. Agencies will be able to learn and grow alongside one another, ultimately strengthening service coordination and integration. How this System aligns with youth providers needs to be explored. For example, it is important that HIFIS includes information about youth serving providers, is aligned with youth development, and is designed to collect data about youth demographics and needs.

Promising National Practices

At a national level, many cities have included coordinated access and assessment in their 10 year homelessness plans. However, in most cases the tools to facilitate coordinated access and assessment are still under development. There are four notable cases in which a mechanism is already in place to facilitate coordinated access and assessment.

Coordinated Access in Lethbridge, Alberta³¹

A centralized intake, assessment, and triage system is in place to determine eligibility and referral of clients to the appropriate Housing First team and or appropriate community service. A Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool is also utilized to determine the needs of the service participant and a warm transfer is used to connect the individual to the appropriate team. This tool is used by all providers within the homelessness and housing system of care, including shelters, mental health and addictions, schools, and correctional services.

³¹ Org Code. (2013). Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool.

Calgary's Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS)³²

A Homelessness Management Information System has been created in Calgary to ensure the System of Care is upheld. The HMIS provides consistent service provider program definitions, intake and eligibility criteria, and outcome measurement. This system allows all providers to view an individual's assessment so that a new assessment does not need to be undertaken as the individual flows through the system. It also helps to ensure a clear understanding is established about what supports are available, thereby supporting effective referrals.

Hamilton Emergency Shelter Services Integration and Coordination Committee (HESICC)³³

HESICC is a partnership of the City of Hamilton, Good Shepherd Centres, Hamilton Housing Help Centre, Mission Services, the Salvation Army, and Wesley Urban Ministries. This committee demonstrates the community's proactive commitment to ensure that people accessing the shelter move from the emergency system to more sustainable and permanent forms of housing.

Street Youth Planning Collaborative (SYPC)³⁴

The SYPC is a multi-layered committee that includes the directors of street youth serving agencies, front line staff, and young people who have experienced homelessness. The key agencies include Alternatives for Youth, Good Shepherd Youth Services, Hamilton Regional Indian Centre, Living Rock Ministries and Wesley Youth Services. Collaboratively and without competition, these agencies focus on meeting the needs of young people. The underlying philosophy of the SYPC is to support healthy adolescent transitions to adulthood.

Action Strategy 1.2. Establish Collective Principles and Values

The Case for Action

Large-scale social change requires a shift in focus from isolated interventions of individual organizations to an approach based on working together for collective impact. In Kingston and area, there is already a shared commitment to end youth homelessness across system of care organizations. Many organizations are working hard to support youth on their journey to independence and to alleviate or remove the barriers along the way. There is a need to build on this commitment by supporting organizations to abandon their individual agendas in favour of a collective approach to ending youth homelessness. This is because no single organization, however innovative or powerful, can accomplish this goal alone. Instead, improvements must be guided by a shared vision for change. It is therefore important for all stakeholders to incorporate systems of care principles and values into daily operations and to be committed to such principles and values. Common principles help guide actions and lend focus to systems of care work. Common values help to ensure that youth are receiving the same messages across the system. When establishing collective principles and values, it is important to consider youth development and what youth require to lead healthy, productive, and meaningful lives.

³² <http://calgaryhomeless.com/hmis/>

³³ <http://www.wesleyurbanministries.com/index.php?page=programscasesupport>

³⁴ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Promising Local Practices

Housing First is a transformational housing model used in a number of Canadian and American communities and is at the heart of many systems of care across the country^{35 36 37 38}. It is a values based model that is guided by clear principles. Much could be gained by having Housing First values and principles guide the system of care in Kingston and area.

City of Kingston's Adoption of Housing First

Housing First as a model has been adopted by the City of Kingston's 10 Year Municipal Housing and Homelessness Plan. Housing First puts the priority on a rapid and direct move from homelessness to housing, instead of requiring people to graduate through a series of steps before getting into permanent housing³⁹. The model is based on the belief that housing is a basic right. There are four core principles to Housing First that lay the foundation for Kingston's 10 Year Municipal Housing and Homelessness Plan and set the tone and direction for moving forward. These principles include:

- ❖ Youth have choice and autonomy over their housing;
- ❖ Youth require immediate access to permanent housing with the support necessary to sustain it;
- ❖ Housing is not conditional on sobriety or program participation;
- ❖ Housing promotes social inclusion, self-sufficiency, and improved quality of life and health.

When a system of care is based on the principles above then all players in the system are approaching support from the youth's perspective. Youth define their own needs and goals and the system works together to meet these needs. This is a shift from other continuum of care models that place the focus on deficits⁴⁰. These models hold the perception that if a youth requires treatment and is "resistant" or "not willing" to be helped, then that youth is not ready for housing. The Housing First model challenges this assumption by recognizing that loss of control over one's life resulting from housing instability, psychiatric hospitalizations, and intermittent substance abuse treatment leaves some youth mistrustful of the mental health system and unwilling to comply with demands set by providers. Accordingly, "compliance" with treatment is not a requirement for housing in the Housing First model. Adopting Housing First principles does not mean the omission of placing expectations on youth. Rather, it highlights the necessity to establish mechanisms for incorporating assets into programs and supports in a way that is congruent with Housing First values and principles.

Along with the adoption of the principles outlined above, the City has established a Vision Statement for Housing First- "*A community committed to providing an effective and coordinated system of housing and supports that is best for each household and quickly ends or prevents their homelessness permanently.*" While Housing First is at the forefront of the City's 10 Year Plan, it has not yet been determined how Housing First will play out when applied to youth.

³⁵ Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Youth Homelessness (2011).

³⁶ City of Kingston's 10 Year Municipal Housing and Homelessness Plan (2013).

³⁷ Vancouver's Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2012)

³⁸ Place to Call Home, Edmonton's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness (2010)

³⁹ Toronto Shelter, Support & Housing Administration. (2007) What Housing First Means for People: Results of Streets to Homes 2007 Post-Occupancy Research.

⁴⁰ Parkinson, S., Nelson, G., & Horgan, S. (1999). From housing to homes: A review of the literature on housing approaches for psychiatric consumer/survivors. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health (Revue canadienne de santé mentale communautaire)*, 18(1), 145-164.

Promising National Practices

Existing Housing First Models for Adults

Housing First as it applies to youth has not been fully explored. This means that at this point in time the vast majority of resources to draw on pertain to models implemented with adults. There are four case studies that have clearly documented the process of establishing collective support for Housing First principles and values. These case studies include:

- ❖ At Home Chez Soi-Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, Moncton;
- ❖ Lethbridge, Alberta – The City and Community to "Bring Lethbridge Home";
- ❖ Hamilton, Ontario – Transitions to Home (T2H);
- ❖ Edmonton, Alberta – Homeward Trust.

Housing First For Youth Framework⁴¹

A Housing First for Youth Framework report has recently been launched in Canada. This report is designed to clarify what Housing First is and what is necessary to adapt the model for work with young people who are homeless. This report will be a valuable tool for understanding what values and principles of Housing First are most relevant to youth and how they can be applied.

Action Strategy 1.3. Create a System to Collect and Share Localized Research

Case for Action

Since the time the community embarked on the Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness project, much has been learned about youth homelessness in Kingston and area. For example, point in time counts have been valuable at providing an estimate on the number of homeless young people in Kingston and area. The youth focus groups and community forum have also been valuable for helping us to understand why youth become homeless. Despite these gains, there are still gaps in knowledge and a need to create a system for ongoing learning. One way to do this is through real-time reporting on the total number of homeless youth in Kingston and area, the length and causes of their homelessness, and their demographic characteristics and needs. This type of reporting allows the system to learn and strengthen their services on an ongoing basis. It also allows Kingston and area to better understand youths' longitudinal homelessness experiences by tracking the services they receive throughout the duration of their homelessness episode(s).

One way to collect and share localized research is through evaluation. The Action Plan is new in many ways. It is new to the community in terms of the focus on youth, the types of programs that will be offered, and the way in which the system will work together. This process will need to be monitored carefully in order to stay on track, learn, and grow.

⁴¹ <http://www.homelesshub.ca/housingfirstyouth>

Promising Local Practices

City of Kingston's Individual and Family Information System (HIFIS)

In addition to supporting coordinated access and service integration, HIFIS will also support knowledge mobilization more broadly. The City will host the data collected through HIFIS and prepare regular aggregate reports for the provider community. As noted above, how this System aligns with youth providers needs to be explored. For example, it is important that the System includes information about youth serving providers, is aligned with youth development, and is designed to collect data about youth demographics and needs.

Youth Community Forum

In the development of this Action Plan, a Youth Community Forum was held called Youth Out Loud Kingston!. This forum was planned and facilitated by youth for youth and was successful at engaging a wide range of youth. The forum could become an annual practice and serve as an effective tool for sharing important lessons with youth in Kingston and area.

The Students Commission's Youth Friendly Checklist⁴²

As part of Kingston's Youth Strategy, which was designed with the end goal of creating a youth friendly city, a Youth Friendly Checklist was developed to assess progress toward creating youth friendly spaces, programs, or organizations. This resource was created by CAST, a working group of youth and adults who took the lead on developing the Kingston Youth Strategy. A similar type of resource could be developed to align with the Action Plan to end Youth Homelessness in Kingston and Area.

Promising National Practices

Calgary's Homelessness Management Information System⁴³

As described above, Calgary's Homelessness Management Information System collects performance indicators and supports outcome measurement. This tool has already been drawn upon in the development of The City of Kingston's Individual and Family Information System.

Eva's Initiatives National Learning Community⁴⁴

Eva's Initiatives National Learning Community collects and shares information about youth homelessness online. It is a national forum designed to help ensure people can work collaboratively, share expertise, and learn from one another as we work to address the needs of youth at risk. The Learning Community is a major step forward in terms of creating a system to share and access research in the area of youth homelessness. It makes it easy for agencies to learn about best and promising practices and to stay current about national priorities. The Action Plan will need to take this initiative one step further by strengthening access to localized research that is specific to Kingston and area.

⁴² <http://tools.engagementsurvey.ca/>

⁴³ <http://calgaryhomeless.com/hmis/>

⁴⁴ <http://www.evasinitiatives.com/2011/12/07/the-learning-community/>

Goal 2. There is an Integrated Homelessness Prevention Framework in Kingston and Area

The Definition

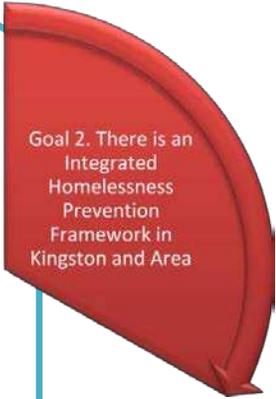
Prevention means stopping youth from becoming homeless in the first place. An integrated prevention framework includes activities that remove or reduce risk factors as well as promote protective factors to ensure wellbeing⁴⁵.

The Need

Prevention is important because homeless youth are a particularly vulnerable population, subject to challenges that pose not only great risk to their health and wellbeing⁴⁶, but place a cost on society as a whole⁴⁷. Of the 79 youth who participated in the Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project focus groups, 36% indicated having a mental illness, 27% indicated having an addiction, 26% indicated having a medical condition pertaining to their physical health, and 11% indicated having a physical disability. Participants were not able to select multiple responses, however research strongly suggests that homeless youth typically experience more than one health challenge at the same time and the longer a youth is homeless, the greater the likelihood of this occurring⁴⁸. Health conditions as described above are costly to manage. One study found that the lifetime cost of each homeless youth in Canada is over \$1 million⁴⁹. By stopping homelessness before it occurs, we are better able to support our young people in their transition to independence and lessen the demand on our social service, primary health, and mental health care system. The ultimate reason for prevention, however, is that it is the only way to truly end youth homelessness.

Prevention requires an understanding of people within their social worlds and the use of this understanding to improve their wellbeing. This is because prevention assumes the perspective that the problems people confront do not arise from personal failures, but from the failures of community systems to adequately support its citizens. With relation to youth homelessness, prevention theorists and practitioners believe that for prevention to be successful it should occur at three levels. The first level is primary prevention, which focuses on working upstream to address factors that increase the risk of youth homelessness, and which can support enhancing protective factors that increase resilience. There is also a need for systems prevention, which means stopping the flow of young people from mental health care, child protection, and corrections into homelessness. Thirdly, there is a need for early intervention strategies designed to support young people and their families when they are imminently at risk of becoming homeless⁵⁰. When communities are working at each level simultaneously, young people are adequately supported by the system and youth are prevented from entering homelessness.

- **Action Strategy 2.1.** Establish Mechanisms for Family Counselling and Mediation
- **Action Strategy 2.2.** Support Youth Engagement in School
- **Action Strategy 2.3.** Promote Universal Mental Health Prevention and Promotion Programs
- **Action Strategy 2.4.** Create a School and Community Awareness Strategy
- **Action Strategy 2.5.** Enhance Youth Employment and Career-Readiness Programs
- **Action Strategy 2.6.** Ensure Youth are Not Discharged into Homelessness



Goal 2. There is an Integrated Homelessness Prevention Framework in Kingston and Area

⁴⁵ Mobilizing Local Communities to End Youth Homelessness in Canada. *Essentials to End Youth Homelessness*.

⁴⁶ Hulchanski, D., Campsie, P., Chau, S. B., Hwang, S., & Paradis, E. (Eds.), (2009) *The Street Health Report, 2007: The Health of Toronto's Homeless Population*, in *Finding Home: Policy Options for Addressing Homelessness in Canada*.

⁴⁷ Belfield, C. R., Levin, H. M., & Rosen, R. (2012) *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*. The Kellogg Foundation.

⁴⁸ National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2013) *Conference on Family and Youth Homelessness*.

⁴⁹ Belfield, C. R., Levin, H. M., & Rosen, R. (2012) *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*. The Kellogg Foundation.

⁵⁰ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Action Strategy 2.1. Establish Mechanisms for Family Counselling and Mediation

The Case for Action

Youth in the Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project named family conflict as being the number one reason they leave or are “forced out” of their home and find themselves without a stable place to live. Many youth (40%) also identified as being “alone” and stated that they have no family support. These findings are consistent with youth homelessness and youth development literature. The family plays a key role in a youth's life. Strong family support is essential for young people as they mature and become adults. Caring relationships and consistent emotional bonds between families and adolescents are significant protective factors⁵¹. When emotional bonds are broken, youth are vulnerable and may become at risk of homelessness⁵². These findings demonstrate that while adolescence is marked in part by the need for greater autonomy than in earlier years, most young people still rely on their families. Family counseling is therefore a core component of the Action Plan in order to support strong and stable family bonds.

Furthermore, in Kingston and area, the majority of youth who are homeless are “temporarily sheltered”, which typically means they are staying in overnight shelters, shelters for people impacted by family violence, or couch surfing. This trend indicates that family counselling and mediation as soon as youth leave home may be the precise service they need to secure their housing stability. The literature also states that early family intervention can break the cycle of homelessness if implemented at this key stage⁵³. This can be achieved by providing dedicated funding to a set of Family Intervention Workers who work through a lead agency. These workers act as a point of contact (meaning they can be accessed no matter where a youth “touches” the system), and support youth to remain at home. The goal is not only to support the youth, but to also support family members to develop a strong understanding of their family relationships, how to manage and negotiate in challenging situations, and how to develop supportive, meaningful, and sustainable relationships within the family. This may include counselling families on how to support youth experiencing mental health and addictions issues.

Promising Local Practices

Existing Places Offering Family Counselling and Mediation

There are a variety of places in Kingston and area that are currently offering some form of family counselling and mediation. A list of these places and what they offer is outlined below.

- ❖ Pathways for Children and Youth has counsellors available in high schools to work with families and youth; they also offer the Wraparound Program and have a Walk-In Family Counseling service available on Tuesday evenings.
- ❖ Youth Diversion refers youth to the Youth Counsellors at K3C Community Counseling Centres when they learn that a youth is considering leaving home; they also offer the MEND program as well as the Strengthening Families program, which is a provincial pilot program.
- ❖ FACS FL&A bring in outside counsellors for family counseling.
- ❖ Kingston Youth Shelter offers the Re-Connect Program for youth looking to reconcile with out of town family members. The Shelter also provides informal family counselling to the youth and families it supports.

⁵¹ National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2013) Conference on Family and Youth Homelessness.

⁵² Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (2012). *A Plan, Not a Dream*.

⁵³ Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (2012). *A Plan, Not a Dream*.

- ❖ Kingston Military Family Resource Centre offers support for youth from military families, including family counselling and mediation programs.
- ❖ St. Lawrence Youth Association (SLYA) has community workers who provide individual and family counseling, available to youth who are involved in the justice system.

While there are a variety of places already offering family counselling and mediation, there is a need to coordinate the support being offered. Youth and families also need help navigating the options available to them.

Promising National Practices

There are two programs that demonstrate a model of case management that matches youth development and reflects the specific needs of homeless youth. How these programs could fit within the context of Kingston and area's existing family counselling and mediation programs could be explored.

Eva's Initiatives Family Reconnect Program⁵⁴

The Family Reconnect program is designed to support youth in remaining at home when appropriate and to reconcile broken family relationships. The program includes the following components.

- ❖ Staff use a client-centered case management model, and facilitate access to appropriate and effective services and supports for young people and their families. In addition to facilitating access to supports, staff may accompany young people to services in those cases where they are having difficulty accessing their appointments.
- ❖ Counseling is at the centre of the work of the Family Reconnect team. Based on family systems theory, counsellors provide short term and ongoing counseling and support. Counseling may also involve family members, with the idea of nurturing and promoting positive change and understanding. In some cases young people and family members participate together in family counseling; in other cases family members themselves receive counseling and support.
- ❖ Mental health supports are central to the program. Mental health support is provided by counsellors, and access to other mental health professionals is facilitated through the work of the program.
- ❖ Many young people receive psychiatric diagnoses that help identify mental health challenges, learning and other disabilities. This often paves the way towards more effective solutions and supports.

⁵⁴ <http://www.evasinitiatives.com/2012/03/27/family-reconnect-program/>

The Elements Project, Boys and Girls Club of Calgary⁵⁵

The overarching goal of the Elements Project is to divert youth from homelessness by enhancing family functioning so that the family can support the youth through adolescence and into a self-sufficient adulthood. A Family Support Worker works with young people aged 12-24 and their families to improve family functioning and divert youth from homelessness. The program uses a strength-based, family systems perspective. The Family Support Worker offers relationship-based intensive case management including assessment, coaching and education, system navigation, referral and advocacy. The level and intensity of support will vary based on identified need and over time the intensity of supports is intended to decrease.⁵⁶

Action Strategy 2.2. Support Youth Engagement in School

The Case for Action

The fact that most people in modern society go through a formal education has led the school to play an important role in the community. Increasingly, schools are playing the role of educator, health and wellness promoter, and socialiser. Given these increased responsibilities, it is concerning that only 41% of youth in the Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project indicated they were still in high school and 29% indicated that they had "some high school education" but were not currently attending. Research indicates that when young people are engaged at school they experience higher levels of happiness and confidence⁵⁷, sense of mastery⁵⁸, more positive social relationships⁵⁹, and decreased feelings of loneliness⁶⁰. Developmental asset and positive youth development literature further indicates that these outcomes are fundamental in the transition to independence⁶¹. These findings demonstrate that in efforts to prevent youth homelessness there is a need to provide youth in Kingston and area with greater educational support, and there is a particular need to re-engage youth who are at risk of disconnecting from their education. As indicated by the youth in the Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project, in order to engage youth at school there is a further need to ensure youth have "voice and choice" over their education. This includes autonomy over course work as well as options for classes/the opportunity to participate in educational programs that match their skills and interests.

⁵⁵ <http://www.boysandgirlsclubsofcalgary.ca/programs/youth-housing-shelter>

⁵⁶ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

⁵⁷ Goodenow, C. (1993). Classroom belonging among early adolescent students: Relationships to motivation and achievement. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 13, 21-43.

⁵⁸ Demaray, M.K., Malecki, C.R., Davidson, L.M., Hodgson, K.K., & Rebus, P.J. (2005). The relationship between social support and student adjustment: A longitudinal analysis. *Psychology in the School*, 42, 691-706.

⁵⁹ Fraser, B. J., & Fisher, D. L. (1982). Predicting student outcomes from their perceptions of classroom psychosocial environment. *American Educational Research Journal*, 19, 498-518.

⁶⁰ Chong, H., Huan, V., See Yeo, L., & Ang, R. (2006). Asian adolescents' perceptions of parent, peer, and school support and psychological adjustment: the mediating role of dispositional optimism. *Current Psychology*, 25(3), 212-228.

⁶¹ Scales, P. C., Benson, P. L., Leffert, N., & Blyth, D. A. (2000). Contribution of developmental assets to the prediction of thriving among adolescents. *Applied developmental science*, 4(1), 27-46.

Promising Local Practices

Alternative Educational Programs

Currently, there are alternatives within Kingston and area available to at-risk youth to ensure they remain connected with the school system. These alternatives include:

- ❖ Pathways to Education;
- ❖ Alternative Education Plans;
- ❖ The Supervised Alternative Education program.

The programs above are typically offered to youth who are "at-risk" of becoming disconnected from school. There is a need to ensure that youth who have become disconnected for either a short or long period of time are provided the support they need to re-engage, and remain sustainably engaged, with school.

Promising National Practices

Community Mobilization Prince Albert (CMPA), Saskatchewan⁶²

CMPA is an effective 2 tiered, integrated multi-agency team working in collaboration to prevent young people from entering into crime, homelessness, and other risk situations. The first layer, The HUB, is tasked with identifying risk of individuals and families and mobilizing appropriate services. The second level, The COR, works on a broader focus of long-term community goals and initiatives. Supporting youth engagement in school is a core goal of CMPA. CMPA is a good example of how community resources can be mobilized to support both youth engagement and re-engagement in school.

Action Strategy 2.3. Promote Universal Mental Health Prevention and Promotion Programs

The Case for Action

Adolescence is the period of development when mental health issues often first arise⁶³. Unfortunately, research suggests that youth may not reach out for help when needed because they lack understanding about mental illness and where they can turn for help, and also because they fear being stigmatized⁶⁴. The voices of youth experiencing homelessness in Kingston and area echo the literature. The youth indicated poor mental health as a factor leading to their housing instability. They also indicated that the stigma surrounding mental health issues made it challenging to seek support when issues first began to surface. There is therefore a clear need for targeted mental health programming that is preventative in nature, promotes mental health, gets youth talking about mental health, and that targets all youth, not just youth at risk. There is also a need for programs that engage youth as active leaders in all programming efforts. As indicated by youth in the Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project, this allows youth to better connect with the content and provides meaningful opportunities for youth to engage with their community.

It is very important to note that this action strategy is not associated with the treatment of serious and severe psychiatric difficulties. The prevalence of such difficulties requires different forms of support through case management and more intensive services (discussed in Goal 3). The goal of the strategy is to promote well-being

⁶² <http://www.mobilizepa.ca>

⁶³ Mental Health Commission (2009). *Toward Recovery and Well-Being: A Framework for a Mental Health Strategy in Canada*.

⁶⁴ Government of Canada (2006) *The Human Face of Mental Health and Mental Illness in Canada*.

by helping all youth cope with the stressful experiences of adolescence. Youth will be given the knowledge and skills that allow them to live their lives more fully and to feel vital and strong without getting "stuck" along the way. Youth in Kingston and area, as well as the literature, indicates that such efforts to reduce stress, distress sadness and worry, combined with efforts to open up dialogue and raise awareness about youth experiences, are key ingredients to wellness promotion and resiliency, even among individuals who may be at risk for more serious illness⁶⁵.

Promising Local Practices

Youth-Led Mental Health Awareness and Anti-Stigma Initiatives

There are three notable initiatives running in Kingston and area that are preventative in nature, working to promote positive youth mental health, and that are challenging negative stigma. These initiatives include:

- ❖ The New Mentality Program, Pathways for Children and Youth⁶⁶
 - The New Mentality is a network of youth-led groups that foster meaningful partnerships between mental health agencies and youth. Led by youth facilitators and working alongside adult allies (agency staff providing in-kind support to the group), groups develop unique projects focused on eliminating stigma and promoting mental health awareness, reaching audiences throughout the province and beyond.
- ❖ Student-Led Peer Mental Health Groups in Schools
 - LDSB and ALCDB offer mental health groups that are student-led. The students act as ambassadors within their high schools to challenge stigma surrounding mental health.
- ❖ Open Minds, Healthy Minds⁶⁷
 - Open Minds, Healthy Minds has four clear goals: (a) Improve mental health and well-being for all Ontarians; (b) Create healthy, resilient, inclusive communities; (c) Identify mental health and addictions problems early and intervene; (d) Provide timely, high quality, integrated, person-directed health and other human services.
 - The initiative is starting with a focus on children and youth and will meet the above goals by: providing children, youth and families with fast access to high quality services; identifying and intervening in child and youth mental health and addictions issues early; closing critical service gaps for vulnerable children and youth, children and youth at key transition points, and those in remote communities.

While there are a variety of other mental health services in Kingston and area, including counselling and psychiatric services, there is a need for universal programs that are grounded in theory and practice. Universal programs are open to all youth, regardless of whether or not they experience a mental health issue or illness. A universal mental health program would share information about mental health, including what it means and how it affects people, provide tools for maintaining positive mental health, get youth talking about health, and challenge stigma. Importantly, these goals would be met through engaging and interactive activities.

⁶⁵ Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada. Flex Your Head! A Mental Health Promotion and Promotion Program for Youth.

⁶⁶ http://www.myrgan.com/Inc/Projects/Entries/2011/4/9_The_New_Mentality.html

⁶⁷ http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/mental_health2011/mentalhealth.aspx

Promising National Practices

Boys and Girls Club of Canada's Flex Your Head! Program⁶⁸

Flex Your Head! is designed to talk about mental health in a way that is safe, engaging, inclusive, and fun. This program promotes mental health and well-being among youth and provides them with useful strategies to prevent and manage distress. Flex Your Head! is co-led by a Club staff member and a youth leader and is strongly informed by current theory and practice in effective youth mental health intervention. The program is currently being run in many Boys and Girls Clubs across Canada and could be offered through the Boys and Girls Club of Kingston and Area.

Action Strategy 2.4. Create a School and Community Awareness Strategy

The Case for Action

It was emphasized by youth in the Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project that there is a general lack of awareness among young people about what the risk factors for homelessness are and what homelessness really means. Many youth also indicated not knowing where to go to get support when issues arise. This is problematic given that from the moment a youth becomes homeless, there is typically a two week window before they become entrenched in street-life⁶⁹. While system coordination allows youth to access holistic and wrap-around support regardless of where they first "touch" the system, there is still a need to ensure youth know about the services that exist so that they can access support prior to crisis. A school and community awareness strategy means that information about youth homelessness is brought to the community and common messages are communicated. The development of the awareness strategy would include consultation with system of care organizations (mental health, addictions, housing, educational organizations) to build core messages. One way to lead this process is through community outreach workers. Community outreach workers conduct educational sessions at youth gathering places that are specific to identified problems with housing and homelessness. For example:

- ❖ Dealing with family conflict;
- ❖ Financial stress and worry;
- ❖ Peer and romantic relationships;
- ❖ Navigating social services;
- ❖ Mental health and addictions;
- ❖ Dealing with landlords;
- ❖ Housing options.

Outreach workers then direct youth to lead organizations for ongoing educational groups and support. The goal is to establish active, highly visible leadership that brings together youth to define and address their own issues. The goal is also to identify signs of mental illness, family instability, and poverty (precursors to homelessness) so that youth can be connected with the support they need early. The third goal is to empower the community to support each other. It is important that leaders, adult and youth, within community structures, such as schools, churches, sports teams, community centres, etc. are actively engaged with the awareness strategy so that they have the knowledge and resources necessary to identify young people who require homelessness prevention assistance and connect them to the help they need.

⁶⁸ <https://www.bgccan.com/en/Partners/OurPartners/Pages/AstraZeneca.aspx>

⁶⁹ Worthington, C. A., & MacLaurin, B. J. (2009). Level of street involvement and health and health services use of Calgary street youth. *Can J Public Health, 100*(5), 384-88.

Additionally, youth identified other strategies such as introducing the topic of youth homelessness and discussing supports at school assemblies, ensuring all teachers have information about homelessness and community supports, and having school counsellors meet with every student once a year to avoid the potential stigma of reaching out. Some youth also indicated that they don't identify as being homeless because they technically have a home; however, for various reasons they don't believe they can return there. Raising awareness about homelessness may encourage youth to reach out or access services.

Promising Local Practices

Youth Community Forum

As highlighted above, a Youth Community Forum was held as part of the development of this Action Plan. This forum was called Youth Out Loud Kingston! and was planned and facilitated by youth for youth. This forum successfully engaged a wide range of youth and raised awareness about youth homelessness in Kingston and area. This forum could become a vital component of a school and community awareness strategy.

Promising National Practices

Homelessness Curriculum for Teachers and Students⁷⁰

The Homeless Hub offers a range of free resources for primary, intermediate and secondary teachers. The resources include lesson plans, backgrounders, and supplementary materials such as videos. The purpose of the Curriculum is to raise awareness of homelessness and to motivate individuals, classrooms, and schools to take action. It is worth considering how these resources might be used (and adapted) as part of a broader community and school awareness strategy.

Resources for teachers include:

- ❖ Lesson Plans
- ❖ Units for Primary grades
- ❖ Units for Secondary grades
- ❖ Getting ready
- ❖ Teaching children who are homeless
- ❖ Examples of student work
- ❖ Multimedia resources

Resources for students include:

- ❖ Art, videos, music
- ❖ Factsheets
- ❖ Research
- ❖ Personal stories

⁷⁰ <http://nationalsafeplace.org/>

Covenant House offers two programs that are designed to share information with young people in school about homelessness, including what it means, what youth rights are, and what options are available. The programs offer students current and comprehensive information about homelessness and link them to resources in their local communities. The programs also foster empathy and social justice by teaching students about the plight of their homeless peers, as well as ways to fundraise and advocate for them. They encourage young people to help themselves and each other. Specifically, the two programs include:

- ❖ Before You Run (Grades 6 - 12)
 - Before You Run is a customized, age-appropriate presentation that covers a broad range of youth risks and issues. It explains how the circumstances that lead young people to the street are as varied as the youth themselves.
 - It also discusses how the experiences of family breakdown, abuse, mental health, bullying, drugs and stress can act as contributing factors to youth homelessness.
 - The presentation includes a video featuring Covenant House youth relating their real-life experiences in a non-threatening way. Students are given information and resources to help them make good choices.

- ❖ Reality Check (Grades 6 -12)
 - Reality Check is also a customized, age-appropriate presentation. It deglamourizes street life and discusses the struggle homeless youth face.
 - Students participate in an activity that highlights the hardship of living independently, without family support, education or a career.
 - The presentation includes a video featuring Covenant House youth describing the challenges of living on the street and what they did to overcome them.
 - Students are encouraged to be future leaders, to volunteer in their communities, to speak out, give back and pay it forward. Youth are also provided local resources where youth can get help or get involved.

Action Strategy 2.5. Enhance Youth Employment and Career-Readiness Programs

The Case for Action

When youth are employed they have money to pay their rent and stay housed. Employment is therefore a key factor contributing to the eradication of poverty, which will in turn end youth homelessness. However, employment for young people is not just about ensuring that young people have money. It is also about ensuring they have the opportunity to focus, explore different interests, identify life learning goals, and harness strengths within themselves. These are the factors that support healthy development and ultimately support youth to further their career and maintain their wellbeing⁷².

Youth employment is good for cities, provinces, and the country as well. Employment supports young people to get into the workforce early and to engage with small businesses that are good for the economy⁷³. Employment also provides youth with the opportunity to develop valuable skills that prepare them for a meaningful career, ultimately reducing their reliance on government funded financial support. With this being said, Ontario is one of

⁷¹ <http://www.covenanthousetoronto.ca/homeless-youth/Runaway-Prevention>

⁷² Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

⁷³ Winefield, A. H., & Tiggemann, M. (1990). Employment status and psychological well-being: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75(4), 455.

the toughest places in Canada for young people looking for work, with youth unemployment rates trending higher than the national average. A new report that analyzes Statistics Canada employment data has found that five years after the global economic crisis, Ontario is now the worst province outside of Atlantic Canada for youth unemployment. The 2013 unemployment rate for Ontario youth between the ages of 15 and 24 ranged between 16 and 17.1%, higher than the average Canadian range of 13.5 to 14.5%⁷⁴. These findings demonstrate the need for intentional programs that support youth employment and career readiness.

Youth in Kingston and area highlighted the need to support youth in creating a plan to achieve career and personal goals. This not only includes support for building resumes and developing interview skills, but also with networking, connecting to employers, and identifying further education or training requirements. Youth also mentioned that it is important that employers are prepared to support youth in maintaining their jobs. While standards of employment must be met and policies must be upheld, employers need training about how to connect with youth, communicate with youth, and motivate them to carry out their responsibilities. Supporting employers may require programs to create partnerships with businesses in the community.

Promising Local Practices

Existing Employment Programs Being Offered in Kingston and Area

There are a variety of programs being offered in Kingston and area that have a particular focus on supporting youth who face barriers to employment to find and keep a job. A list of some of the key programs being offered and who is offering them is provided below.

- ❖ Summer Jobs Service (The Community Employment Resource Centre – North (CERC), KEYS Job Centre, ACFOMI Employment Services, Career Edge, and the St. Lawrence College Employment Service)⁷⁵
 - Free job-search and self-marketing support program available through Employment Ontario Summer Jobs Services agencies.
 - The program helps students find summer jobs and provides a \$2-per-hour-per-student hiring incentive for eligible Ontario employers to create summer employment opportunities for students. This program is available to students aged 15 to 30 who are planning to return to school in the fall.
- ❖ Youth Summer Jobs (KEYS Job Centre)⁷⁶
 - Participants can work 20-35 hours per week for 6 weeks and receive minimum wage, paid through a fund offered by the Ministry of Children and Family Service. Around 200 youth are provided with placements and supported to maintain their employment annually.
- ❖ Youth Employment Fund (The Community Employment Resource Centre – North (CERC), KEYS Job Centre, ACFOMI Employment Services, and the St. Lawrence College Employment Service)⁷⁷
 - Part of the Ontario government's new Youth Jobs Strategy, which is helping young people across the province get work experience, start a business or build job skills.
 - Youth between 15 and 29 years of age who are unemployed, not attending school full-time and a resident of Ontario may apply.
 - The fund provides incentives to employers to help cover the cost of wages and training for

⁷⁴ The Young and the Jobless. Youth Unemployment in Ontario. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

⁷⁵ <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/jobseekers/sjs.html>

⁷⁶ http://www.keys.ca/job_seekers/students.html

⁷⁷ <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/employmentontario/youthfund/>

new hires and help youth cover costs like transportation or tools required for the job.

- Special attention is paid to help youth facing barriers to work, including: youth on social assistance; aboriginal youth; youth with a disability; youth with a poor history of educational attainment or employability; and youth in communities with high youth unemployment.
- If a youth can demonstrate they are intentionally working toward employment goals, they also have access to a 1 week training program.

❖ Skills Link (KEYS Job Centre)⁷⁸

- Youth ages 15-30 who experience barriers to employment may participate.
- It is a 13 week program that offers group based support to help youth get and keep a job.
- Students learn how to locate and make contact with employers, and receive support to secure placements.
- All placements are fully subsidized for the first six weeks, with a phased transition to the employer's payroll after this time.
- Students are provided with support to retain their position and coordinators coach employers to help them understand the needs of their youth employees.

❖ Career Edge, Nappanee⁷⁹

- Services include employment counselling and support for finding and securing employment.
- In addition to an employment centre, there is job search engine built into their website. Also on this website is a blog with information about how to find and secure employment.

Promising National Practices

Common Components of Youth Employment and Career Readiness Programs

There are many youth employment and career readiness programs being offered in cities across Canada; so many that we feel it is less valuable to provide a lengthy list. Rather, below is an outline of the common components of successful youth employment and career readiness programs for youth facing multiple barriers to employment.

Workforce Development

Workforce development prepares youth for the workplace. The key elements of success identified in the literature include:

- ❖ Early employer engagement;
- ❖ Career awareness and planning;
- ❖ Work and learning connection;
- ❖ Key job readiness competencies;
- ❖ Early placement in paid work;
- ❖ Employee retention and advancement;
- ❖ Extended follow-up and support;
- ❖ Youth entrepreneurship.

Youth Development

⁷⁸ https://www.keys.ca/job_seekers/youths.html

⁷⁹ <http://careeredge.on.ca/>

While workforce development prepares a youth to become a worker, youth development seeks to support a youth's transition into adulthood. Youth development is a necessary component to ensure that challenges associated with the transition to independence do not become barriers to employment. Elements supporting success include:

- ❖ Focusing on each youth as an individual;
- ❖ Supporting each youth's sense of belonging;
- ❖ Building youth responsibility;
- ❖ Using youth as resources;
- ❖ Providing appropriately supportive services;
- ❖ Structuring additional help through peer support;

Delivery Agency Capacity

Delivery Agency Capacity means that the agency taking on the program has the capacity to implement and sustain it. The ability to intentionally deliver a program with a theory of change is what sets best-practice programs apart. Programs with delivery agency capacity have:

- ❖ Skilled staff;
- ❖ Commitment to monitoring and evaluation;
- ❖ Collaborations and partnerships;
- ❖ High quality implementation;
- ❖ Sufficient, consistent, predictable funding.

Action Strategy 2.6. Ensure Youth are Not Discharged into Homelessness

The Case for Action

Many young people have been in care for years and some report being in a series of foster homes before becoming homeless. In many jurisdictions, gaps in the child welfare system mean that young people (16 and older) may have great difficulty in accessing services and supports⁸⁰. "System failures in child welfare, including the fact that young people can 'opt out' but not back in, and that young people can age out of care, means that for many young people the transition from child welfare support is not to self-sufficiency, but to homelessness. And for many of these young people, there is no 'home to return to.'"⁸¹

To ensure that discharging from Correctional Services and Children and Youth Services (i.e. foster care, group homes), as well as Health Services (hospitals, mental health and addictions facilities), does not result in homelessness for youth, there is a need for these systems to collaborate with case managers to ensure discharge planning includes permanent housing with longer term supports. It is therefore also important to ensure that permanent and affordable housing is available. The cost of housing in Canada is a major cause of poverty. Poverty is the leading cause of homelessness. Therefore safe, secure, and affordable housing is not only an essential pathway out of homelessness, it is also a key component of preventing homelessness in the first place."⁸²

In his 2008 speech at the Partners Solving Youth Homelessness conference, Miloon Kothari, former United

⁸⁰ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

⁸¹ Winland, D. N., Gaetz, S. A., & Patton, T. (2011). *Family Matters: Homeless Youth and Eva's Initiative's Family Reconnect Program*. Homeless Hub.

⁸² Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, stated: “It is the human right of every man, woman, youth and child to gain and sustain a secure, safe home in which they can live with peace and dignity”. Permanent affordable housing is clearly an important component of a Canada-wide strategy to solve youth homelessness and of this local Action Plan. However, it is only one element of the solution. Homeless youth also need a wide range of supports for the array of complex problems that they face.

Promising Local Practices

Existing Initiatives Supporting Transition into the Community from Jails, Hospitals, and Child Welfare

There are some initiatives taking place in Kingston and area that are supporting youth to successfully transition into the community. There is a need to coordinate these initiatives, assess their alignment with youth development, and ensure there is an intentional overall approach to reintegration efforts.

- ❖ The Saint Lawrence Youth Association (SLYA)
 - SLYA has a Reintegration Worker who provides individual and family counseling and assistance for youth with finding employment, accessing ODSP, locating housing, and navigating a plan for educational success. The only youth who can access the program are those on probation or ordered by the court to participate.
- ❖ Coordinator, Prevention/ Diversion Program
 - The City of Kingston's 10 Year Municipal Housing and Homelessness Plan calls for a Coordinator, Prevention/Diversion Program to work with institutions and other stakeholders on stopping the reckless discharge from jails, hospitals, and child welfare. How this program can be expanded to support youth needs to be explored.
- ❖ K3C Community Counseling Centres
 - K3C has a Youth-In-Transition Worker who works directly with youth who are aging out of care.
- ❖ FACS FL&A
 - There are 4 staff working with youth in transition out of care as well as young mothers.
- ❖ The John Howard Society, Elizabeth Fry Society, and Home Base Housing
 - These organizations are also doing work in this area for the adult sector and their programs can be explored to assess transferability to youth populations.

Promising National Practices

Calgary's High Fidelity Wraparound Supports Program⁸³

High Fidelity Wraparound Supports helps to ensure longer-term supports are in place for youth transferring from correctional institutions, foster homes, group homes, mental health services, hospitals etc. into the community. This program is a strengths-based, integrated approach to working with families and youth that emphasizes the idea of "voice and choice". With the support of facilitators and coaches, youth and families put together a team of people who will help them meet goals that they choose.

Roofs for Youth, Wood's Homes, Calgary John Howard Society and Calgary Young Offenders Centre⁸⁴

⁸³ <http://highfidelitywraparound.ca/site/what-is-wraparound/>

⁸⁴ http://www.woodshomes.ca/site/PageNavigator/programs/street_services/programs_roofs.html

Roofs for Youth provides supports to youth (aged 15-18) before and after sentencing in order to reduce their risk of reoffending. Counsellors meet with youth to provide reintegration support. Together, they make a plan for the youth to successfully exit the justice system, find employment, housing or education opportunities and engage with their community.

Goal 3. Housing Options Match Youths' Transition to Independence

The Definition

The housing options available to youth permit them to transition from one housing program to another according to their individual preference and developmental stages⁸⁵.

The Need

The introduction of this Action Plan explained how the needs and characteristics of youth, as well as the assets that youth require, call for diverse housing options. Youth need housing options that will follow them along their journey to independence. In this pilot, anyone between the ages of 15-24 is considered a "youth". A 15 year old varies quite substantially in terms of needs, desires, and interests than a 24 year old. There is also great variation within this age-range in terms of life experience and opportunity for skill development. To add a layer of complexity, some youth may experience mental health and addiction issues, while others may not. Just as youth are diverse, so too must be the housing options available to them.

The U.S. National Alliance to End Homelessness indicates that housing can take a number of forms. No matter the model or form of housing selected, youth should have the flexibility to move among housing programs as they gain greater independent living skills and economic stability, including the ability to re-enter housing programs and move back along the continuum if their current needs or abilities change. Responding to the needs of homeless youth and engaging them in determining their housing needs will increase their future independence. Providing them with options will also support youth staying housed, as youth will have the opportunity to adjust their form of housing on an ongoing basis so that their immediate and future needs are met.

- **Action Strategy 3.1.** Enhance the Role of Emergency Housing Services
- **Action Strategy 3.2.** Increase the Amount of Transitional Housing Available
- **Action Strategy 3.3.** Make Housing First a Housing Option for Youth
- **Action Strategy 3.4.** Ensure Access to Affordable Housing Units
- **Action Strategy 3.5.** Ensure Continuous Case Management and Follow-Up Support



Goal 3. Housing Options
Match Youths' Transition to
Independence

⁸⁵ Mobilizing Local Communities to End Youth Homelessness in Canada. *Essentials to End Youth Homelessness*.

Action Strategy 3.1. Enhance the Role of Emergency Housing Services

The Case for Action

Kingston and area currently has one emergency shelter and a transitional housing unit that play a key role for youth in crisis. Youth may arrive at the doorstep at any hour. This service is important given that family conflict is the leading reason why youth leave home in Kingston and area⁸⁶. Family disagreements typically occur at night or in the wee hours of the morning, leaving youth with few options for places to go. Many youth using emergency shelter services are therefore focused on urgent, practical needs. They need a bed, access to food, hot showers, clothing, and/or emergency support and services. One key issue is that there are no services in the rural counties surrounding Kingston and area. This leaves youth living in rural areas to travel a great distance to access emergency housing services. As we enhance emergency housing services, there is a need to ensure youth in rural areas are provided with access to emergency supports, which includes ensuring they can get to shelters.

Research indicates that once youths' basic needs have been addressed they are more willing to tackle other issues⁸⁷. This makes emergency shelters an ideal referral source. Emergency shelters in Kingston and area therefore need to be used as a key access point/outreach service. Once youth receive basic supports, all in one place, they will be directed to the appropriate services within the community that will support them to be quickly re-housed. The emergency shelter is also one of the places in Kingston and area that is currently offering informal family counselling, as described earlier. Youth accessing these places need to be supported by trained family counselling professionals so that early intervention can occur. Therefore while youth shelters are not the answer to addressing youth homelessness, if used strategically, they are an essential access point where youth in need can begin to get support to become more stable.

Promising Local Practices

Existing Support Being Provided at Youth Shelters

Kingston and area has one youth shelter that is providing emergency housing services to youth. In addition Home Base Housing provides transitional and supported housing for youth. The Kingston Youth Shelter and Home Base Housing currently offer informal family counselling, education, and employment support. These supports need to be formalized and expanded upon to support early intervention. Furthermore, the City's 10 Year Municipal Housing and Homelessness Plan puts housing workers in emergency shelters to help divert people from the emergency system when safe to do so, or once in the system to get them into housing with supports right away. The transferability of this model to the youth shelter system needs to be explored.

⁸⁶ Youth Out Loud: Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project.

⁸⁷ Raising the Roof. (2009) Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions.

Promising National Practices

Shelter Outreach Worker at McMan Youth Family and Community Services Association, Medicine Hat, Alberta⁸⁸

The Shelter Outreach Worker works with the Inn Between Youth Shelter to provide "Common Ground" Parent/Teen Mediation, one to one support and success coaching for youth and families in order to prevent youth homelessness. When a community youth does access the shelter, the Shelter Outreach Worker collaborates with all stakeholders to help transition the youth back home or to a stable living arrangement and provides follow-up support to ensure the placement is maintained.

Action Strategy 3.2. Increase the Amount of Transitional Housing Available

The Case for Action

There is discrepancy in the literature about the effectiveness and appropriateness of transitional housing models. A "typical" transitional housing program is seen as an intermediate step between homelessness and independent living. A homeless person may transition from living on the streets or in shelters to transitional housing, and from there, move on to a place of his or her own. In almost all cases, supports are provided, such as life skills classes, addictions treatment, and employment support. The vast majority of researchers in the field of housing view transitional housing as limiting to consumer choice and control. There are often rules by which they must abide and transitional housing is almost always time-limited, although the length of time may be anywhere between six months and two years⁸⁹.

When assessing the use of transitional housing approaches for youth, it is important to consider how the model matches youth development. Transitional housing models typically offer structure, supervision, support, life skills, and sometimes education and training. Many youth, and in particular younger youth, find this appealing. Youth in Kingston and area, for example, identified the need for structure and support in housing options, with capable support staff who have the skills and experience to support youth in stabilizing their lives. Many of the youth indicated a preference for apartment-style arrangements, but liked having access to supports in-house. Some youth expressed that they liked having goals they were expected to meet. The issues of security, safety, and privacy were identified as critical for success. Also, supports that address education, job skills and employment experience were preferred⁹⁰. The fact that youth find some of the qualities of transitional housing appealing is not surprising. High expectations, structured use of time, opportunities for engagement, healthy and caring relationships, supportive mentors and role models, and safety are valuable assets that environments need to offer youth to support wellbeing and their transition to independence⁹¹. Furthermore, not all youth, especially younger youth, have had the opportunity to develop their life skills to the extent that would make them feel comfortable to live more independently⁹². The in-house support provided by transitional housing can often reflect "family" and the rules can reflect parental expectations. While there is room to strengthen the amount of choice, control, participation, and power offered to youth within traditional transitional housing models, the strengths of the model that were voiced by youth are meaningfully considered in the Action Plan.

⁸⁸ <https://www.mcman.ca/HOME.aspx>

⁸⁹ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press

⁹⁰ Youth Out Loud: Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project.

⁹¹ Scales, P. C., Benson, P. L., Leffert, N., & Blyth, D. A. (2000). Contribution of developmental assets to the prediction of thriving among adolescents. *Applied developmental science, 4*(1), 27-46.

⁹² Mallett, S., Rosenthal, D., & Keys, D. (2005). Young people, drug use and family conflict: Pathways into homelessness. *Journal of adolescence, 28*(2), 185-199.

Accessibility to transitional housing is a key challenge in Kingston and area, especially in rural areas where there is no transitional housing available. There are currently high wait lists and a particular lack of units available for youth in conflict with the law or who experience mental health and addiction issues⁹³. Youth with these complex issues may also require more long-term housing support than what is currently offered by transitional housing models in Kingston and area (primarily 1 year). Furthermore, the tight housing market in Kingston and area makes it difficult for youth to find affordable housing upon completion of transitional housing programs. Lengths of stay need to be flexible based on an individual's unique situation and their ability to locate and prepare for permanent housing. By adjusting the model in this way, one of the key concerns with transitional housing will be alleviated, which is that youth "age-out", "time-out", or "graduate" into homelessness.

Promising Local Practices

Existing Transitional Housing Programs

There are two youth transitional housing organizations in Kingston.

- ❖ Home Base Housing
 - Youth 16-24 years of age are offered rent geared to income (19 beds available) and supportive housing (8 units available).
 - Youth receive case management support and can stay in housing for up to one year. From here they work with a case manager to find a suitable permanent housing option.
- ❖ St. Lawrence Youth Association
 - SLYA is in the process of trying to establish transitional housing for youth being released from custody.

Home Base Housing and the St. Lawrence Youth Association provide a significant amount of support to their youth tenants. Educational and emotional support and life skill development opportunities are integral to their models. Youth have emphasized this support as being essential to their housing success. However, while there is transitional housing available to youth in Kingston and area, there is a need for more beds and units as well as a need to offer lengths of stay that extend beyond one year.

Promising National Practices

The Foyer Model⁹⁴

The Foyer is an integrated transitional housing model that has gained popularity in the UK, Australia and elsewhere. The Foyer model is currently being piloted in at least two Canadian cities (Calgary and Edmonton). It offers possible solutions for addressing the housing needs of homeless youth and in particular younger teens and those leaving care or juvenile detention. Youth are housed for a longer period of time than is typically the case with transitional housing, are offered living skills, and are either enrolled in education or training, or are employed. A toolkit has been developed to assist communities in adapting this model to their local context. It is intended to give service providers and policy makers an essential understanding of the key components necessary for developing a successful Foyer. The model could be valuable in guiding the expansion of transitional housing in Kingston and area.

⁹³ Youth Out Loud: Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project.

⁹⁴ <http://www.homelesshub.ca/foyer>

Transitional Housing Models with a Developmental Approach

There are a variety of transitional housing programs being offered across the country. There are six organizations that are particularly notable. All of these organizations provide a developmental approach to support, offering career, educational, life skill, and counselling support. They also have strong relationships and partnerships with other youth serving organizations in their community. While every model has positive features as well as challenging components, there is something to be learned from each. In Canada, the particularly strong models of transitional housing include:

- ❖ Eva's Phoenix (Toronto)
- ❖ Peel Youth Village (Mississauga)
- ❖ Shy – Supportive Housing for Youth (Cambridge)
- ❖ Loft Community Services (Toronto)
- ❖ Choices For Youth (St. John's, Newfoundland)
- ❖ Mustard Seed Project (Calgary)

Action Strategy 3.3. Make Housing First a Housing Option for Youth

The Case for Action

Best practice literature indicates that Housing First is the preferred model for people who require intensive supports and are experiencing chronic homelessness. Housing First can exist within different housing forms, from scattered site housing in the private rental marketplace, to units in mixed affordable housing, to congregate models of housing, where there are many units in a single building and the possibility of on-call supports, to permanent supportive housing, where the clinical services and landlord role are performed by the same organization. Services in permanent supportive housing are typically performed on-site⁹⁵. Housing First has gained wide acceptance and has been identified as “best practice” by the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

The majority of research about Housing First has focused on adults and there is less literature about the effectiveness of Housing First models with youth populations. However, there are elements of the Housing First model that make it appealing for some populations of youth.

The model is particularly valuable for youth who have struggled in transitional housing or have been in and out of housing treatment facilities (primarily due to mental health and addictions issues). This is because one key benefit of the Housing First model for youth is that it takes into consideration how a history of entering and existing psychiatric/treatment facilities may leave some youth mistrustful of the mental health system. For youth that are unwilling to comply with rules or participate in treatment programs at the outset of a program, the Housing First model does not revoke the support being offered. Rather, the intent is to provide housing stability with the goal of allowing youth the opportunity to accept support at their own pace⁹⁶. Housing stability also provides space for youth to remove themselves from negative influences and pressures. One study that explored treatment preferences for homeless youth in London, ON found that Housing First was the preferred model for these very reasons. Without the stability of housing, the youth were more likely to be influenced by environmental and psycho-social stresses, such as stress associated with poor weather conditions, noise in cramped housing facilities, lack of safe places to sleep (especially in cities), as well as peer pressure to use drugs and alcohol. Participants also indicated that a lack of permanent housing can worsen mental health issues, or

⁹⁵ Toronto Shelter, Support & Housing Administration. (2007) What Housing First Means for People: Results of Streets to Homes 2007 Post-Occupancy Research.

⁹⁶ Toronto Shelter, Support & Housing Administration. (2007) What Housing First Means for People: Results of Streets to Homes 2007 Post-Occupancy Research.

cause one to turn/return to substance use as a way to cope with the stress of the unknown⁹⁷.

There are also challenges associated with Housing First models when they are applied to a youth population. For example, people may assume that youth, like adults, have the experience and household skills for independent living. Many homeless youth have not yet developed these skills, which leads to feelings of insecurity and nervousness about living without structured adult supervision⁹⁸. Adolescence and young adulthood is also a time when peers play an important role. Tight-knit communities are often formed in transitional housing and the study about youth treatment preferences, described above, found that some youth chose not to pursue Housing First out of fear of disconnecting from their peer group and becoming isolated⁹⁹.

Furthermore, while choice and control about personal goals is reduced in transitional housing models, some youth prefer to live with other youth who are going through the same experience as them and to have expectations placed upon them¹⁰⁰. Youth with mental health and addictions issues may therefore become overwhelmed by the amount of independence that Housing First provides. These challenges do not mean that Housing First is not a desirable model for youth. Rather, these challenges highlight that certain forms of housing within the Housing First model are more ideal for youth than others. For example, while scattered site forms of housing are primarily encouraged for adult populations¹⁰¹, congregate housing or permanent supportive housing where there are greater opportunities to build a sense of community and receive supports in-house may be ideal for youth transitioning to independence. Ultimately, the primary importance is to match youth with the form of housing that is most suitable to their developmental needs.

Promising Local Practices

A Local Focus on Housing First

The City of Kingston will be disseminating a Request for Interest/ Request for Proposal targeted to youth housing that will be issued this year. However, this funding alone will not meet the housing needs. A partnership will need to be secured.

Existing Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Teams

There is currently more than one ACT team operating within the Kingston area – such as the ones operating out of Providence Care. It would be valuable to seek opportunities to partner with such agencies to take advantage of existing expertise within the community.

⁹⁷ Forchuk, C., Richardson, J., Lavery, K., Bryant, M., Rudnick, A., Csiernik, R., & Kelly, C. (2013). Housing First, Treatment First, or Both Together. *Implications for Policy and Practice*, 95.

⁹⁸ National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2006) Promising Strategies to End Family Homelessness.

⁹⁹ Forchuk, C., Richardson, J., Lavery, K., Bryant, M., Rudnick, A., Csiernik, R., & Kelly, C. (2013). Housing First, Treatment First, or Both Together. *Implications for Policy and Practice*, 95.

¹⁰⁰ Lindsey, E. W., Kurtz, P. D., Jarvis, S., Williams, N. R., & Nackerud, L. (2000). How runaway and homeless youth navigate troubled waters: Personal strengths and resources. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 17(2), 115-140.

¹⁰¹ Padgett, D. K., Gulcur, L., & Tsemberis, S. (2006). Housing first services for people who are homeless with co-occurring serious mental illness and substance abuse. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 16(1), 74-83.

Promising National Practices

The Infinity Project^{102 103}

At this point in time, there are few Housing First models that have been implemented and evaluated with youth. However, in 2009, Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary introduced The Infinity Project: a Housing First program for youth who find themselves on the homeless continuum. It has been in operation since February 2009 and to date has served 58 young people. The Infinity Project provides youth (aged 16 to 24) with a permanent home in the community of their choice and the supports they need to maintain it and become self-sufficient. This model should be explored for use and adaptation in Kingston and area.

Housing First For Youth Framework¹⁰⁴

A Housing First for Youth Framework report has recently been launched in Canada. This report is designed to clarify what Housing First is and what is necessary to adapt the model to work with young people who are homeless. This report will be a valuable tool for creating a Housing First model that works for youth in Kingston and area.

Action Strategy 3.4. Ensure Access to Affordable Housing Units

The Case for Action

When 79 youth in the Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness Research Project were asked what led to their homelessness, 40% indicated that they couldn't afford a place to live. Furthermore, for Housing First to be an option for youth in Kingston and area, affordable housing needs to be available to youth. Affordable housing is therefore a core component of the Action Plan. The goal of any strategy should not be to keep youth in emergency, transitional, or permanent supportive housing for their entire life. The goal should be to keep youth housed and offer the support necessary so that they can transition to independence in the community, free of housing supports. Affordable housing is not just beneficial to youth, however. An appropriate supply of affordable housing can help retain young talent and knowledge in the city of Kingston. An adequate supply of affordable housing will also support the city to meet the accommodation needs of minimum wage workers vital to the success of local service businesses, thereby contributing to a critical element of the local economy¹⁰⁵. Despite the personal, municipal, and economical benefits of affordable housing, Kingston and area has a shortage of units available. Kingston and area is home to two major post-secondary educational institutions (Queen's University and St. Lawrence College) as well as to the Royal Military College and the Canadian Forces School of Communications and Electronics. These educational institutions lead young people to compete for housing and landlords often favour students who have parental co-signers on leases. This leaves youth disconnected from the educational system and without family support to experience difficulty obtaining housing¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰² Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary: Infinity Program Over 18 Final Report (2012).

¹⁰³ Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary: Infinity Program Under 18 Final Report (2012).

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.homelesshub.ca/housingfirstyouth>

¹⁰⁵ 10 Year Municipal Housing and Homelessness Plan.

¹⁰⁶ 10 Year Municipal Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Promising Local Practices

Clear Guidelines for Increasing the Amount of Affordable Housing Units Locally

The City's 10 Year Municipal Housing and Homelessness Plan has made clear recommendations and set guidelines to increase the amount of affordable housing units in Kingston. The remaining need is to create a plan to get youth most at risk of homelessness into those units. One way to achieve this goal is through the adoption of a coordinated access system, as described in Goal 1. Another way is through the use of case managers and follow-up mentorship, which is described in more detail in Action Strategy 3.5.

Promising National Practices

City of Calgary's Strategy to Ensure Adequate Affordable and Supportive Housing¹⁰⁷

Increasing the amount of affordable housing is a priority in almost all municipal housing plans. The way to achieve this goal, however, varies extensively from city to city. Calgary's 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness 2008-2018, developed by the Calgary Homeless Foundation, has a clearly laid out strategy for increasing the amount of affordable housing and ensuring that housing supports are in place. The strategy effectively reflects ongoing learnings about the housing market, as well as balances the need for new housing units with the provision of rent supplements. While not every component of their strategy is relevant to Kingston and area, much could be learned from their approach, implementation, and ongoing tracking efforts.

Action Strategy 3.5. Ensure Continuous Case Management and Follow-Up Support

The Case for Action

Best practices point to the need for a case manager or case management team to help youth develop independent living skills, while also affording the youth the rights and responsibilities of tenancy^{108 109 110}. Case management is a key component of transitional and Housing First models. There is a need to extend this support so that it occurs from the point of entry into the system (e.g. upon being identified as at risk of homelessness) through transition to affordable housing and beyond, when the youth has moved to independent permanent housing. Accordingly, there is a need for case management to be flexible across the different forms of housing, so that youth have the opportunity to shift from one form of housing to the next without compromising their support.

It is important for case management to be immediate and consistent as youth move along the housing continuum for a variety of reasons. It is important that case management is *immediate* so that youth receive the support they need to get housed quickly. It is important for case management to remain *consistent* so that youth have meaningful relationships with their support team and someone supporting them to reach their goals. Consistent case management also ensures that a youth's ongoing needs are identified and the services they receive are adjusted as needed. The qualities of case managers are similar to those of a mentor. There is a considerable amount of research that indicates youth who have a positive adult role model in their life are more likely to positively transition to adulthood and experience a higher quality of life^{111 112}.

¹⁰⁷ <http://calgaryhomeless.com/10-year-plan/>

¹⁰⁸ Frankish, C. J., Hwang, S. W., & Quantz, D. (2005). Homelessness and Health in Canada. *Canadian journal of public health*, 96

¹⁰⁹ Calgary Homeless Foundation (2011). Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Calgary.

¹¹⁰ National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2013) Conference on Family and Youth Homelessness

¹¹¹ Zeldin, S., Christens, B. D., & Powers, J. L. (2013). The psychology and practice of youth-adult partnership: Bridging generations for youth development and community change. *American journal of community psychology*, 51(3-4), 385-397.

¹¹² Greeson, J. K. (2013). Foster Youth and the Transition to Adulthood The Theoretical and Conceptual Basis for Natural Mentoring. *Emerging Adulthood*, 1(1), 40-51.

It is also important to ensure youth who are living in permanent and affordable housing or who have reunited with their family do not lose all form of case management as soon as they become independent or return home¹¹³. We have a responsibility to follow-up with these youth and to provide them with support while they settle in and adjust to their new living situation. Things don't always work out, and some youth quickly find themselves in challenging situations that can once again threaten their housing. For example, a youth may lose their job, get into another fight with their family or with their landlord, get overwhelmed with responsibilities, or return to substance abuse. A case manager or trained mentor can assess the extent of the challenges and take action accordingly. It may be as simple as lending an ear, or it may require connecting the youth to services, programs, or employment in the community. It may also require working with the youth's landlord or identifying a more suitable form of housing. Either way, emotional and practical support is necessary to ensure youth stay housed.

Promising Local Practices

Case Management Through Existing Transitional Housing Programs

In Kingston and area, youth can stay in Home Base housing for up to one year. After a year, the youth works with a case manager to find suitable permanent housing. This support could be extended to ensure youth have consistent after-care for another year. There is also a need to explore how best to support youth that have difficulty locating permanent housing.

Promising National Practices

Script, Boys and Girls Club of Calgary¹¹⁴

The Script program offers assessment, referral and case management to youth who are at risk of or are currently experiencing homelessness. There is an outreach and engagement strategy embedded within the program that identifies youth participants. There is also an 828-HOPE Assessment and Referral service, which helps match the youth and their family with the supports they need. Once youth participants have been identified, an assessment and referral worker is available to meet face-to-face within 48 hours. The program focuses on building positive relationships based on respect, support and empowerment through a client- centred, strength-based case management model. Youth are provided ongoing coaching and mentorship, focusing on enhancing motivation, taking responsibility, self-care and living skills, managing money, personal administration, social networks and relationships, drug and alcohol misuse, and physical, mental and emotional health.

¹¹³ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

¹¹⁴ <http://www.boysandgirlsclubsofcalgary.ca/programs/youth-housing-shelter>

After-Care, Covenant House¹¹⁵

At Covenant House in Toronto, Ontario, when a youth moves into permanent housing in the community, housing workers provide the assistance and guidance they need to transition to independence. This includes support for up to a year after the youth has left the shelter or transitional housing. There are three key components of their "after-care" case management.

- ❖ Partnerships for Success
 - Housing workers build partnerships with several property owners of safe and affordable housing. These landlords contact the housing worker when vacancies arise and ask the housing workers to help mediate if any issues arise.
 - The housing workers also meet the property managers on behalf of the youth and join them on viewings. They assess the quality of the apartment and get to know the landlord.
- ❖ Ensuring Kids are Not Alone
 - The housing workers act as supportive parents. They help the youth move, support them to find affordable furniture, and ensure they know where the services in their community, like inexpensive grocery stores, local food banks, and recreation centres are.
 - The housing workers also drop in regularly on kids for about a year to review their living situation. The housing workers tailor their approach to each youth depending on needs.
- ❖ Navigating the System
 - The housing workers support youth to access services in the community that match their ongoing needs and development. This may include mental health and educational services, as well as government programs like Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program.

Housing First Intensive Case Management¹¹⁶

Case management is a key component of Housing First models. When an individual participates in Housing First, they are assigned a Case Manager or an ACT Team. This case management focuses on the individual's housing needs (tenant advocacy, landlord mediation etc.) and facilitates access to mainstream community services that address other health related needs associated with housing stability (mental health, addictions etc.). For youth, there would be a need to extend this support so that it occurs from the point of entry into the system (e.g. upon accessing a shelter) through transition to affordable housing and beyond, when the youth has moved to independent affordable housing. There is also a need for case management to be flexible across the different forms of housing, so that youth have the opportunity to shift from one form of housing to the next without compromising their support.

¹¹⁵ <http://www.covenanthousetoronto.ca/homeless-youth/Housing-Support>

¹¹⁶ <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English?terminal=65>

Moving Forward

The next step in the Taking Action to End Youth Homelessness project is to identify key objectives for putting each action strategy outlined in this Action Plan into practice. This requires clarity around how each action strategy will be specifically implemented, selecting existing practices that will be built upon, and identifying who will take leadership in each area. As part of establishing objectives for each action strategy, timelines for implementation and measures to assess progress will also be selected. While there is still work to be done, this phase of the Action Plan is one step in the larger goal to end youth homelessness in Kingston and area. As a result of this phase of the Action Plan, United Way KFL&A and partners will have advanced three key outcomes that will support the obtainment of this goal. Firstly, Kingston and area's expertise and knowledge about youth homelessness has been strengthened through effective research and knowledge exchange practices. Secondly, collective priorities among youth, social service, government, and non- governmental stakeholders to end youth homelessness in Kingston and area have been established. Thirdly, there is strengthened momentum to put strategies to end youth homelessness in Kingston and area into action. With held hands and focused minds, we trust we can set this plan in motion and end youth homelessness in Kingston and area.



Youth Out Loud Kingston

2014



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