



- The reasons youth are homeless are different from adults who are homeless, and the solutions need to be unique. Plans for homelessness in every community should include a dedicated plan, community-based solutions and youth-centred services for youth who are homeless.
- All youth, rural or urban, benefit from a sense of connection and services in their home community. Many rural communities would benefit from more services for youth.
- Youth under the age of 18 years typically lack the skills and experience to successfully live independently, especially youth who leave the care of Family & Children's Service at the age of 16.
- Housing options need to match the needs of youth – shelters, supportive or transitional housing, permanent affordable housing choices – should be readily available for youth.

## What We Know About Youth Homelessness

### Youth in Shelters

- 1 in 5 of the homeless population using shelters are unattached youth between the ages of 16-25. In some communities this is as high as 1 in 3.
- A further 1% of youth who are homeless are under the age of 16 (Segaert, 2012).
- It is estimated that about 200,000 Canadians experience homelessness annually, and about 30,000 are homeless on any given night (Gaetz et al., 2013:22).
  - An additional 50,000 Canadians may be couch surfing or 'hidden homeless'
- There are at least 35,000 young people who are homeless during the year, and 6,000 on any given night (Gaetz et al., 2013:22).
  - This does not include young people who:
    - > do not enter the shelter system
    - > are absolutely homeless and are sleeping out of doors or in other places unsuitable for human habitation
    - > or those who are temporarily staying with friends and have nowhere else to live (couch surfers).
- The youth homeless population is diverse.
  - 37% of youth in shelters are female (Segaert, 2012).\*
  - Young women are especially at risk of crime and violence (including sexual assault) while homeless, leading them to find alternatives to the streets, even if those alternatives pose other significant risks (Gaetz et al., 2010)
  - Certain significant sub-populations of youth are over-represented, including Aboriginal youth (Baskin, 2013) and in some cities like Toronto, black youth (Springer et al. 2013).
  - 25-40% of the youth who are homeless identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual or queer (LGBTQ), compared to only 5-10% of the general population (Abramovich, 2013; Josephson & Wright, 2000).
- Typically, young people who remain homeless for extended periods of time are also exposed to early sexual activity, exploitation, addictions and safety issues in a compressed time frame (Milburn et al. 2009; Saewyc et al., 2013; Gaetz, 2004; Gaetz et al., 2010).

1 in 5\* shelter users are youth



\*1 in 3 in Kingston

\*50% of youth in Kingston shelters are female



Access to housing and employment may be very restricted for teens under the age of 18 (particularly those under 16).

- In Ontario, there are barriers to accessing social assistance for youth under the age of 18, which leads many young people to participate in the informal economy, often including illegal and quasi-legal activities such as drug dealing and the sex trade. (Gaetz)
- The high school dropout rate for homeless youth is 65% (Gaetz et al., 2010), much higher than the drop-out rate for young people in Canada which is 8.5% (Statistics Canada, 2012),
  - High school drop-outs face a considerable disadvantage in the labour market and may face exposure to a life of poverty (Sum et al., 2009; Statistics Canada, 2010; 2012b; 2012c).
- 77 % of homeless youth are unemployed. Most homeless kids lack enough education, job experience, life skills, and stability to find and maintain employment.

Young people aged 16-24 make up about 20% of the homeless population, or 30,000 annually. A further 1,500 are under the age of 16 and unaccompanied by adults.

(Segaert, 2012:16)

## Causes of Youth Homelessness

The causes of youth homelessness are not necessarily the same as adults. The key causes of youth homelessness include:

- Family conflict underlies youth homelessness and many are fleeing abuse or leaving the care of child welfare services.
- Youth homelessness is rarely experienced as a single event – and may be the end result of a process that involves multiple ruptures with family and community and numerous episodes of leaving, even if for short periods.
- Homeless youth typically lack the experience and skills necessary to live independently and this is especially true for those under the age of 18.
- While there are some commonalities that surround the experience of homelessness for young people and adults, for instance - lack of affordable housing, need for discharge planning and system response related to health care and youth justice issues - there are important differences including physical, mental, social and emotional development.



Youth living in rural communities often have to leave their friends and support system because often there are no services in rural areas to support youth at risk or homeless.

Contrary to the stereotype that kids are on the street because they don't want to live by their parents' rules, most have fled or been forced out of homes where there is abuse and neglect.<sup>[4]</sup>

More than 50% of homeless youth have been in jail, a youth detention centre, or prison

- About half of homeless kids come from middle – and upper – income families.<sup>[6]</sup>
- About 43 % of homeless youth have been involved in the child welfare system, many have moved through a series of foster or group homes.
- Mental health issues are also a major factor in youth homelessness.
- One trusted service provider, family member or mentor can make all the difference.
- What homeless kids need is a wide range of services and support to become productive and successful adults.

For all of these reasons and more, a province wide, youth-based strategy to address youth homelessness must be distinct from the adult sector.

For more information, please contact youth-serving organizations or the United Way in your riding.

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

[1] Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions, Raising the Roof, 2009., [2] Raising the Roof, Youth Homelessness., [3] No Way Home, The Fifth Estate, CBC, 10 March 2004., [4] 101 Things You Need To Know About Youth Homelessness, St. Thomas University, NB, 2006., [5] St. Thomas University, 101 Things., [6] St. Thomas University, 101 Things., [7] St. Thomas University, 101 Things.