



**United Way**  
Kingston, Frontenac,  
Lennox and Addington  
Change starts here.

STRENGTH  
RESILIENCE

Report on  
**YOUTH**  
Homelessness  
2018

BELONGING



STRENGTH

Amanda, homeless at age 15

My mom had been threatening to kick me out for a couple of years. The first time I was locked out I was 15. I would stay at my friend's house. My mom became unbearable. She was constantly yelling at me and smashing things. I thought she was going to kick me out, so I went to my school counsellor and they said there was a place they could get me into. I was able to get an apartment. My mom kicked me out once she found out.

Most youth who become homeless aren't well prepared to take care of themselves. As a youth, your housing should be provided for you so that you can have friends, study, and do what you are supposed to do.

I like to be independent and not have anyone controlling my life. I'm really busy trying to be an adult. I'm aiming to get into university and I'm also taking a Smart Serve course so I can get into waitressing.

WOLF HOLIDAY  
CIRCUS SHOW



## A Vision for Tomorrow

On any given night, more than 6,000 Canadian youths are homeless.

Young people account for one in five of the people living in Canada's homeless shelters. In Kingston the figure was more acute in 2013. One in three shelter residents here were between the ages of 15 and 24.\*

To help these vulnerable young people put their homelessness behind them and live safe, productive lives, the United Way Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington embarked on a mission to prevent and end youth homelessness in our region.

This mission began with the vision of reducing the number of young people using the shelter system. However as the consultation process gained momentum, it became clear that the root causes of homelessness are complex and require intervention on multiple fronts.

Instead of reducing homelessness, then, the United Way opted to focus on prevention, providing timely intervention, and building a sustainable network of supportive resources. While this approach may not have the intended effect of reducing the number of homeless youth, it will ensure that youth homelessness in our community becomes a treatable condition, rather than a chronic one.

And so a new vision emerged:

**"By 2020, 80 per cent of youths who enter the homelessness system in KFL&A will be housed within 30 days."**

By pursuing this vision, we can focus our attention and our efforts on identifying and removing the barriers that keep young people from accessing safe, suitable, and sustainable housing, and ensure that every young person in KFL&A has a place to call home.

\* In 2017, as a result of community wide efforts, one in five shelter residents were between the ages of 15 and 24.

## The Face of Youth Homelessness in KFL&A



25-40%  
self-identify as LGBTQ

50%  
are from middle or upper-income families



77%  
are unemployed



65%  
have dropped out of school

50%  
have been in jail



### Darryl,

homeless in Kingston

I came from a family with four children and my parents. We moved around Canada a lot.

I had some family issues that were caused by drug use. I became homeless. When you don't have a home to go to or a place to rest, you feel unwanted and uncomfortable. You are completely alone.

## Collective Impact: The Road to Realization

In order to realize our vision and turn youth homelessness into a treatable condition, we needed to adopt an approach that is capable of effecting dramatic, community-wide change.

The Collective Impact approach has been enabling positive change around major issues in communities around the world for decades. United Way KFL&A has employed Collective Impact successfully for close to two decades. Since 2011 the approach has been gaining favour among non-profits across North America.

Collective Impact is similar to -- yet distinctly different from -- other forms of collaboration. The key difference is that the collaborators come from different sectors and work through a centralized infrastructure toward a common goal, finding solutions and addressing root causes of larger community issues.

Working together with the aid of a dedicated staff providing “backbone” coordination along with a structured process enables a diverse group of organizational collaborators to work from a common agenda, determine shared values and guiding principles, develop clear measurements, and remain focused on the goal.

Collective Impact initiatives are a key focus of United Way KFL&A's Community Investment Strategy. They help us identify pressing issues, address their root causes, develop pilot programs and policies to effect change in our community, and monitor and evaluate our progress over time.

Through this process, we engage as many stakeholders as possible, ensuring that our community plans include input from everyone effected by these issues.

### Hearing the Right Voices

As we worked to formulate our Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness, we engaged partners from a range of frontline community agencies – many of whom were working independently of each other to serve the same population. We learned that, by bringing these groups to the same table, the process enabled them to work together, avoid duplication, and exchange vital information and collaborate around their clientele.

We also engaged partners from the private sector, all three levels of government, and the community at large. Most importantly, though, we sought input from young people who have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness.

In August of 2015, we created a Youth Council with a mandate to ensure that the voices and perspectives of homeless youth inform the decisions we make and the programs we design. We recruited participants through the local school boards, youth employment programs, shelters, transitional housing, and programs such as Youth Diversion, Y2K, Pathways to Education, and the local Boys and Girls Club. Our participants provided invaluable insight into the lives of young homeless people and inspired and contributed to the solutions that became the Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness.

One of the critical insights they shared was that young people are reluctant to trust even the most well-intentioned adults. This insight has influenced all aspects of the Plan, as it has taught us that perhaps the biggest obstacle to success will be earning the trust of homeless youth and inspiring them to make use of the available services.

For this reason, one of the Plan's most important strategies has been using the voices of homeless youth whenever possible.

### Backbone Coordination and Leadership

A foundational component of Collective Impact is centralized or “backbone” coordination. The United Way has agreed to supply this critical element in order to ensure that the process retains momentum and the projects are funded and implemented.

The United Way chairs the Steering Committee, providing leadership and coordination of events, committee meetings, data collection, tracking and evaluation, and conversations with youth, partners and funders, to keep the plan moving forward.

The Steering Committee meets monthly and provides input and advice at every step of the way. The Youth Council continues to provide their insights and coordinate the annual forums for youth.

## A Plan to End Youth Homelessness

As our Youth Council members shared their stories and insights with us, we acquired a wealth of new information that has enabled us to see youth homelessness from the perspective of those who have experienced it first-hand. This new perspective has given rise to new understandings, new objectives, and new strategies for addressing homelessness issues among young people.

### A Deeper Understanding

One important learning that emerged from this process was a deeper understanding of how youth homelessness differs from adult homelessness.

One of the differentiators is that where homeless adults have nowhere to live, many homeless youth still have the option of returning to their family homes. A plan to address youth homelessness, then, must consider making a return to the family home a viable option.

Unlike adult homelessness, youth homelessness can be viewed as a temporary condition rather than a chronic one, and the set of solutions can include educational components that may not be as effective with a chronically homeless older population.

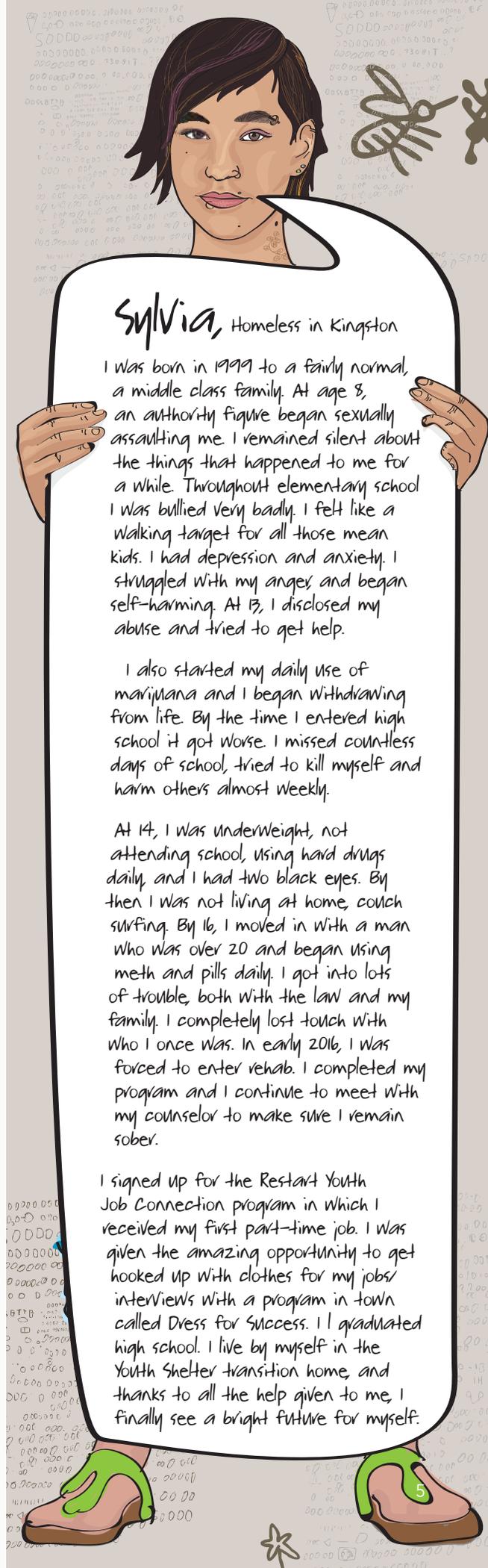
Another important consideration that applies uniquely to youth homelessness is that young people are still developing. The risk-taking and reactive behaviours and poor impulse control that are often associated with developing minds are a contributing factor to youth homelessness, making addressing developmental issues critical to any solution.

### Collecting data

An important piece in understanding the issue was collecting data and statistics. We learned early on that Kingston had a higher rate of youth homelessness than the average across the country – one in three people in shelters in Kingston were youth in 2013-14. Thanks to our community-wide efforts, we have seen a positive change in this area – in 2017 the number went down. This past year, just one in five people in shelters in Kingston were youth. We also learned that our community has a higher rate of female youth who are homeless, with over 50 per cent of homeless youth being female. (The average across the country is 20 per cent).

An annual Point in Time is conducted to track the number of youth who are absolutely homeless. In 2016 we learned that 10 per cent of youth who are homeless identified as Indigenous.

Additionally a new process was developed in 2013 to capture trends in youth who are precariously housed and still in school. At the same time every year, on a specific day, adolescent care workers in high schools provide us with the number of youth who they know are precariously housed. This provides us with estimates that are tracked year over year.



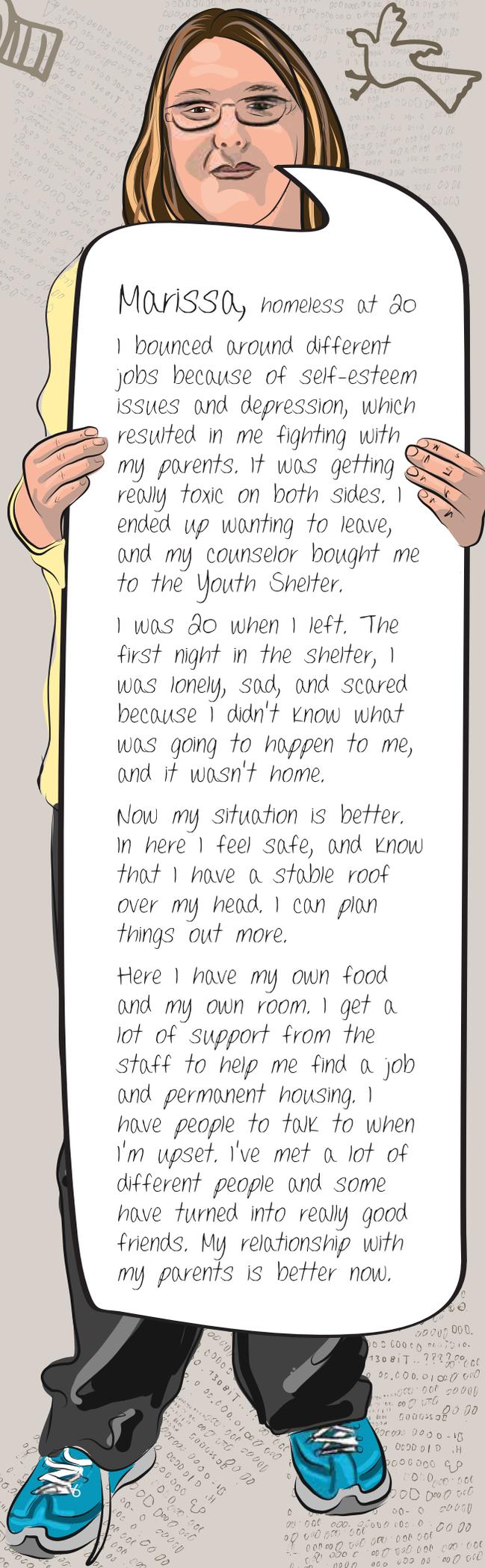
**Sylvia**, Homeless in Kingston

I was born in 1999 to a fairly normal, a middle class family. At age 8, an authority figure began sexually assaulting me. I remained silent about the things that happened to me for a while. Throughout elementary school I was bullied very badly. I felt like a walking target for all those mean kids. I had depression and anxiety. I struggled with my anger, and began self-harming. At 13, I disclosed my abuse and tried to get help.

I also started my daily use of marijuana and I began withdrawing from life. By the time I entered high school it got worse. I missed countless days of school, tried to kill myself and harm others almost weekly.

At 14, I was underweight, not attending school, using hard drugs daily, and I had two black eyes. By then I was not living at home, couch surfing. By 16, I moved in with a man who was over 20 and began using meth and pills daily. I got into lots of trouble, both with the law and my family. I completely lost touch with who I once was. In early 2016, I was forced to enter rehab. I completed my program and I continue to meet with my counselor to make sure I remain sober.

I signed up for the Restart Youth Job Connection program in which I received my first part-time job. I was given the amazing opportunity to get hooked up with clothes for my job interviews with a program in town called Dress for Success. I graduated high school. I live by myself in the Youth Shelter transition home, and thanks to all the help given to me, I finally see a bright future for myself.



Marissa, homeless at 20

I bounced around different jobs because of self-esteem issues and depression, which resulted in me fighting with my parents. It was getting really toxic on both sides. I ended up wanting to leave, and my counselor bought me to the Youth Shelter.

I was 20 when I left. The first night in the shelter, I was lonely, sad, and scared because I didn't know what was going to happen to me, and it wasn't home.

Now my situation is better. In here I feel safe, and know that I have a stable roof over my head. I can plan things out more.

Here I have my own food and my own room. I get a lot of support from the staff to help me find a job and permanent housing. I have people to talk to when I'm upset. I've met a lot of different people and some have turned into really good friends. My relationship with my parents is better now.

## A New Definition

We also discovered that many homeless young people did not consider themselves homeless because they technically have a roof over their heads. These youth, many of whom “couch surf” with friends or relatives, are rarely counted among the homeless population. In helping them understand their situations, we have been able to achieve a more accurate picture of the extent of youth homelessness in KFL&A.

## Exploring Root Causes

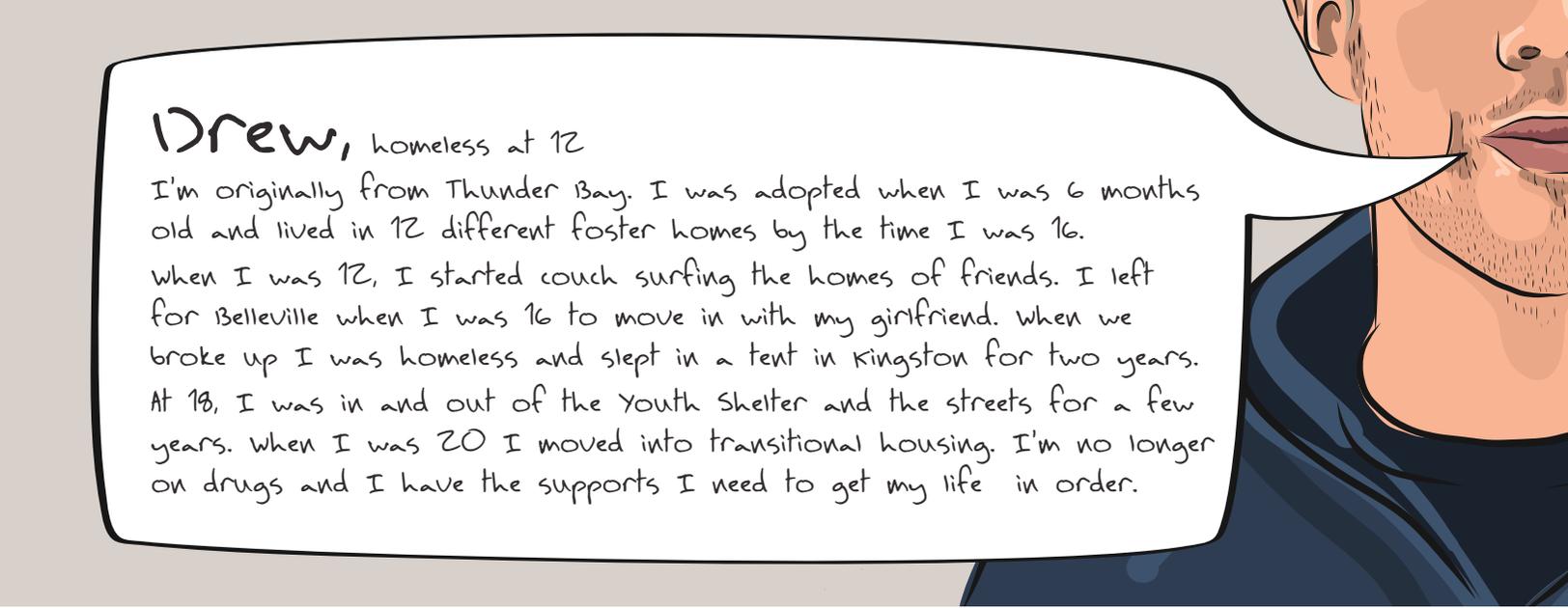
Listening to young people provided us with insight into how youth homelessness can occur. Youth participants helped us identify several root causes:

- **Family conflict:** Conflict between youth and parents and/or siblings is the single largest contributing factor to youth homelessness in KFL&A.
- **Addictions and mental health:** Addictions and mental health issues are contributing factors to youth homelessness, as they are with adult homelessness.
- **Education and unemployment:** Barriers to completing education and developing skills (job skills and life skills) are key contributors to youth unemployment, which is three to four times higher than the adult unemployment rate in Kingston.

## Focusing Attention Where It Is Most Needed

Understanding the nature of youth homelessness and its root causes has enabled us to focus our attention and efforts on the areas that have the greatest need and will have the greatest impact on preventing and ending youth homelessness in our region. By establishing and/or strengthening these areas, we can ensure that the appropriate services are in place to allow young people to treat the causes of their homelessness and end it before it becomes chronic. The Plan focuses on these areas:

- **Homelessness Prevention:** Addressing the root causes of homelessness, and education and awareness programs delivered in schools and throughout the community
- **Integrated System of Care:** Systems and protocols that are easy and convenient for youth to access
- **More Housing Options:** Enhanced role of emergency shelter, more transitional housing space, more appropriate options tailored to youth needs, more affordable housing options, more supportive resources
- **Regional Options for Rural Youth:** Housing options and supportive services for youth in neighbouring and rural communities in Frontenac and Lennox & Addington counties



Drew, homeless at 12

I'm originally from Thunder Bay. I was adopted when I was 6 months old and lived in 12 different foster homes by the time I was 16. When I was 12, I started couch surfing the homes of friends. I left for Belleville when I was 16 to move in with my girlfriend. When we broke up I was homeless and slept in a tent in Kingston for two years. At 18, I was in and out of the youth shelter and the streets for a few years. When I was 20 I moved into transitional housing. I'm no longer on drugs and I have the supports I need to get my life in order.

## Successes to Date

Since the Plan's implementation, several new initiatives have been realized, with chartable progress achieved in each area of focus.

### Homelessness Prevention

In order to prevent homelessness, it is necessary to address its root causes. The Plan calls for strategic investment in programs and services that target the three identified root causes of youth homelessness: family conflict, addiction and mental health, and barriers to education, skills development.

#### Family Conflict

**Family Mediation:** Since 2015, the United Way has provided funding for a full-time family mediation worker at the Kingston Youth Shelter's Family Support Program. This worker provides supportive services to address conflict, improve communication, and facilitate healthy reunions between homeless youth and their families. This worker has counselled 77 youth in two years, all but two of whom were able to return home successfully.

#### Addiction and Mental Health

**Youth Outreach:** In June of 2016, United Way provided funding for a Youth Outreach Worker to provide cognitive therapy and referrals to homeless youth with mental health issues. This program is provided through Addictions & Mental Health Services KFL&A. In its first 18 months, more than 63 young people have received support through this service.

**Intersections:** Approved for funding in 2017, this pilot program delivered by Youth Diversion provides intervention, navigation, and coordination of services for children and youth under age 18 who are at risk of

becoming involved with the justice system. Through this program, police can make service referrals for children who, while not engaged in criminal activities, still exhibit serious behaviour problems. In the last six months of 2017, the program served more than 35 youth, the youngest being six years old.

**LGBTQ+ Mental Health:** Since 25 to 40 per cent of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+, a pilot program that addresses the mental health needs of gender-diverse youth is now in place, facilitated by the Canadian Mental Health Association. This program includes providing safe spaces for LGBTQ+ youth and the hiring of a counsellor specializing in gender diversity. Initially funded through a grant, the program is now receiving United Way funding through the allocations process.

#### Unemployment

**Skills Development:** The Youth Employment Strategy, developed in 2016, includes recommendations to address barriers and challenges that prevent or hinder youth from entering and staying in the workplace. The initiative was led by the City of Kingston and United Way with a number of agencies and partners involved in the development of the strategy and plans. Solutions include mentoring, developing pre-employment skills, incorporating employers in the planning process, and supporting an early start.

Initiatives that are now in place include financial literacy workshops, paid apprenticeship programs, summer job programs, and a systematic effort to reduce experience requirements in entry-level jobs at the City of Kingston and other local employers.

There have also been several events held in and around Kingston including a Youth Summit to promote life skills that will enhance employability, and a forum to provide guidance counsellors and educators with up-to-date workforce opportunities and services available for youth.

## An Integrated System of Care

Many of the youth expressed frustration with a system that can be difficult to navigate. Several of our initiatives are designed to simplify the system so that users can access the services they need easily and conveniently.

### **System Mapping and Protocol Development:**

We continue to work with our partners to establish systems and protocols to help young people access services easily. To ensure that services are accessible and convenient for young users, increased coordination is necessary. This includes information sharing and coordination between service providers and the 211 service to ensure that 211 agents provide callers with the best possible information. Many improvements to the system have been effected to date, however this complex process is an ongoing project.

**Hub for Marginalized Youth:** One Roof, Kingston's Youth Hub, opened in 2017 at 426 Barrie Street. Renovated with the help of Novelis Inc. employees and youth program users, One Roof is a partnership between 15 organizations providing a range of services to homeless youth in one convenient location. Services include showers, food, counselling, housing access, education, and skills training.

**Closing Gaps in Early Response Services:** We provided funding for a full-time youth worker to coordinate prevention, diversion, and housing-first services to reduce pressures on the system caused by an increase in the number of youths needing longer-term support.

**Transitional Life Skills Program for Youth with a Developmental Disability:** Youth with Mild Intellectual Disability (MID) can often be misunderstood, without the supports they need. In 2017, Community Living Kingston began a pilot project to help youth with intellectual disabilities who are homeless or precariously housed. Since the pilot began, 14 youth have received life skills training to improve their readiness for independent living and have been assisted with navigating community supports to connect them with services.

## More Housing Options

In addition to supportive services, the greatest need for homeless youth remains housing. We have undertaken several initiatives to increase the number of affordable housing options for youth who are homeless or precariously housed in KFL&A.

### **Transformation of the Homelessness Services System:**

We work closely with the City of Kingston and partners to transform the homelessness services system to focus on housing first, homelessness prevention and diversion for youth, eviction protection and providing more affordable housing options that meet the needs of youth.

**Transitional Housing Program:** While traditional Housing First programs do not identify transitional housing as a solution to homelessness, we quickly learned that, for youth, transitional housing is often an important step toward permanent housing. It allows youth the time to heal, recover, and develop the skills that will enable them to succeed in living independently.

With the 2016 opening of a six-person transitional home for youth aged 16-19, Kingston is now home to increased transitional housing programs, offering transitional living options for 24 youth for up to 24 months. The new program, run by the Kingston Youth Shelter, provides living accommodations, life skills training, and counselling for youth to facilitate the transition to independent living.

More than 90 per cent of residents are either working full-time or working part-time and attending school. Eight youth have graduated from the program to date. All of them have moved on to stable independent living arrangements.

Additionally the United Way supports another Transitional Housing unit with Kingston Youth Shelter as well as RISE@one4nine, a transitional housing program run by Home Base Housing.

### **Expanding the Role of the Emergency Shelter:**

Since the shelter is the first point of contact for many youth who are homeless, it's important that their services include, not just beds, but access and referrals to prevention, diversion, and housing services. The Kingston Youth Shelter has expanded its suite of services and supports to include two transitional homes and the Family Mediation Program; they offer prevention-diversion and housing worker services, supporting youth who move from the shelter directly into independent living.

**Exploring Policy Changes:** The City of Kingston Ontario Works department has reviewed its policies to ensure they are serving youth in the best way possible. The Ontario Works program continues this review to ensure that the changes implemented are best meeting the needs of youth

## Sparking Dialogue

### Education and Awareness Campaign:

It was identified that a comprehensive communications plan was needed to support the goals and strategies of the Action Plan. A three-pronged approach was adopted by the steering committee to achieve the communication goal of changing community attitudes positively.

- Targeted intervention for youth at risk/youth who are homeless
- Increased awareness of the issue of youth homelessness among students in Grade 7 and upwards, schools, educators and families
- Reduced stigma associated with youth homelessness among the general public

The campaign, launched in 2016, features youth who have experienced homelessness and have successfully obtained support from community organizations. They share their stories, the realities of what led to homelessness, and a sense that there is help and where those at risk may obtain support through the 211 helpline and the various programs, services, and service delivery systems.

The stories address the myths of youth homelessness and the causes, providing opportunities for education, increased empathy and understanding among all intended audiences.

To complement the strategy and increase awareness of the issue, videos were produced by youth. The first was created in 2015 by members of the Youth Council; and a second video was produced by a member of the Youth Council. Both of these videos include interviews with local youth who ended up homeless in Kingston. These can be found on the United Way KFL&A website at [www.unitedwaykfla.ca/youth](http://www.unitedwaykfla.ca/youth).

Youth homelessness was a featured issue in the United Way's community fundraising campaign and a number of workplaces and events included talks from youth who had previously been homeless.

Highlights of the awareness campaign included an official launch at City Hall in Kingston and the declaration of Youth Homeless Awareness Day on May 3, 2016, as well as an information-sharing awareness day at Queen's Park, hosted by MPP Sophie Kiwala and organized by our United Way.

Numerous events and speaking engagements were held during a visit from Joe Roberts, who was once a homeless youth and who became a successful businessman. Joe recently trekked across Canada with a shopping cart as part of his "Push For Change" campaign, to raise awareness about youth homelessness and stopped in Kingston in October 2016.

### Forums:

Youth spoke often about the need to educate their peers about the causes of youth homelessness and what can be done to prevent a youth from becoming homeless. The Youth Council organizes an annual youth forum.

Schools are often a place of trust and safety for youth, and a place where they can access supports and services. Council members reminded us that it was important to share information with educators, as many youth will turn to a trusted person at school, and as they learned from their own experiences, many of their counsellors and teachers were not aware of where to send them.

Local school boards have been instrumental in working with the United Way on educating students and educators on the issue. As a result of input at this forum, we developed a Youth Services Listing to assist with finding resources to connect youth who are dealing with homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless with local programs and services.

## Our Next Steps

In the coming months, while we continue to make progress on our current initiatives, we will also undertake several new initiatives.

**Rural Youth Homelessness Strategy:** Because rural youth have needs that differ from their urban counterparts, we recognize the need to tailor our programs toward youth living in the rural portions of our region, including North, Central and South Frontenac, Lennox & Addington including the Greater Napanee Area.

We are currently seeking input from students, educators, and families in those regions to draft a strategy that will enable us to offer appropriate services to rural youth and their families.

This strategy will include reinforcing 211 as the first point of contact and promoting existing pilot projects such as the family mediation worker and the Intersections program. It will also include hiring a new dedicated youth case management worker for Frontenac County in 2018, which will enable us to offer support and referral services in Sharbot Lake, Sydenham, and Verona. This will help us identify the issues directly related to youth in rural areas who are precariously housed or homeless.

We will also identify opportunities to offer transportation services, making it easier for rural youth to access Kingston-based services. And we will explore opportunities to establish services in these regions, including a gathering place and a centralized service hub, as well as housing options that would enable rural youth to remain in their home communities.

**Strategy for Indigenous Youth:** Indigenous youth is another population with needs that are not yet adequately met in the existing system. We will explore strategies to determine and meet those needs. To learn more about how to approach this issue, United Way has started speaking with different groups and individuals to gain insights.

In the meantime, cultural awareness workshops have been offered to staff who work directly with youth.

**211 Youth Services Portal:** As part of our ongoing efforts to make supportive services easier to access, we are developing a youth-friendly web-based portal using data collected from 211. The portal will offer a link to a separate website with information on youth mentoring, networking, and employment opportunities.

## Funding

The United Way Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington provides funding for the development and implementation of the Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness and many of the projects that emerge from it. Funding for the initiative comes from a variety of sources:

### Kingston Penitentiary Tours

When Kingston Penitentiary closed its doors in 2013, Correctional Service of Canada worked with United Way to conduct fundraising tours of the vacant facility for three weeks. These funds (\$170,000) were dedicated to youth initiatives and helped to fund some of the initial work, with input from the Steering Committee.

In 2016 and 2017, St. Lawrence Parks Commission, the City of Kingston, and Correctional Service of Canada partnered to run tours through the summer with 50 per cent of the profits coming to United Way for its youth initiatives. The United Way received \$322,000 from tour proceeds in 2016 and \$800,000 in 2017, which was used to fund backbone coordination for the Plan and programming and initiatives that emerged from it.

### Innoweave Grant

The Innoweave Foundation works collaboratively with McConnell Foundation, the Laidlaw Foundation and the Ontario Provincial government to support collective impact initiatives. In 2016 the Innoweave Foundation approved a \$150,000 grant to support the Collective Impact process for data collection, plan development, and evaluation. The funds were also used to support the development of the education and awareness plan and collaterals, and some pilot initiatives outlined in the Plan.

### Transformational Gift

Kingston-based philanthropist A. Britton Smith, owner of Homestead Land Holdings Ltd., made a transformational gift of \$1.2 million to the United Way in early 2016.

The single largest one-time gift in this United Way's history, Mr. Smith's donation was used to create and fund a transitional-living facility that provides accommodation, counselling, and life skills training for six youth aged 16 to 19. The house is Kingston Youth Shelter's second transitional housing program for homeless youth, increasing the available youth transitional housing units from 18 to 24.

The funding covers the program's expenses for its first five years.

### City of Kingston Homelessness Plan

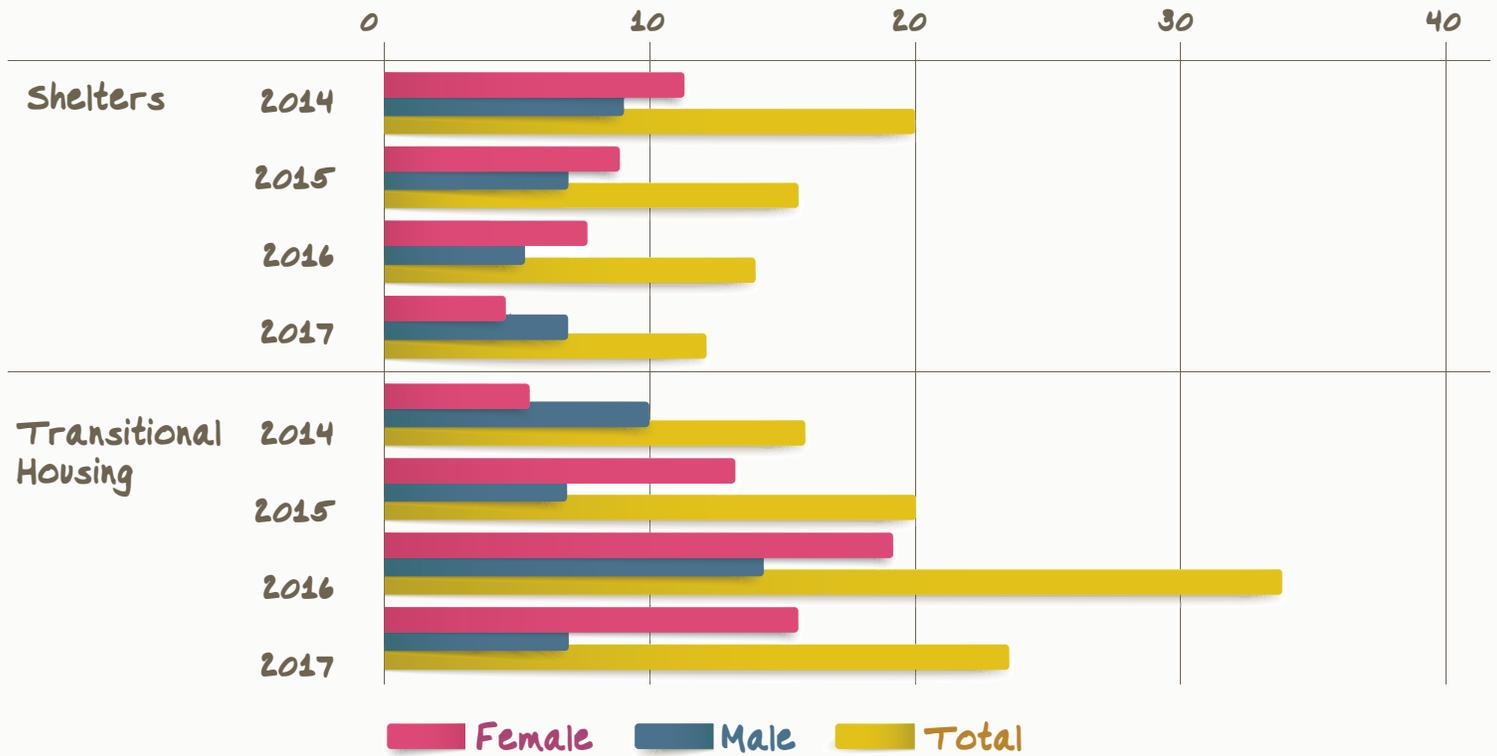
In developing its 10-year homelessness plan, the City of Kingston agreed to partner with United Way and collaborate on strategies developed through the youth homelessness initiative. The partnership has resulted in a robust and iterative plan to support youth who are homeless in the region. City and United Way staff continue to work together to find ways to evaluate and enhance the system. The City funds a number of critical core programs including the coordination of youth services, prevention-diversion workers and housing first workers.

### United Way Community Investment

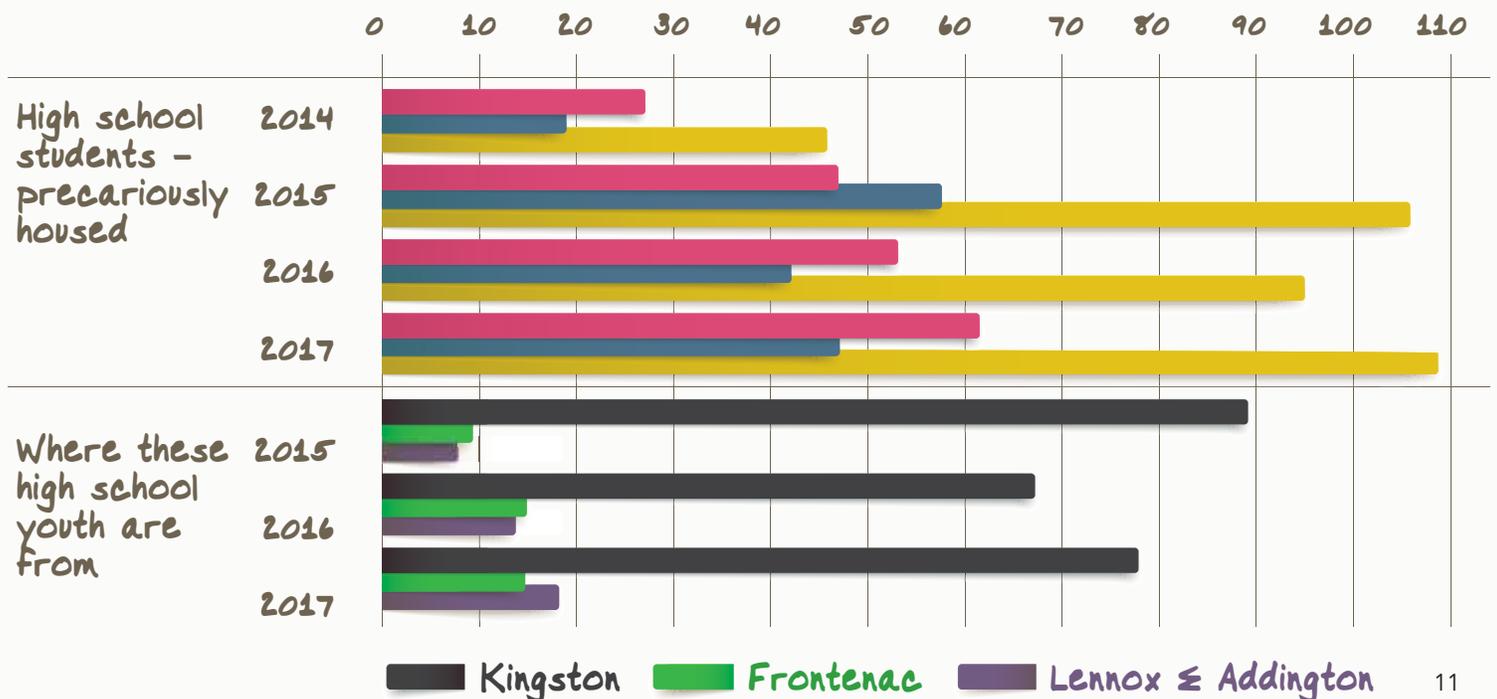
United Way funds some of the core programs that provide support to youth who are homeless or precariously housed through its partner agency funding process. These include youth services at the Kingston Youth Shelter, Home Base Housing, Canadian Mental Health Association and Youth Diversion.

# Youth Point in Time Count

Number of youth who were homeless



Goal: better at identifying precariously housed youth in high schools





STRENGTH

## Sam, homeless at 18

My mom disappeared when I was a toddler. I was put in the care of my grandmother. She moved often and had addiction issues. I spent two years living in a car.

I continued to attend school wherever I was. I moved with my grandmother to Kingston a few years ago, and at the age of 15, I was placed in foster care. It was the first time I slept in a bed by myself and had my own space.

I finished high school and I'm currently living in one of the transitional homes. I am enrolled in a program at St. Lawrence College



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YOUTH  
OUT LOUD  
Kingston & Area

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