



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

STRENGTH
RESILIENCE
WILL
PART

Report on
YOUTH
Homelessness 2018
summary



On any given night, more than **6,000** young Canadians are homeless. Young people account for **one in five** of the people living in Canada's homeless shelters.

In 2014, in Kingston, this figure was more acute: one in three shelter residents were between the ages of 15 and 24*. *As a result of community-wide efforts, in 2017, this number declined to one in five.

For five years, United Way of Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington and local partners have been working collectively to help local youth move beyond their homelessness into safe, productive lives.

It became clear that focusing on prevention and providing timely intervention was key to making the complexities of youth homelessness a treatable, rather than chronic, issue.

And so a vision emerged:

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

In order to realize our vision, we needed to think disruptively to ensure that every young person in KFL&A has a place to call home. We adopted a collective-impact approach to effect dramatic, community-wide change, focusing on removing barriers that keep young people from accessing safe, suitable, and sustainable housing.

We engaged frontline agencies bringing them together, along with the private sector, all levels of government and the community.

Most importantly, we sought input from young people who had experienced homelessness, or currently were homeless. Through partnerships with school boards, shelters, and agencies, we recruited young people to talk about challenges and potential solutions.

We learned that youth homelessness is different from adult homelessness, and needs to be addressed differently. Many homeless young people "couch surf" with friends or relatives, and are rarely counted among the homeless population.

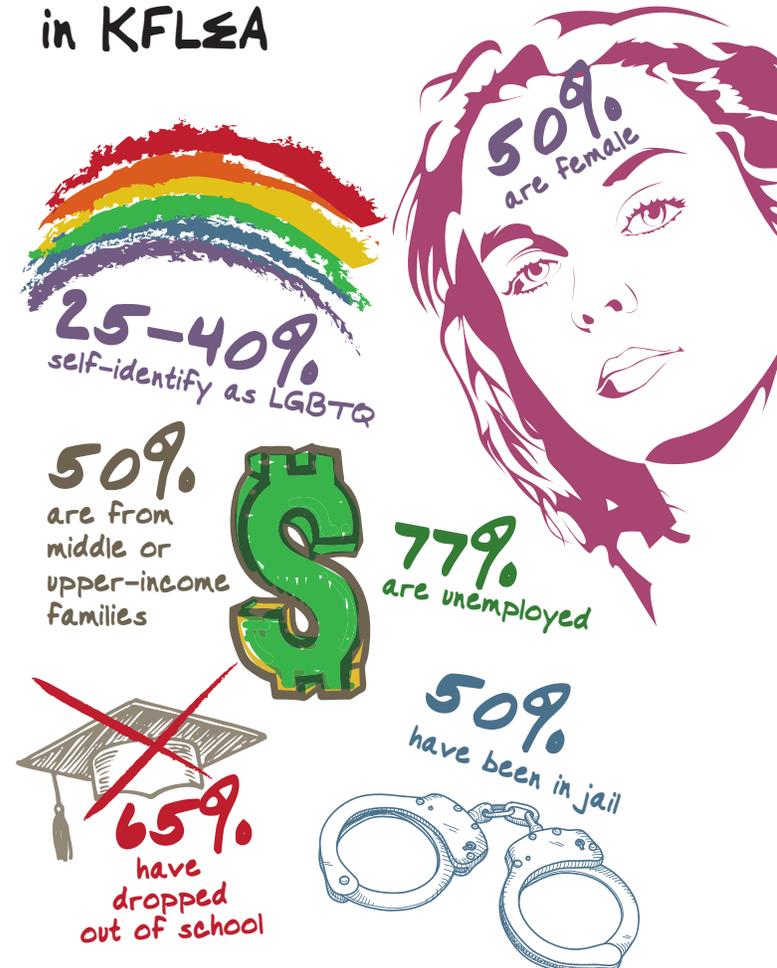
Exploring Root Causes

Listening to young people provided us with insight into root causes:

- Family conflict
- Addictions and mental health
- Education and unemployment

As youth shared their stories, we gained a wealth of information and more accurate picture of youth homelessness in KFL&A. We also learned youth homelessness can be viewed as a temporary condition, rather than a chronic one, and its solutions can include educational components that may not be as effective with older people.

The Face of Youth Homelessness in KFL&A



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.

Focusing Attention Where It's Most Needed

Understanding youth homelessness and its root causes enabled us to focus our attention and efforts on the areas of greatest impact.

- **Homelessness Prevention:** through education and awareness in schools and the community
- **Integrated System of Care:** Systems and protocols that are easy and convenient for youth to access
- **More Housing Options:** More transitional and affordable housing options, with resources tailored to the needs of youth
- **Regional Options for Rural Youth:** Supports for youth in rural communities

Education and Awareness:

A comprehensive awareness campaign was developed and launched, featuring stories of youth who have experienced homelessness and successfully obtained support. These can be found at: www.unitedwaykfla.ca/youth.

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

Forums: Youth spoke about the need to educate their peers and educators on the causes of youth homelessness and what can be done to prevent it.

- United Way Youth Council organizes an annual youth forum
- Local school boards work with United Way to coordinate an annual forum for educators.

Pilot programs and solutions

Based on what we heard from youth, the steering committee designed pilot programs that have been extremely successful:

Family Mediation: supportive services to address conflict and facilitate healthy reunions between youth and their families.

Youth Outreach: mobile program that provides cognitive therapy and referrals for youth with mental health issues.

Intersections: intervention and coordination of services for children and youth under 18 who are at risk of becoming involved with the justice system.

LGBTQ+ Mental Health: a peer program that addresses the mental health needs of gender-diverse youth, providing safe spaces for LGBTQ+ youth.

Skills Development: The Youth Employment Strategy includes recommendations to address barriers and challenges preventing youth from entering and staying in the workplace.

Hub for Marginalized Youth: One Roof is a new partnership between 15 organizations providing a range of services to homeless youth in one convenient location.

Transitional Life Skills Program: to help youth with intellectual disabilities who are homeless or precariously housed.

System Mapping and Protocol Development:

Closing Gaps in Early Response Services: we coordinate prevention, diversion, and housing-first services to reduce pressures on the system and ensure services are accessible and youth-friendly.

Exploring Policy Changes: we continue to review the system and policies to ensure that changes implemented best meet the needs of youth.

More Housing Options

The greatest need for homeless youth remains housing. We work closely with partners to transform the homelessness services system and provide more affordable housing options that meet the needs of youth.

Transitional Housing: for youth, transitional housing is often an important step toward permanent housing. With a new six-person transitional home for youth aged 16-19, Kingston now offers supportive housing options for 24 youth, for up to 24 months.

Expanding the Role of Emergency Shelter: since the shelter is often the first point of contact for many homeless youth, it's important that services include, not just beds, but access and referrals to prevention, diversion and housing services.

Next Steps

The approach is working. In 2014, one of every three people in KFL&A emergency shelters was under 24. Today, only one in 12 falls into this demographic. We've seen a dramatic drop in the number of people, homeless in downtown Kingston, who were youth.

As United Way and its partners continue to work toward making youth homelessness a treatable condition, they will continue to take their cues from young people. The ever-growing suite of resources will soon include efforts to address homelessness in rural parts, and services for Indigenous youth.

Sylvia, Homeless in Kingston

I was born in 1999 to a fairly normal, 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 jobs 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.



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OUT LOUD**
Kingston & Area

For more information
www.unitedwaykfla.ca/youth