

Preventing and Ending Youth Homelessness in KFL&A



The reasons that youth become homeless are different than those of adults, and therefore, the solutions also need to be different in order to meet youth's needs. Often, youth don't realize that they are experiencing homelessness. After all - they have a home, they just can't go back to it.

Framed by the voice of youth, with input from front-line service providers, funders, and community members, a Community Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Kingston and Area was developed in 2014. Now in the 2nd year of implementation, much has been accomplished towards our community's goal:

By 2020, 80% of youth who enter the homelessness system in KFL&A will maintain their housing, or will be housed within (30) days.

Strategies and Activities include:

1) Homelessness Prevention:

- I. Support youth engagement in school & community
- II. Establish pilots (e.g. family support, mental health support, supporting LGBTQ mental health, prevention/diversion)
- III. Promote universal prevention - Create and deliver awareness campaigns at schools and community awareness campaign

2) Integrated System of Care:

- I. Establish systems and protocols to help youth access services easily, including enhancing coordinated access
- II. Hub for most marginalized youth (collaborative initiative)
- III. Create system to collect and share localized research
- IV. Continuous case management and follow-up is provided
- V. Identify issues around institutional discharge into homelessness (i.e. criminal justice, hospital, child welfare)
- VI. Develop strategies for youth employment, skills development and career readiness
- VII. Explore feasibility of youth-centred mental health services and residential facility

3) Increased Range of Housing Options:

- I. Enhance role of emergency shelter in providing housing services and support
- II. Increase amount of transitional housing available
- III. Get the most appropriate housing option for youth's needs
- IV. Work with housing liaison, diversion worker, eviction prevention worker, case managers and landlords in providing affordable housing options for youth
- V. Municipalities review OW/ ODSP policies to cover existing gaps in eligibility for youth who leave home

4) Regional Engagement & Coordination:

- I. Ensure alignment of City of Kingston's housing and homelessness strategies
- II. Develop plans for rural youth in neighbouring and rural communities in FL&A

2016-17 - Highlights and Accomplishments:

Education & Awareness

- An innovative education and awareness campaign was launched, depicting real stories of youth from our community with lived experience of homelessness.
- May 3, 2016 was declared Youth Homelessness Awareness Day
- In October 2016, United Way hosted Joe Roberts, a former homeless youth who spent 15 years on the streets of Vancouver, as he came through Kingston on his trek across Canada pushing a shopping cart to raise awareness about youth homelessness. Joe's visit reaffirmed the importance of our local efforts on education and awareness and shone a light on our community as a leader on issues related to Youth Homelessness.
- Youth homelessness was a theme during the United Way campaign; speakers and life sized real story cutouts reinforced the issue and solutions across the community. It encouraged youth to reach out for services and helped reduce the stigma of youth homelessness

Planning and Strategies

- A Youth Employment Strategy was developed with actions to address barriers and challenges that youth face in preparing, entering and staying in the local workforce.
- Work began in the fall of 2016 to develop a plan and strategies to address the issue of youth homelessness and unique needs of youth in the neighbouring and rural communities of Frontenac and Lennox & Addington counties. Focus groups took place with more than 160 youth in rural schools and youth serving agencies.
- The 2016 and 2017 annual spring youth point in time counts were conducted to provide a snapshot of youth experiencing homelessness while attending high school in KFL&A.

Programs and Service Delivery

- Three pilot projects were introduced in 2016, and funding was secured to continue them:
 - Family Mediation worker to prevent youth from entering the homelessness system;
 - Addictions & Mental Health Youth Outreach program tailored to youth's specific needs and meeting them where they are at; and
 - LGBTQ+ Mental Health program promoting mental health with gender diverse youth
- United Way has just approved funding for a fourth pilot project, **Intersections**, geared to providing early intervention, navigation and coordination of services for children & youth, ages 8 to 18 who are at risk of becoming involved with the justice system.
- A new 6 bed transitional housing program for homeless youth age 16-19 years opened on April 25, 2017 through the support of Honorary Patron and local philanthropist A. Britton Smith, who made a gift of \$1.2 million through United Way, to establish the program.

Youth Engagement

- Continued engagement of the Youth Council ensured the voice of youth was always at the forefront of our work. They held their 2nd and 3rd annual Youth Summit and facilitated interactive workshops on topics they chose related to youth homelessness and youth employment. They also provided feedback on the development of user friendly youth portal to be developed in partnership with 211.
- The 1st and 2nd annual information sessions for guidance counsellors, adolescent care workers and educators provided resources to help youth prepare for the workforce, and information on new and existing preventative programs and services that have been piloted to assist families, homeless youth and those at risk of becoming homelessness.

Our initiative believes prevention is a key element in ending youth homelessness. From a broader community perspective, how do we begin to address youth homelessness when many people are either unaware that the issue exists, or don't know where to turn if help is needed within their own family?

Going forward, the Steering Committee has identified:

- Strategies to address rural youth homelessness
- Version 2.0 of the plan identifies a focus on needs of Indigenous youth
- Exploring Social Enterprise for "NEET" youth (youth Not Engaged in Employment, Education or Training)
- Continued monitoring of established pilot programs to address identified issues and gaps in the current system