

THE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS  
PRELIMINARY SUMMIT REPORT

**HONOURING  
KATHERINE'S  
LEGACY TO  
LIGHT THE  
WAY HOME**



*"Katherine was a light. Not like the sun, but like the stars.  
Always there to look up to and shining through the darkness."*



A COLLABORTIVE REPORT WRITTEN BY  
YOUTH WITH LIVED EXPERTISE



This report was written by 9 youth with lived expertise of homelessness, mental health, substance use, the foster care system, many of whom identify as LGBTQ2S+ or Indigenous. We wish to thank the contributions of all youth who helped develop the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit but had to step away from this project: C, K, S, D, Q, R, J, M, T, S, L, E, and K.



*“Katherine was a light. Not like the sun, but like the stars. Always there to look up to and shining through the darkness.”*

*- Haley Hodgkinson*

This project was funded and supported by:



This program is funded by the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia.



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**We wish to acknowledge that this project, both the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit and the writing of this report, has occurred on the traditional and unceded territory of Tk'emlups te Secwepemc (Kamloops) within Secwepemcúl'ecw (Secwépemc Nation) and Ts'elxwéyeqw (Chilliwack) within S'olh Temexw (Stó:lō Nation). We humbly acknowledge that many of us are visitors to these lands, which we are gathered to work on.**



**Pictured Left: Fraser River, Pictured Right: North & South Thompson River**

# MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHORS



**Mckenna Smith**

**Youth Advisor**

*"The feelings of empowerment and gratitude while working on the Light The Way project have overridden any anxieties I once previously had, when I first was offered this opportunity, presented before me by an amazing individual - I was in awe of how a woman could so graciously assign a role as a Youth Advisor with lived expertise, though it wasn't easy carrying on from the past I once lived. As a former youth who experienced homelessness, I had an idea in my head that my past was nothing of use, except for self learning and intrusive flashbacks, that was, until I met Katherine. After obtaining a position from her, she helped me understand the concept of a silver-lining. I had heard of the term before, but never encountered it quite to this extent. With A Way Home, my life's experiences continue to be valued, for when I collaborate with coworkers, solutions can be formed from our past. I found an aspiration to see change happen for so many youth still in an unstable environment.*

*Admirably, there are more opportunities, like this project, that have continued to present themselves within the organization to youth with lived expertise, providing that silver lining Katherine loved to show everyone, as well; the probability to see more change within our province. I strongly believe the more these favourable circumstances present themselves to individuals with lived expertise - the greater chance those people will have a moment of empowerment and stable pathways can be built, as this has shown to be so true for many team members involved at A Way Home Kamloops.*

*I will be forever grateful to have met such an influential rockstar who is; forever lighting the way from above. A special thank you to Kira and Dayna is given, for continuing this impeccable work despite such trying times - as well as elevating all of the voices of those with expertise."*

# MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHORS



**Daniel Galbraith      'Original' Youth Advisor**

*"If I were to be completely honest, I used to think youth homelessness was nothing to concern myself with, much like the general public I had the "not in my backyard" mentality. This mentality led me to ignore the issue and assume someone else would deal with it. When I was going through a situation myself and ended up couch surfing, I met with a woman who would end up changing my life in a way I never thought possible, this was of course Katherine McParland. Katherine opened my eyes to the struggles homeless youth live with everyday. Katherine brought me to the frontlines and showed me what I, along with many others have been ignoring for far too long.*

*Katherine lifted the proverbial veil from my eyes and showed me that what I had gone through was not unique to me. I was given the chance to make a change in the lives of youth. As the original youth advisor I was able to develop the Youth Against Youth Homelessness team and without them, I don't think the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit would have happened.*

*In the pursuit to change how youth in the system and youth dealing with many different challenges are helped, myself along with the many other youth advisors that authored this report decided to hold the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit to bring everything we have seen and learned that these diverse youth go through to policy makers, politicians, change makers, and the general public. We wanted to help make the changes needed to prevent the next generation of youth from suffering the same challenges. We wanted the province to see what has been brushed under the rug and shine a light on the issues that make a youth with so much potential fall through the cracks and end up on a path that no one would want to see their own children on."*

# MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHORS



**Melanie Hedch**

**Youth Advisor**

## **‘Pragmatic Mediator’**

*“Hi, my name is Melanie Hedch. I’m a young adult with lived expertise. I am truly humbled to have been a part of the summit recording and subsequent report. This experience has brought me closer to my colleagues and people who have had similar experiences. This summit has provided a unique opportunity to engage in much needed dialogue to highlight a somber subject. Youth with lived expertise of homelessness have been a marginalized demographic for too long. The reasons vary, but a part of it is because the population of at-risk youth exist, in many instances, in a kind of no-man’s land. They are not yet grown, yet far too often youth experience hardships without guidance from an appropriate grown up.*”

*As someone who has been, albeit for a brief time, in government care I can say that there is a strong kinship between other people in the care system. I feel a sense of duty to use my acquired knowledge to uplift others to ensure that no one needs go without support. No youth left behind.*

*I look forward to continuing to share my voice. Katherine has been a cheerleader for me. She was an amazing authentic change maker. I am honoured to have worked alongside her. I will continue to stand with her in the pursuit of justice, equity and equality for all.”*

# MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHORS



**Angell Olsen**

**Youth Advisor**

*"I first met Katherine as I was leaving a toxic, narcissistic relationship. I was with them for five years, and got into some legal trouble (i.e. no contact order) Even though they were the abusive one, I got charged instead of them and I wasn't allowed back into my house. Faced with instantaneous homelessness, my sister, who is a social worker, was friends with Katherine who helped me get temporary safe housing, and I couldn't be more grateful today. Since then, I have gotten a stable job, stable housing, and a healthy partner. I have 3 beautiful fur babies (cats), and my mental health is becoming better every day. I got a hold of my addictions, and I started going to therapy and school again. My life doesn't look anything like it did two years ago and Katherine McParland is to thank for that.*

*I used to think so low of my life, and motivations. I thought I was a failure, and that I wasn't worthy of basic human rights. I don't know if you have any lived expertise yourself, but it's one of the lowest feelings to not have a roof over your head, and a bed to sleep in. Or even just having to wash your clothes at a friends place, and use their shower. There is something dehumanizing, and I wouldn't wish it upon anyone. So when Katherine helped me into housing, and invited me to Youth Against Youth Homelessness it felt like I found somewhere I belong. A place where there were people who experienced the same things I did, and knew what I had been through. I met the lovely Daniel, Mel, and Kira five years ago. Now they are like family to me, and even though our Katherine is gone I will always feel like I have a place at A Way Home.*

*Working on this report, and the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit I have learned so much since then. I have even more empathy, and compassion than ever before. And I truly believe with the legacy Katherine left behind we can complete her mission. I miss her every single day, not one day goes by where I don't think about her. Katherine was like when it's raining and sunny at the same time. The fresh air from the rain brought me back to life, and her sunshine felt like home."*

# MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHORS



## Bee Foster Youth Advisor, 'Therapy Queen'

*"The past four years of my life has been a constant unpredictable rollercoaster ride of recovery and self-reflection. Before I joined the team of A Way Home, I was struggling with my mental health, and generally unsure of where I belonged. Being alone while navigating the ins and outs of supports and services felt like an inescapable revolving door, especially as I transitioned from youth to adult. The feelings I had for youth going through similar experiences was powerful, but I didn't have the means or an outlet for that empathy.*

*Being in the right place at the right time, I landed an informational interview with Katherine McParland. While preparing for our meeting I found myself immersed in her work and life experience. Katherine's life of overcoming adversity felt so close and similar to my own. Even before meeting her face-to-face she had unknowingly changed my life's direction. My first meeting with Katherine was such a welcoming and accepting experience. She never interrupted me and left so much space for my questions and concerns to be really heard. Katherine's unique wisdom connecting to others allowed her to see my life's course without needing my story. She saw value in my lived experience and opened the door for my place in this project.*

*Having a place where I could openly exchange ideas with youth sharing the same passions as my own has forever changed my mental health. Sharing our journeys, our lessons learned and different education opportunities has taught me so much more about social issues. My knowledge on mental health services, youth support, and the diverse needs of youth is always in a constant state of growth. The "Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit" has provided such an essential space for us to share real-life, uncomfortable and hidden adversities youth are faced with. Being given the freedom to express the solutions and needs of youth, without bias, has been such an empowering experience. I will forever be grateful for the immense self-confidence this project has taught me.*

*While reading this report, I believe it is important to acknowledge the emotional barriers and adversities the Youth Advisors and Peer Navigators overcame. COVID-19 forced us to use our creativity in developing new methods of work, but it also denied us the close needed support during our time of grief. My time with Katherine was short, however the endless compassion and determination I experienced throughout her work gave my life hope and meaning. In the face of losing our fearless leader and her irreplaceable guidance, the team persevered and cultivated the seeds Katherine had gently planted in each one of us. This report is the first of many flowers to bloom from those seeds. Thank you for giving me and my friends this opportunity."*

# MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHORS



**Moise Sewap**

**Youth Advisor**

## 'Animal Lover and Pizza Whisperer'

*"Hello there! I'm Moise Sewap, a Youth Advisor for A Way Home Kamloops. The work for this Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit was astounding and the response was astonishing for me and especially for my fellow Youth Advisors. When you have a powerful story to share, you feel compelled to share it with the world and everyone around you. The work Katherine put into this organization was charismatic and extraordinary. She had a passion and drive to end youth homelessness and was SO passionate about what she did, she shared it with the world and she took the challenges she was faced with everyday head on and overcame them with resilience and admiration!! I'm honored and glad, I was able to join her on her journey, as a Youth Advisor with A Way Home, it's changed my perspective so much and it has also changed my life for the better!!*

*If we can make an impact and inspire change in the world, we can eventually change the world! This report is how we can get started, all our voices matter, we all have a voice to say what we can say and this report will make our voices heard for everyone to hear! I can't wait to see what the future holds and I can't wait to also share my passion with the rest of the world! Let's do this!!!"*

# MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHORS



## Haley Hodgkinson 'The Provincial' Youth Advisor

*"Words cannot express the gratitude I feel towards Katherine and everyone at A Way Home. From the moment Katherine and I met we couldn't wait to work together, little did I know it would lead me to where I am today. I first got involved with Youth Against Youth Homelessness after I collaborated with Katherine on a youth homelessness forum in my community that the Mayor came to. She told me she was inspired by my passion and the work I had done and invited me to Kamloops to help consult with the originally intended local conference, and that is when I met some of the first Youth Advisors, who are now like family to me.*

*I was extremely passionate about working with Katherine on the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit, so much so, I volunteered joining virtually twice a week. When the idea was finally brought to Katherine to hire me as a Youth Advisor, she jumped and screamed with joy and excitement. Something that I will always cherish in my heart is knowing that I inspired Katherine, this amazing, phenomenal force to be reckoned with was inspired by me! Can you believe it? Wow. I will always be grateful for the fact that Katherine always let everyone around her know how much she truly loved them and admired their strengths. I was inspired by how much Katherine's goal of the conference changed, going from a local event to a provincial one, and now with COVID-19 the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit. Katherine's passion has motivated me to ensure her goal of an in-person provincial conference will happen one day.*

*Katherine continued to open so many doors for me and empowered me to stand in my truth. She taught me what it is like to be rooted in action and to not be afraid of making mistakes, but to honor my experiences and use them to make a difference. She always told me how strong and resilient I am, so I knew I had to continue being that to make her proud. She left me with lessons to live by, a family, and opportunities to continue on. Katherine, the Youth Advisors, Dayna, and Kira gave me a chance to make real change and be a part of a family and community that values my expertise and voice. She truly did give me infinite possibilities. I have become such a strong leader and am working towards being the force to be reckoned with like Katherine was. I know she's with me, lighting the way.*

*Working on this project has changed my life. I am so privileged and honored for the opportunity to be a youth advisor with A Way Home, it is a journey that I will never forget. I have been continuously inspired by the passion, strength, courage, resilience and determination to make a difference everyday while working with my fellow youth. I am so proud of us all, and I know Katherine is too. I have learned so much and I am excited for what is next. Thank you to everyone who has supported this project and the youth during this time, you are so very appreciated. I stand rooted in action to continue Katherine's legacy in her honour, please stand with me."*

# MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHORS



**Dayna Chapman**

**Peer Navigator**

*"I met Katherine in 2017. I was going to TREC (Twin Rivers Education Centre) and finishing up my grade 12. I had just moved in with a new set of foster parents. I wrote my English teacher an essay, a little glimpse of what my life story was. My English teacher was amazed, and told me she followed someone in the media named 'Katherine McParland.' She told me my story reminded her of Katherine's, and told me if I reached out to Katherine, interviewed her, and then brought her into school to do a presentation, she would tailor my assignment. So, I emailed Katherine, she picked me up at TREC three days later and we went to Tim Hortons. I gave her the essay, and told her I'm here today because my English teacher wanted me to meet you, so I think you should read this. She read through my story and looked at me and told me I would make an amazing social worker, because I have that first voice experience. I had never even thought about university, until that conversation. Katherine asked if she could drive me home, as we pulled into the driveway she looked at me and said, "No way you live here!!! I used to live here too!!!" Katherine invited me to be a part of YAYH, but my anxiety was too much at the time. 2 years later, I just finished the Human Service program at TRU. My professor suggested because of the population I wanted to work with, to apply at A Way Home.*

*Katherine first introduced me to this project when I was new, and told me it would be a good initiative for me to get on. I had never been to a preliminary summit before or understood what it took to organize and bring one to life. Over the past year, there have been so many changes, & I am so incredibly grateful for my amazing coworker, Kira, for going to great lengths to make this event happen, structure and facilitate writing the report and graciously teach me along the whole way. There have been many youth that have worked on this project, in which all of them have taught me so much. They are all so unique, driven, resilient, and on the track to do amazing things. Watching them work together to create this report reminded me of how Katherine used to say "you're rockstars", because they really are. Writing a report is not easy, and not something people regularly do. But these rockstar youth advisors did it. I'm so incredibly proud to see the work that they have all done within AWHK, this report and all of the personal growth they have done in their lives during this past year."*

# MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHORS



## Kira Cheeseborough

### Lived Expertise Programs Manager

*"Working alongside the youth this last year has been an incredibly rewarding experience and I'm honoured to have been able to witness their growth into even greater advocates. These resilient young leaders have shown tremendous strength, especially in our grieving of Katherine. She brought us all together and her passing has left a gaping hole in the world. Yet, through this the youth came together to heal and fill the hole with Katherine's memories, teachings, and spirit. We've persevered together to ensure the Preliminary Summit continued as planned to honour Katherine's legacy. Now, we carry on the light she mentored to us.*

*To me, Katherine was the closest person in my life, just like an older sister. I met her when I was at my lowest point. She listened to my story and believed me when I told her I was hurting. I truly believe if not for her unconditional love, I would not be here today.*

*Katherine taught us with lived expertise, the tremendous power we hold by standing in our truths and harnessing our experiences to create growth. That by having lived experience, we are not less than, faulty, or a product of failure but rather we are human beings crafted by adaptability, strength, courage, perseverance, and hope through our lived expertise. And that we are capable and deserving of love, from ourselves and from those we choose to become our found family. This is the legacy of a true angel.*

*I want to thank all the incredible youth leaders who have had a role in this project along the way as your voices have helped steer and inform this work tremendously. I hope that our paths will cross once again in the future moving forward for change.*

*I hope by reading this report, it will ignite or give a renewal of passion for ending and preventing youth homelessness in BC. By centering the voices of lived expertise in decision-making processes, we can ensure all youth have the tools necessary to be the makers of their own bright future. Without youth at the table, we will only repeat the same mistakes. We must no longer tolerate a youth's future being left to chance.*

*From the bottom of my heart, thank you for magnifying our voices."*

# KATHERINE MCPARLAND

## A CHAMPION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

*The Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit and  
this report are dedicated in loving memory of  
**Katherine McParland, a Champion of Children and Youth.***



May 8th, 1987 - December 5th, 2020

*"Our most horrific life experiences that cause the deepest  
wounds can sometimes become our life purpose."*

## "DEAR KATHERINE,

*To us, you were our mentor, a big sister, a friend, family, and a 'Queen'. Though you've physically left us, we know you are here looking over us all with the same love, compassion and care you always have. Your strength and resilience taught us to stand up against those who would rather push us down. You lit the way for so many youth and for us to make a difference. Now, we are going to continue to light the way in your stead.*

*The four lessons to stand in your truth have helped us carry on. We've been remembering to find the silver lining in the darkest of storms, just as you taught us. You taught us we are worthy of changing the systems for a better future for ourselves and youth. You would say 'our deepest wounds sometimes become our life's greatest purpose' and to us that has even greater meaning than before. Haley is honouring your legacy by making it her life's purpose to do so. Mckenna is eternally grateful to you for helping rebuild her reputation, which she has made a promise to continue upholding. Mel believes you changed her life trajectory, helping her see her inherent value when she couldn't before. Moise remembers you telling him 'we're rooting for you' with the brightest smile on your face as if speaking to a friend. Daniel asks himself: 'what would you do?' and the answer he gets helps him, to stand up when no one else will, to sit and listen when he wants to fight, and encourages him to persevere when everyone else says retreat. Bee is grateful for the acceptance and abundance of opportunities you provided for them. Angell is forever grateful for all of the public speaking Katherine taught her and to find the silver lining in the darkest of situations.*

*You gave us the chance to recover and rebuild ourselves after going through our darkest times. You taught us how to remain rooted in action, focusing on possibilities over probabilities, which we used to persevere forward with the Preliminary Summit. We will continue to use these lessons moving forward in creating a conference that will ensure change in your honour.*

*These lessons you gave us will keep us connected to you, to each other, and our memories together, through all that life throws at us. You brought us together and we've become a close family that will forever cherish you as our big sister. You called us your angels, and now you're ours. Our guardian angel up amongst the silver clouds. Thank you for being the hero we needed.*

*We sent you a guiding beam, to light the way home for you. Did you see it?"*



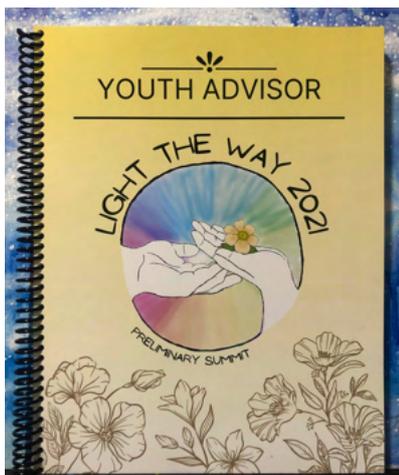
# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank the **Government of British Columbia** and the **Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction** for funding and supporting this project and youth with lived expertise.



This program is funded by the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia.

**Thank you for valuing our lived expertise in such a meaningful way!**



Thank you to **Angela Cooke** and **BC Housing**, for sponsoring *Mel Hedch* to design and have printed custom notebooks for every Youth Advisor.

We wish to thank historic **Youth Advisors C & Q** for designing and digitalizing the logo as seen on the notebook.

Thank you to **Cori Coutts** for helping find the following sponsors to fund custom awards for each Youth Advisor:

**Knappett Projects Inc.**  
**MYCORCompliance**  
**TLCVictoria**  
**Blue Anvil Labour Leasing**



We would also like to acknowledge **Tiaré Jung**, from **Drawing Change**, for being our graphic recorder for the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit!

Finally, but not least, we thank our incredible **Steering Committee!** We would not have been able to do this event without you all. Thank you for being with us for this last year.

**And thank YOU for reading our report!**

# AMPLIFY YOUTH WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

## FIGHT THE WAY SUMMIT

### YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Still dependent on adult caregivers for safety & stability!

Youth ages 13-27 experiencing unstable, unsafe, or inconsistent housing with or without parents, care givers, and/or support.

### HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

lacking a supportive family system due to intergenerational trauma, substance use

eg GROOMING: adults set up a relationship to manipulate, abuse, & exploit youth.

eg LGBTQ2+ phobia

eg Extreme religious households

No sense of self... "HOW CAN I BE ME & BE SAFE?"

### FOSTER CARE... AILING OUR YOUTH

in care forced to jump through hoops for basic needs vs. learning self-sufficient life skills

MINI WHITE \$

COVID-19 for youth w/in from care instability & isolation are not "UNPRECEDENTED" but multiplied by the pandemic

### NEED FOR SOMEWHERE SAFE TO COME HOME TO & AT LEAST 1 HEALTHY SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIP MORE THAN EVER!

19th birthday being pushed off a cliff...  
Bridge over specific services!  
w/ youth who are all

### TOXIC STRESS OVERLAP OF ADVERSE EXPERIENCES...

Substance use is an escape from an overwhelming reality

It is easier to find a dealer than the support needed

- calling the mental health line
- Results in a 911 call
- Results in involvement of police / authority figures

**MORE TRAUMA**

### TRIBUTE TO KATHERINE MCPARLAND

Katherine experienced homelessness as a youth & was dedicated to lifting up youth...

With Katherine's LOVE we made it through...

- homelessness
- substance use
- domestic violence

READY ANGELS?

### I draw strength from my culture & who I AM

### Decolonize

Indigenous-led housing

Lumma's CEO has over 35 years experience working in Indigenous housing.

### connection to my culture

- Support groups for inter-cultural Elders as mentors
- Sweat lodge
- Drumming

NEED TRANS SAFE SPACES!

- Shelters
- Continuum of stable housing
- community
- Towns / 2sl/gender non-conforming supports / support workers who "get it!"

### Continuum of wrap-around support & services

youth advise: PROMISING PRACTICES!

24hr support worker... crises are not 9-5

### Community Belonging Being Valued for WHO I AM...

Every door is the right door

Service providers are trained to know all resources available & refer youth for their specific needs

Consistent support person

Regular check-ins for wellness & goal setting

Centre safety & security of children & youth...

at Lumma, if it's not working out, children/youth stay, foster parents leave

### purpose

Opportunity for youth to have pride & employment from what was once great pain!

SUCCESS MEANS HAPPINESS!!!

# LET'S END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS!!!

### WHO I AM & WHO I AM PROUD OF

### HOPEFUL FOR WHAT I CAN BE...



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report, we highlight discussions from the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit on common barriers, pathways, and impacts of youth homelessness, while also sharing about how supports, housing, and employment can provide opportunity for youth to overcome these adversities. We especially felt discussion surrounding the experiences of youth aging out of foster care, with special considerations due to COVID-19, were of vital importance. We also wish to share our solutions to ending and preventing youth homelessness, as informed by our **lived expertise** and the expertise of youth from across BC. This report intends to bring education and advocate for change as informed by youth with lived expertise. We recognize that we were not able to give the level of detail all these areas of discussion require, but we hope to do so in a future “Light The Way” Youth Homelessness Conference.

**“Section One: Definition of Youth Homelessness”** features the importance of language and meaning. We thought it was of great importance to have a definition established by youth for the youth. Many other definitions addressed the complicated conditions of youth homelessness, but were lacking the values of a person first approach. Instead, we created a definition with the intent of providing safety to youth who are in vulnerable situations. Additionally, we support Jesse Thistle’s definition of Indigenous Homelessness, as informed by Indigenous Peoples across Canada.

In **“Section Two: The Superhighway to Homelessness”**, the title term “superhighway to homelessness” was coined by Katherine McParland to describe her experience as a youth in care who became homeless due to unsafe placements and the lack of a sense of belonging many youth feel in foster care. She described how the foster system taught her how to couch surf and tote her belongings around in garbage bags (McParland, 2018 cited Metcalfe, 2018). She advocated for communities to step up and create a sense of belonging for these youth as well as proper supports and care for youth transitioning and aging out of care. Katherine called for a provincial plan stating “if MCFD [Ministry of Children and Family Development] is going to take on the role of mom and dad, all the other ministries need to step in and act as aunties and uncles” (McParland, 2018 cited Metcalfe, 2018). We share the challenges youth often face while being in care including aging out, family privilege, after-care supports and Agreement with Young Adults, with discussion on aging out during COVID-19. Alongside Katherine, we advocate for a systemic change that ensures no youth ages out of care without safe, adequate and appropriate housing and supports for youth to prevent and end youth homelessness in BC.

The title of ***"Section Three: A Broken System Not Broken Youth"*** was chosen by the youth in consensus to show that it is not the youth that are failing, rather, that the system is failing youth. We highlighted many pathways and barriers to homelessness including mental health, substance use, lasting effects of colonization as well as discrimination, unsafe or unstable housing, family/caregiver and service provider relationships, education, and forced & harmful beliefs. Pathways and barriers are interconnected, creating a cycle for many youth who are left to be broken alone and without help. Youth have the chance to turn probabilities into infinite possibilities if they have the supports and means to do so. By understanding the pathways and barriers that lead to homelessness and the experiences we as youth face, service providers and policy makers can better learn ways to prevent homelessness. We need a system that empowers us to stand in our truth to make change in our lives, and find life's greatest joy and purpose in our most difficult experiences. As youth, the fault should not be placed on us when those around us are not able to give the adequate and appropriate care we need.

***"Section Four: Valuing the Lived Expertise of Youth"*** outlines the necessity of having youth voices center stage and actively involved in decision making. Main points include using the 'youth housing first' model, having wraparound supports and a continuum of care options that support youth from their first day in the system to transitioning them to leave care. Wraparound services also put a focus on youth centered care which gives them more opportunity to work on themselves and have support from the community.

These supports are particularly needed in regards for youth in the LGBTQ2S+ community. Inclusive shelters and housing are essential for people who are trans or non-gender conforming. Without this, youth may face discrimination and even violence from outdated views stemming from their gender or sexual identity in a heteronormative society. Conversely, when the needs of youth from this community are met, and their reality is validated, youth can be true to their self and continue to embrace their growth and development. Safe spaces allow youth to have timely access to support for their needs, like hormone replacement therapy or sexual health supplies provided in an educative manner free of judgement. Disjointed community services can result in youth not getting the intended level of support.

***"Section Five: Providing Purpose and Opportunity"*** discusses how youth employment after exiting homelessness is vital to homelessness prevention and prevention from falling back into unsustainable patterns, such as survival tactics. Employment doesn't just provide them with money to pay rent and buy food, it can empower them to find a sense of purpose. Providing opportunities for youth with lived expertise is empowering and helps advocate for change. Peer support that meets youth where they're at and uses a trauma-informed lens, such as the Peer Navigation program, can help them refine employment skills and secure work.

At the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit, we had a live Q&A segment, where all Youth Advisors shared their learning outcomes and experiences working on the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit. A post-event evaluation survey was completed by viewers where feedback is provided on their key takeaways.

Youth Advisors found through the educational opportunities also provided prospects for internship and leadership, many expressed feeling valued because of their lived expertise, which fueled their passion to help others. We shared how having a platform for our voices to be heard by adults at decision-making tables further built our confidence. We spoke to our experiences working with Katherine and how she created a work environment that didn't feel like work, but a family working together to make a difference. We mentioned how having an empowering and supportive boss that valued our voice and experiences empowered us to become better workers. Advocacy skills, effective communication in public speaking, articulating report writing, team-building accomplishments and guidance in professionalism are just a few of the outcomes that relate to becoming staff at A Way Home Kamloops (AWHK). All Youth Advisors came to a collective agreement that participation in this project was a life-changing opportunity, that provided endless support for empowerment to find the silver lining in our past and spread awareness to create a positive lasting change for youth.

***“Section Six: Promising Practices in Housing”*** highlights a variety of innovative solutions. Types of housing are categorized from no and low barrier to supportive and scattered sites. The range of options speaks to identifying and supporting the unique needs of every youth.

In ***“Section Seven: ‘Nothing About Us Without Us’”***, we provide 14 recommendations to help address the issues and prevent homelessness for youth from diverse backgrounds and experiences. These recommendations include Youth First Voices, supporting purpose and belonging, youth housing first or youth focus, continuum of youth housing, colonization and reconciliation, youth-specific government funded housing, youth-centered transitions from care, becoming family for youth in care, dependable and consistent support for youth in care, permanent post-pandemic supports, youth first wraparound services, youth-to-youth peer support, mental health for youth, and meaningful jobs for youth with lived expertise.

Ultimately, our biggest recommendation and call to action for the Government of British Columbia, and all government ministries, is to support and actively collaborate in developing a provincial plan to end youth homelessness. A plan centered on youth voices by implementing our report recommendations, the solutions from youth in Katherine McParland's report, *“From Marginalized to Magnified”*, and ensuring youth lived expertise leadership is involved every step of the way.

# **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

## ***Informed By Youth With Lived Expertise***

Support Youth First Voices  
and Their Right to Choice

Government Needs To  
Become and Act as Family  
To Youth In Care.

Help Youth in Finding  
Purpose and Belonging

Provide Youth Dependable  
and Consistent Support  
While In Care

Increase Youth-Specific  
Housing by Using Youth  
Housing First Models

Permanent Implementation  
of COVID-19 Emergency  
Measures for Youth In and  
From Care

Provide Youth A Continuum  
of Youth Housing Options

Youth First Wraparound  
Services

Pursue Reconciliation By  
Supporting Indigenous  
Communities and Their Youth

Peer Support, Youth To  
Youth

Increase Youth-Specific and  
Youth-Only Government  
Funded Housing

Increase Mental Health  
Supports For Youth with  
Lived Expertise

No Youth Ages Out of Care  
Without Safe, Appropriate,  
and Stable Housing with  
After-Care Supports

Provide Meaningful Jobs For  
Youth With Lived Expertise



# INTRODUCTION

## WHO IS KATHERINE MCPARLAND?



Katherine McParland is the late Executive Director and Founder of A Way Home Kamloops Society, a youth housing first organization that provides housing and wraparound services to youth at-risk of or experiencing homelessness between the ages of 16-25 years old. On December 5th, 2020, Katherine suddenly and tragically passed away, leaving an empty space in the world of youth advocacy.

Katherine grew up in the foster care system, and experienced homelessness after aging out of the system. From her adverse experiences, she set out with a vision to create meaningful change so that no other young person should ever have to experience homelessness again in Kamloops. She gathered a group of people to meet in an abandoned building to make a plan for creating housing for youth aging out of foster care.

This group soon became the steering committee for the City of Kamloops' youth homelessness action plan called "A Way Home".

What started out as a vision became a collective of service providers, businesses, and community members to ensure there is 'no wrong door' for youth searching for support in Kamloops. Since 2012, this grassroots initiative was supported by three backbone organizations (the Boys and Girls Club of Kamloops, Elizabeth Fry Society, and the United Way), until A Way Home became its own registered non-profit in 2018. In 2019, A Way Home Kamloops Society received charitable status.

In these years under Katherine's fearless leadership, A Way Home Kamloops opened new housing for youth, with our latest housing being the Safe Suites program. Katherine also made Kamloops the first community in Canada to conduct a youth-specific youth homelessness count in 2016, with a second count in 2018, and a third count underway for May 2021 that is solely led by youth with lived expertise.

During this journey, Katherine also co-founded the BC Coalition to End Youth Homelessness in 2017, bringing together youth-serving organizations, Indigenous leadership, and youth with lived expertise from across the province with the collective goal of creating a provincial plan to end youth homelessness. Through this work, Katherine and the Coalition engaged with and brought together government ministries to address the top pathways and barriers associated with youth homelessness by creating ministry-specific reports that were informed by youth with lived expertise. This work brought to light the need for inter-ministerial collaboration in responding to and preventing youth homelessness. In the last year, the BC Coalition created two special reports informed by youth with lived expertise on the impacts of COVID-19 and the key recommendations to address increasing gaps or barriers to youth's experiences of homelessness. Katherine started the Coalition on our greatest journey yet, to lead a coordinated housing response for youth who will be aging out of foster care in March 2022. We remain dedicated in this mission, for the youth and for Katherine.

In Katherine's work, she elevated "Youth First Voices" and the lived expertise from youth who have experienced homelessness by having their voices inform programming, policy, and advocacy work in every dimension (McParland, 2020). Since the beginning of A Way Home Kamloops, a group of youth with lived expertise of homelessness have helped inform the development and strategic direction of the organization.

**In recognition of her dedication to youth, Katherine received many accolades:**

**2018, YMCA Peace Medal**

**2020, BCASW Heart of the Grasslands Award**

**2021, First Call Champion of Child & Youth Rights Award (posthumously)**

**2021, AimCanada Lifetime Mentorship Award For Youth Homelessness**

**Advocacy (posthumously)**



## **THE HEART OF A WAY HOME KAMLOOPS: YOUTH AGAINST YOUTH HOMELESSNESS**



Youth Against Youth Homelessness (YAYH) was developed alongside grassroots beginnings of A Way Home Kamloops. As a former youth in care and a person with lived experience, she recognized the need to have voices of lived experience informing and guiding the work. The soon to be first Youth Advisor met with Katherine to discuss how the youth with lived experience could be involved in the decision making process, resulting in YAYH. The 'Original' Youth Advisor, Daniel, worked alongside Katherine to build this program from the ground up. A small number of youth were selected and the process began with bi-weekly meetings in a recreational room inside the Boys and Girls Club of Kamloops. A couple years later, another Youth Advisor, Kira, was hired to work alongside Daniel and Katherine. The trio made tremendous change in the community and walked alongside Katherine as the grassroots work of AWHK paved new and innovative directions for youth housing services. From there, YAYH grew and became the heart of A Way Home Kamloops. Over time, the group has evolved and become bigger than ever envisioned, inspiring provincial groups and developing a virtual summit, with the help of youth from different communities, to highlight the need for lived expertise to be informing solutions to youth homelessness in BC.

## **HOW WE BEGAN TO "LIGHT THE WAY"**

The February 2020 report authored by Katherine McParland, "From Marginalized To Magnified: Youth Homelessness Solutions from Those with Lived Expertise", was created with leadership from Youth Against Youth Homelessness BC (YAYH BC), a provincial group of youth with lived expertise of homelessness. As part of her Masters of Social Work in Leadership practicum, Katherine worked with the provincial Office of the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) to bring together youth with lived expertise from across the province to inform this report. Through this work, 12 youth leaders were identified from different communities to help in this project and the youth decided to take the name YAYH BC, in recognition of the youth leadership from the YAYH group in Kamloops. The provincial youth went back to their communities to organize and host workshops and events of their own, highlighting the specific experiences for each community.



**TO READ "FMTM"**

Through inspiration, Katherine fostered the idea of creating an event of her own, which in turn, ended up being the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit. When



we started this work in 2019, we intended to host a grassroots solutions-focused conference in Kamloops. As time went on, Katherine came back to the local YAYH group with news that this conference was going provincial! Soon after, we began working on the project as funded by the Government of British Columbia, to bring together youth with lived expertise, service providers, and government representatives from

across the province for a two day solutions-focused conference. This new vision included youth-led panels on the first day and group discussions on the second day where all attendees could collaboratively draft solutions that would be used to inform a provincial plan to end youth homelessness. This event was to be called the "Light The Way" Youth Homelessness Conference (LTW). As a result, we hired eight Youth Advisors with lived expertise to lead this conference.

*"At the grassroots beginning of LTW, I had the honour of coming to Kamloops and consult the youth advisors on event planning. Katherine invited me after we collaborated on my first forum where individuals with lived and living experience were invited, as well as service providers and the Mayor. When the Mayor arrived he said he wasn't going to stay long, but ended up staying the whole time and was very engaged! I remember Katherine got so excited and told me "This is amazing, you're a Rockstar."  
- Haley Hodgkinson*

Unfortunately, COVID-19 created tremendous barriers, forcing us to adapt to a virtual event. This shift in focus required dedication, hard work, and resilience from the Youth Advisors in adapting the work they had done to fit the new parameters of this project. In the end, the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit was born. As we continued our project work, we felt it important to ensure we continued to build off voices from youth across the province by incorporating knowledge from Katherine's report, "From Marginalized to Magnified" (FMTM), in our own considerations and discussions. That said, we want to clarify to readers since the change of event format, we could not delve into the depth of detail on most topics as we originally intended. Rather, we had more brief discussions, which we share in this report.

Earlier in 2020, we had created surveys to help capture more youth's voices from across BC that we would elevate during the event and in this report. You will see quotes through this report sharing these youth's voices from these surveys. Additionally, we created a post-event survey to capture feedback from summit

attendees, as to their biggest takeaways, what they hope to see in a future conference, and how they will continue to carry youth voices forward in their work. This feedback will be seen within "Section Five: Providing Purpose and Opportunity" and in the Appendices under "Preliminary Summit Evaluation Feedback".

In December 2020, Katherine McParland suddenly and tragically passed away, deeply impacting us all. To many of us she was a mentor, friend, peer, or like family. Even through the grief, we persevered to bring the virtual summit to life, to both celebrate our own resiliency, but now to honour the life and legacy of Katherine. She empowered us and provided us an opportunity to have our voices heard in a way unimaginable before. Katherine changed our lives as she helped us find a sense of purpose and belonging in a world that often marginalized or oppressed us. We keep her memory in our hearts and help drive our continued passion to create meaningful change for future generations to come.

We successfully hosted the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit on January 21st, 2021 on Zoom over three and a half hours, which we dedicated in loving memory of Katherine. The event brought 57 attendees from across the province with representatives from BC Housing, the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth, the First Nations Summit, the Attorney General's office, the Ministries of Children and Family Development, Mental Health and Addictions, and Social Development and Poverty Reduction. Guests included the Honourable Mitzi Dean and the Honourable Sheila Malcolmson.

As a final note, this report was written by youth with lived expertise. All information cited in this report is as informed by their expertise, the expertise of youth from across the province, and other sources as cited.

*"The resilience and courage to push ahead in sharing solutions as informed by their lived expertise deeply moved attendees. This Summit provided an opportunity for the government to hear directly from youth the life-changing impact empowering lived expertise holds." - Kira Cheeseborough*

**WATCH "YOUTH ADVISORS, ASSEMBLE!"**





In Summer of 2020, a small group of us were filmed in a documentary on the history and work behind A Way Home Kamloops. The documentary highlights Katherine McParland's story and the stories of youth with lived expertise, including current Youth Advisors Angell, Daniel, Mel, and former Peer Navigator Kira, who found purpose and support through AWHK. Thank you to **Bamboo Shoots** and **TELUS** for this opportunity to have our voices and stories heard! You can watch this documentary through the link or scan the QR code below.



OR CLICK HERE:  
[HTTPS://VIMEO.COM/489628661/C90C79696E](https://vimeo.com/489628661/c90c79696e)

INTRODUCTION





# SECTION ONE

## DEFINITION OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS



When the youth advisors started working on the Preliminary Summit one of our main questions was: ‘What is youth homelessness?’ In 2016, The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2016) defined it as “the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe, or consistent residence.” Though this definition intends to acknowledge the complex nature of youth homelessness, we felt the language used implied that it is the youth who were at fault for the experience, or that they did not have the ability to acquire stable housing. As a result, we developed a new definition we believe captures a more objective take on the experience. We define youth homelessness as:

*“A youth between the ages 13-27 experiencing unstable, unsafe, inappropriate, unsuitable, or inconsistent housing with or without parents, caregivers and/or support.”*

We created this definition with the intent of providing a **harm reduction** and stigma-free lens while continuing to value the lived expertise of youth who have been, or currently are experiencing homelessness. Our goal with this new definition was to shift from the usage of words that can encourage or perpetuate the implication of blame on vulnerable youth. The terminology in the previous definition implied the responsibility of being caretakers fell upon the youth, even though they were the ones in need of support and caregivers. In our definition, the statement “...housing with or without parents, caregivers and/or support”, was developed from a youth-centered perspective.

We expanded the age in our definition to include those in between the ages of 25-27 because the human brain has not finished maturing and developing until around the age of 25 (Johnson, Bloom, & Giedd, 2009). This includes empathetic and sympathetic responses which are still critically underdeveloped before the age of 25 and that's when there are no extenuating circumstances leading to adverse impacts to

development like childhood experiences and chemical imbalances from genetic or environmental factors. With these additional pieces considered, brain development may be delayed or impacted beyond the age of 25.

At the Preliminary Summit, we shared about the different types of homelessness a youth may experience as a spectrum, rather than linear. However, we find there are two umbrellas homelessness may fall within: hidden and absolute. Hidden homelessness comes in many different forms including couch surfing, shelter hopping, sexual exploitation, survival hustling, or other forms of temporary housing arrangements that are not permanent and/or unsafe. We defined absolute homelessness as living on the streets, where a youth is directly exposed to the elements. Under this umbrella of homelessness, we recognize youth on the streets often have to find new places to rest or set up camp, depending on which areas seem safest each night.

We'd also like to acknowledge Jesse Thistle's Indigenous definition of Homelessness. This definition includes 12 dimensions of Indigenous Homelessness, informed by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit scholars, frontline workers, community members, and those with lived expertise from across Canada (Thistle, 2017). These 12 dimensions were identified through the diverse experiences of homelessness across all communities and Nations (Thistle, 2017).

Thistle explains how these dimensions layer and by breaking down the experiences of communities and individuals, the layers can be applied to better understand, articulate, and help find solutions to homelessness. The 12 dimensions of Indigenous Homelessness are summarized by Jesse as follows (Thistle, 2017):

**"1. Historic Displacement Homelessness**

*Indigenous communities and Nations made historically homeless after being displaced from pre-colonial Indigenous lands.*

**2. Contemporary Geographic Separation Homelessness**

*An Indigenous individual's or community's separation from Indigenous lands, after colonial control.*

**3. Spiritual Disconnection Homelessness**

*An Indigenous individual's or community's separation from Indigenous worldviews or connection to the Creator or equivalent deity.*

**4. Mental Disruption and Imbalance Homelessness**

*Mental homelessness, described as an imbalance of mental faculties, experienced by Indigenous individuals and communities caused by colonization's deeply entrenched social and economic marginalization of Indigenous Peoples.*

**5. Cultural Disintegration and Loss Homelessness**

*Homelessness that totally dislocates or alienate Indigenous individuals and communities from their culture and from the relationship web of Indigenous society known as "All My Relations."*

**6. Overcrowding Homelessness**

*The number of people per dwelling in urban and rural Indigenous households that exceeds the national Canadian household average, thus contributing to and creating unsafe, unhealthy and overcrowded living spaces, in turn causing homelessness.*

**7. Relocation and Mobility Homelessness**

*Mobile Indigenous homeless people travelling over geographic distances between urban and rural spaces for access to work, health, education, recreation, legal and childcare services, to attend spiritual events and ceremonies, have access to affordable housing, and to see family, friends, and community members.*

**8. Going Home Homelessness**

*An Indigenous individual or family who has grown up or lived outside their home community for a period of time, and on returning "home," are often seen as outsiders, making them unable to secure a physical structure in which to live, due to federal, provincial, territorial or municipal bureaucratic barriers, uncooperative band or community councils, hostile community and kin members, lateral violence and cultural dislocation.*

**9. Nowhere To Go Homelessness**

*A complete lack of access to stable shelter, housing, accommodation, shelter services or relationships; literally having nowhere to go.*

**10. Escaping or Evading Harm Homelessness**

*Indigenous persons fleeing, leaving or vacating unstable, unsafe, unhealthy or overcrowded households or homes to obtain a measure of safety or to survive. Young people, women, and LGBTQ2S people are particularly vulnerable.*

**11. Emergency Crisis Homelessness**

*Natural disasters, large-scale environmental manipulation and acts of human mischief and destruction, along with bureaucratic red tape, combining to cause Indigenous people to lose their homes because the system is not ready or willing to cope with an immediate demand for housing.*

**12. Climatic Refugee Homelessness**

*Indigenous peoples whose lifestyle, subsistence patterns and food sources, relationship to animals, and connection to land and water have been greatly altered by drastic and cumulative weather shifts due to climate change. These shifts have made individuals and entire Indigenous communities homeless."*

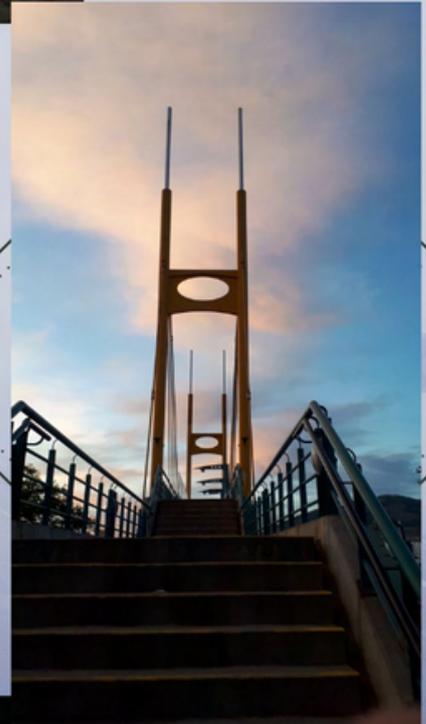
**LET'S END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS!!!**

**DO WHAT'S NEVER BEEN DONE BEFORE**



FROM PROBABILITIES

*To Possibilities*



**INNOVATE**



## **SECTION TWO**

### **"THE SUPERHIGHWAY TO HOMELESSNESS"**

#### **YOUTH AGING OUT OF CARE & COVID-19**

The BC foster care system is meant to provide children and youth without safe, dependable, and consistent family or homes, an opportunity to meet critical developmental milestones in a safe and supportive environment. However, the experiences of youth in and from government care seem to tell a different story. Katherine McParland (2020) would often share from her own experiences and the knowledge that she

heard from youth with lived expertise from across the province that "foster care is a superhighway to homelessness." Katherine (2018 cited Metcalfe, 2018) said: "If foster homes are not meeting kids' needs, they tend to run away, but have nowhere to go. They are making decisions with their feet. They are running away from these placements and are told they are choosing homelessness. I beg to differ. I say they are choosing to find a sense of belonging and we, as communities, need to create this for them."



*"It shouldn't be a bad thing to say you were in foster care. It should be an opportunity to bring together like-minded individuals by creating a sense of community."*

*- Melanie Hedch*

When youth are placed in government care, the clock starts ticking until they age out. The Metro Vancouver Homeless Count in 2020 found that 3 in 10 people who experienced homelessness had once been in foster care, a youth group home, or on an Independent Living Agreement (BC Non-Profit Housing Association, 2020). Because of the pandemic, youth aging out of government care is the most vulnerable population at risk of homelessness (BC Coalition To End Youth Homelessness, July 2020). We need to ensure that they have the support and resources by permanently extending temporary low-barrier supports, and allowing for adequate transition planning years before their 19th birthday so youth transition safely and successfully.

#### **HOW CAN WE PREVENT YOUTH HOMELESSNESS FOR YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE?**

*"Talking about planning before they turn 19."*

*- Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

*“A year before aging out of care there should be a MANDATORY meeting that goes off what is going to happen in the later months of the year, I believe that every 3 months you should have a meeting and make a goal list of what you want to accomplish to better help yourself as you age out. A lot of supports leave once your turn 19. A list should be made that gives you a look at supports that are available after 19.” - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

## **YOUTH IN CARE & FAMILY PRIVILEGE**

Angell, a Youth Advisor, spoke of the need to ensure support for youth in government care are easily accessible and culturally appropriate. “When youth are in the foster system, a lot of them don’t know what resources are out there or have access to them. These resources could have been helpful not just for myself, but something that has been resonating is getting in touch with our cultural background, as this is an important part of development” (Olsen, 2021).

Fostering Change (2019) estimates 700 youth age out of government care at the age of 19 annually in BC meanwhile 9 in 10 parents can provide support for their children until the age of 29. Furthermore, “only 1% of children in BC are in care, yet more than 50% of youth experiencing homelessness have been in care” (Zero Ceiling, 2019). This drastic over-representation only further highlights multiple gaps that current resources do not bridge for the complex and unique circumstances of each youth, including resources to address the lack of family privilege. If change is not implemented now, how many more will fall through the cracks?

## **HOW SHOULD YOUTH HOMELESSNESS BE PREVENTED?**

*“Better foster homes. When you're in a place as a broken young person and other people around are using drugs you're likely going to use drugs too.” - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

## **AFTER CARE SUPPORTS**

A notable factor leading to the pathway to homelessness, is the lack of consistent and active planning for the transition out of care. There needs to be more open, transparent communication between the social worker and the youth.

Many of the youth in care do not receive the luxury of obtaining **family privilege** and as such, essential bonds may occur, leading the social workers/care providers to (unintentionally) become mentors and a backbone support for a youth. When this connection is broken due to either quick terminations of Youth Agreements or youth being given a new social worker, this can result in experiences of abandonment. The more frequently a youth is moved around in care, the greater chance that the youth

is unable to create and maintain stable healthy relationships. Furthermore, there is a lasting impact youth face of lacking permanency from being moved or having relationships cut off. In some cases, the youth will only trust themselves as they are the only constant in a world of variables. Youth leaving the system face a subconscious choice of deciding to become vulnerable and trust people or build a wall around their heart.

## **HOW CAN WE PREVENT YOUTH HOMELESSNESS FOR YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE?**

*“Create an extended period of services for youth age 19-25 (aimed at youth aging out of care but not exclusive to youth with that background) that provide a safety net of community services and connections to prevent youth from falling through the cracks in their transition to adulthood.”*

*- Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

When services get cut off exactly at age 19 there is not always a continuum into adult supports. For example, counselling is cut off after a youth ages out, which can be detrimental to recovery from mental health concerns, such as trauma. If youth want continued services they usually have to go through mental health and substance use services to be put on a waitlist. In 2020, the BCCEYH recommended that youth from government care have universal and comprehensive after-care support, regardless of circumstances with waitlists eliminated (BC Coalition To End Youth Homelessness, May 2020). Even when they are connected, they will have to start over with a new practitioner, which reinforces a sense of lack of permanency. For youth, especially those in foster care, harm reduction, mentorship, community support systems, and developing better identification of unsafe spaces is important when creating a sense of safety and belonging.

## **AGREEMENT WITH YOUNG ADULTS (AYA) RESTRICTIONS**

Youth who apply for an AYA face many restrictions on eligibility. Though these have been made more accessible since the implementation of the low-barrier AYAs, youth are still often denied their applications and need assistance from a RCY advocate to appeal the decision.

## **HOW CAN WE PREVENT YOUTH HOMELESSNESS FOR YOUTH AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE?**

*“Have wraparound supports for all youth who age out of care. Take away or widen the eligibility requirements for Agreements with Young Adults.”*

*- Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

## **COVID-19 TEMPORARY EMERGENCY SUPPORTS & LOW-BARRIER AYA**

MCFD has increased support for youth in care who have turned 19 during the COVID-19 pandemic through the temporary emergency measures (Temporary Housing Agreement and Temporary Supports Agreement) and low-barrier AYAs, including the cultural life skills AYA. However, these supports remain to be temporary until March 2022. If a youth ages out prematurely due to coercion from their placement or unsafe housing, they remain at an increased risk of falling through systemic gaps. The BCCEYH (2020) provided the provincial government with a recommendation to create a plan for every youth in care that includes alternative housing options and supports, with considerations and plans based on each youth's culture. We would further add to this that the Temporary Emergency Supports and low-barrier AYAs temporary supports should become permanent to ensure consistency and stability for youth post-pandemic. Additionally, youth should be automatically enrolled into the AYA program upon aging out as a preventative measure to homelessness.

### **IF YOU COULD BUILD A DREAM PROGRAM BASED ON WHAT YOU NEED, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

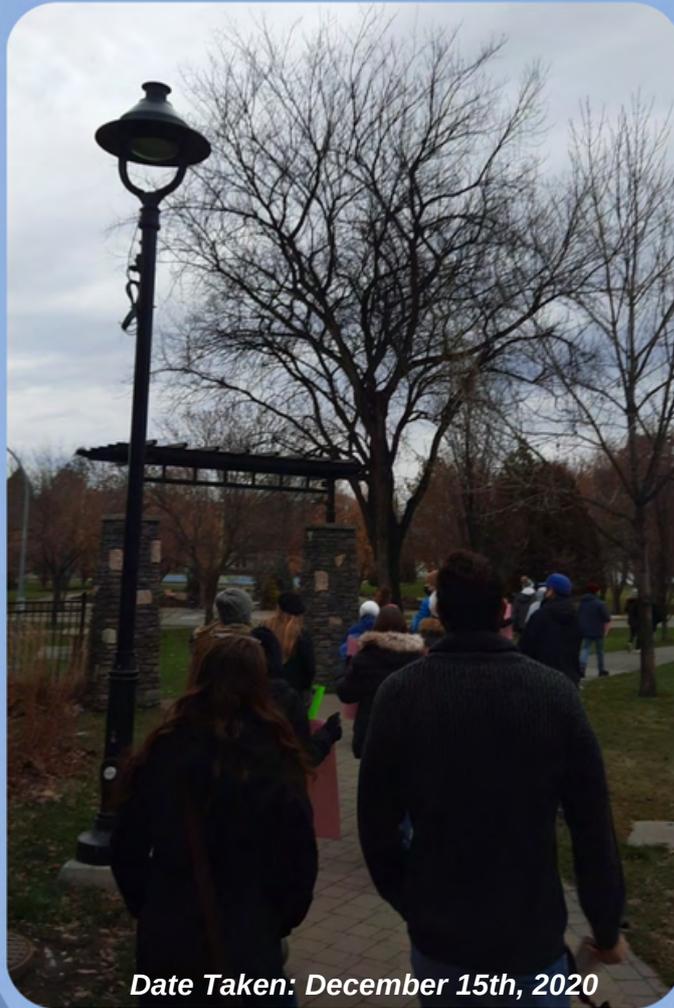
*"I would create a program that helps youth who have aged out of care. This program would have specialized supports that help with mental health, life skills and trauma supports. Within the program I would create housing for ONLY older youth 19-24, support in transition to living independently and support in schooling/work." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

*"A guaranteed support system for ALL youth after they age out of care. Which includes trauma counselling, a place to live, income support, and start-up costs up to the age of 25."  
- Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*



Date Taken: December 15th, 2020

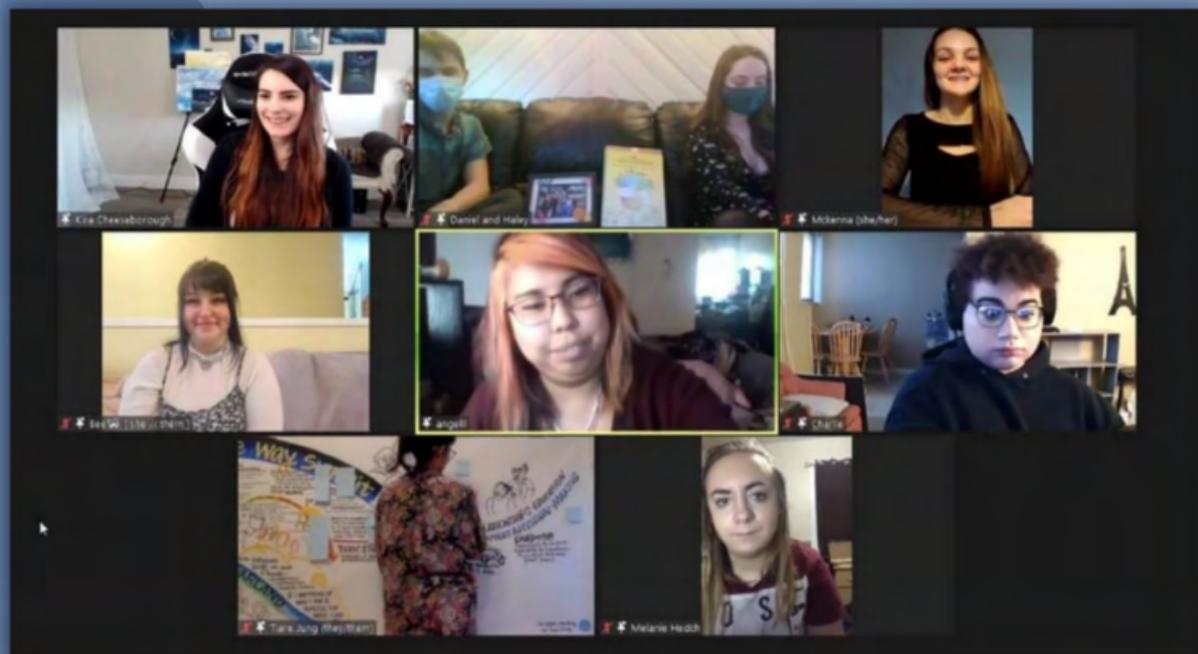
### **SECTION TWO: "THE SUPERHIGHWAY TO HOMELESSNESS"**



Date Taken: December 15th, 2020



# Stand in Your Truth





## SECTION THREE

### A BROKEN SYSTEM, NOT BROKEN YOUTH



This section discusses pathways to and barriers in exiting from homelessness which youth may encounter, which often are interchangeable and intersectional. A youth could experience multiple pathways, which can exacerbate or lead to one another in a chain. Experiences that might start as a pathway can also act as barriers in preventing youth from accessing support or resources that could help them exit homelessness.

#### MENTAL HEALTH: TRAUMA & EXPLOITATION

Experiences which negatively impact mental health can become a pathway and create barriers regarding homelessness or housing insecurity. Mental health concerns often arise from trauma, whether due to childhood experiences or events experienced while homeless. Without adequate access to support, trauma can easily compound itself. This can increase the youth's risk to experience other forms of trauma or retraumatization. Youth are also at a greater risk of exploitation when experiencing homelessness. Youth may experience sexual exploitation while facing homelessness, include sexual 'favours' for money, substances or shelter. The term, "**survival rape**" was coined by youth with lived expertise to describe this exchange of sexual acts to have a couch to sleep on rather than risking sexual assault on the streets (McParland, 2020). We add further to this that survival rape is non-consensual because if safer options than being on the streets were accessible, consent for these sexual acts would not be given.

In particular, intergenerational trauma can severely impact a youth throughout their development. A youth whose parents/caregivers experienced homelessness, substance use, and/or mental illness are at greater risk themselves of experiencing similar or worse circumstances through a cycle of trauma. Intergenerational trauma can be caused by childhood experiences or events while experiencing homelessness by the first and subsequent generations. Youth Advisors discussed how those who have experienced intergenerational trauma may see compounded impacts on their mental health, such as anxiety, depression, complex PTSD and/or development of mood or personality disorders. In *From Marginalized to Magnified (FMTM)*, Indigenous youth over-represent youth experiencing substance use dependencies and homelessness, which is known to be deeply connected to the historic and ongoing trauma from colonization (McParland, 2020).

## **WHAT GAPS ARE THERE TO FINDING STABLE WORK AS A YOUTH?**

*"Homeless youth are often traumatized. PTSD can greatly affect your work performance. There is also the problem of lack of experience and juggling work and school."  
- Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

## **MENTAL HEALTH: ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (A.C.E.)**

During the Preliminary Summit, the CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study was discussed, highlighting how trauma impacts child and youth development. This study completed surveys and physical examinations of 17,000 people where they would relay events that triggered toxic stress during their childhood development. When comparing their physical health with the information gathered from the survey they concluded that trauma has a visible life-long effect on our health (Felitti, Ada, Nordenberg, Williamson, Spitz, Edwards, & Marks, 1998).

People who had faced two or more adversities were two times more likely to develop depression, anxiety, addiction, stunted development, and overall bad physical health (Felitti et al., 1998). People who had faced four or more adversities, (or one out of eight people) were four times more likely to develop depression, anxiety, addiction, stunted development, lung disease, heart disease, hepatitis, and obesity (Felitti et al., 1998). They were twelve times as likely to attempt suicide, and had a visible twenty year difference in life expectancy (Felitti et al., 1998).

## **MENTAL HEALTH: WAITLISTS, MIS- OR UNDIAGNOSED CONCERNS**

Discussion on mental health also highlighted how youth experiencing mental health crisis may face eviction and possibly a 'bad reputation', impacting their ability to secure rental housing in the future. Additionally, waitlists create barriers for those who require housing and/or mental health support, especially while experiencing ongoing concerns or symptoms.

Due to inaccessible therapy and waitlists, a youth may not know they are experiencing symptoms of a mental illness and go without a diagnosis or treatment. For homeless youth who require medication or treatment, barriers to accessing these supports arise when they lack personal identification, funds, transportation, or means of communication, such as a phone or internet access. Additionally, youth without a diagnosis may not be able to articulate their experiences or symptoms adequately to professionals, family, peers, or other supports, often resulting in misunderstandings or misdiagnoses.

Undiagnosed or untreated mental illness can lead to feelings of disconnect or isolation, further leading to a sense of loss within themselves, their community, and their family. Without access to adequate support or treatment, youth may feel a need to self-medicate or adopt maladaptive coping mechanisms to survive, such as self-harm, high risk activities, or substance use. When a youth is experiencing homelessness with mental health concerns and are self-medicating with substances, youth are often trapped in a cycle of trauma. As Haley (2021) shared, “It is a lot easier for a youth on a street to find a dealer, or a drug than it is to find resources. And that’s why resources need to be no barrier or low barrier.”

## **SUBSTANCE USE: LACK OF CHOICE**

At the Preliminary Summit, how youth with lived expertise identify substance use as both a pathway to homelessness and a barrier in exiting homelessness was discussed. As previously mentioned, youth may self-medicate as they have no access to a doctor or use substances for survival reasons. Often, youth who use substances remain homeless because they have no access to low- or zero-barrier housing, where they can come off the streets and safely use substances. The practice of providing youth with harm reduction supplies or access to safe consumption sites is still widely unused, which leads to a lack of access and inconsistencies in supporting youth through a harm reduction lens.

We've heard our peers with lived expertise share stories of it being very difficult, if not impossible, to access doctors or medical facilities and get prescribed medications they need. Due to these barriers, we highlighted how youth experiencing homelessness are faced with the choice of using street substances to medicate their pain and mental illness or being left completely untreated. Developmental differences are often evident between youth who grew up with family privilege and those youth without family privilege, in that any substance use is often more recreational for youth with family privilege than the maladaptive behaviour of using substances to cope.

Low-barrier or zero-barrier housing is a useful tool for communities as it helps youth transcend the streets. However, private property owners rarely rent out their real estate for the purpose of providing low-barrier housing. This is discouraging to youth who just want a place to sleep. Low-barrier supportive housing can allow youth to escape the cold and dangers of living on the streets, while providing a foundation for them to safely use while seeking treatment. Without access to supportive housing, youth have nowhere to go to work towards sobriety.

### **WHAT WOULD HAVE HELPED YOU SECURE HOUSING?**

*“Wet housing or housing where I could use.”  
- Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

Youth have described **survival substance use** as using substances to protect themselves. For those youth experiencing homelessness, being out on the streets can be unsafe, especially at night. Youth, especially young **womxn**, are especially at risk of exploitation or harm. Youth may use substances to stay awake throughout the night to prevent their possessions from being stolen, or to protect themselves from being sexually assaulted. However, survival substance use may lead to mental harm, illness, or fatality due to unregulated and dirty supply.

## **SUBSTANCE USE: INCREASED RISKS**

Exploitation and survival rape are real dangers for youth experiencing homelessness. Youth being exploited for a roof over their head, often are introduced to substances in these environments. This creates a cycle of dependency where youth may be forced into repeated cycles of exploitation in exchange for the substances they've been supplied. There are additional risks for youth staying in adult shelters or wet housing, as they are often targeted by exploitative adults and influenced into continued substance use or other harmful behaviours. Access to youth-specific **wet housing** is vital to breaking this cycle and protecting youth from harmful adults.

With all the substances available and the dangers they pose, housing programs that utilize harm reduction are crucial. There are few places that help with harm reduction, with many not wanting to associate with substances and the stigma they carry. The overdose rates during the pandemic skyrocketed because substances are being dirtied or diluted with highly toxic fillers, such as Fentanyl, in the product. With very few places to get harm reduction supplies this initially leads into an inaccessibility to harm reduction in general. Harm reduction can save lives but without being able to access harm reduction the only alternative is unsafe, dangerous and potentially deadly.

We know Indigenous youth are experiencing higher rates of substance use, mental illness, and intergenerational trauma than other demographics of youth. Yet, there remains a need to increase resources to help Indigenous youth heal and grow - especially in remote or rural communities.



## **THE DEEP-ROOTED IMPACTS OF COLONIZATION**

Colonization has long impacted all aspects of wellness for Indigenous youth, from loss of culture, spirituality, sense of belonging, connection to the land, and disconnection from community and family. We recognize that the experiences of Indigenous youth deserves far deeper exploration and discussion as informed by youth from diverse communities and Nations. As such, this is a key area we wish to have Indigenous-led discussions on at our future conference.

### **THE DEEP-ROOTED IMPACTS OF COLONIZATION: LOSS OF CULTURE & SPIRITUALITY**

At the Preliminary Summit, Angell (2021) discussed how there can be a loss of spirituality and culture when there aren't enough resources for interracial families to support Indigenous youth growing up. When parents of an Indigenous child don't know the value or importance behind their culture, it can create a sense of disconnection that can remain lifelong, impacting the relationship between parent and youth. This makes it challenging for Indigenous youth to reconnect to their culture or community when an adoptive parent cannot provide support or connection to these holistic pieces of wellness. Additionally, youth growing up in faith-based households can experience a detrimental disconnection to their spirituality or identity. For example, if a Two-Spirited Indigenous youth living in foster care is raised to believe identifying as LGBTQ2S+ is wrong or 'sinful', it can tremendously impact their wellness.

*"I am adopted by my Aunt. She took me in when I was 6 months old. Growing up we didn't have a lot of interracial supports. I think resources could have been useful for me or anyone looking to get back to their cultural background." - Angell Olsen*

## **STIGMA & DISCRIMINATION**

Daniel (2021) shared thoughts on public attitudes of NIMBY-ism (not in my backyard) youth often are faced with when experiencing homelessness. This experience often dehumanizes youth, as youth feel those who perpetrate such attitudes do not actually see them as human beings, but rather blights to their neighbourhood. As Daniel (2021) explained, "they know it exists but they don't like to think about it existing, or what they have to do to help because it does not affect them directly."

When most people imagine a 'homeless person', a common image that comes to mind is an adult whose appearance is stereotypically dirty, disheveled, and that they are 'lazy' or a 'mooch'. This image holds a strongly stigmatizing perception of the experience, which often translates to the general population's perception of youth

experiencing homelessness. They may also harbor perceptions that a youth is choosing to be homeless because they 'don't want to do their chores'. As we know, this is severely incorrect. We believe community education on youth homelessness is key to destigmatizing and erasing these harmful stereotypes.

***“One thing I would like people to take away from this is: Youth who are homeless are not gross, we are not stupid, we are not lazy, we have problems the same as you but we just need the little extra help. We are worth it as much as the next person and I wish people would start realizing that if we all helped, a lot of the problems going on could be changed.”***  
**- Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent**

Homelessness often happens due to circumstances beyond a person's control and for youth, their experiences are very different than those of adults. Yet, there remains a lack of awareness and public education around destigmatizing these perceptions. There is a need for increased public awareness that there is not a 'one size fits all' solution to ending or preventing youth homelessness. Youth may experience internalized conflict or self-stigma because of societal pressure from day-to-day interactions with their peers, adults, and comments on social media . These pressures often prescribe a certain level of expectation or a specific measure youth must meet to be seen as successful.

There are different types of discrimination regarding age, mobility, socioeconomic class, gender identity, race, and more. These experiences are intersectional, often overlapping with one another or compounding the barriers and impacts associated with homelessness into far greater challenges than they began.

### **WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU FACED TRYING TO SECURE HOUSING?**

*“Getting references and being young.”*  
**- Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent**

When youth age out of care at 19, they're left with no support and nowhere to go. Yet, finding suitable and safe housing can be difficult because many landlords may not want to rent to someone so young, which classifies as ageism. Ableism occurs when landlords refuse to rent to youth with mobility issues because of the extra effort needed to accommodate their mobility. This can quickly become a deciding factor for why youth with limited mobility may end up homeless.

Discrimination and phobia due to gender identity is common for youth who identify as LGBTQ2S+, especially trans and non-binary youth. LGBTQ2S+ youth may be kicked out by their family or have to run away from home because they are at-risk of or experiencing abuse. Additionally, landlords may not rent to same-sex couples due to personal beliefs or they have young kids who “are not ready to be exposed”.

Reflecting back on our discussion of colonization, we know racism is deeply ingrained in Canadian history and its currently existing structures, which continues to perpetuate harm to Indigenous youth and youth from racialized communities. This creates huge barriers to exiting homelessness, especially when their cultural and spiritual needs cannot be met or there exists a disconnection from their community. Barriers from experiencing homelessness in combination with other intersectional experiences (mental illness, trauma) or identity (gender, race, sex, age, spirituality, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, etc.), can become life shattering.

## **FINANCIAL INEQUITIES**

Low socioeconomic status and classism come from structural inequities, playing a large role in housing insecurity and homelessness. Minimum wage is not a livable wage, leaving many youth having to choose between paying rent or eating. Youth who have incurred injuries or were born with diverse abilities may be living on Persons With Disabilities (PWD) funding, which many private landlords do not see as a reliable or adequate source of income. Prior to 2021, youth who remained on Income Assistance were only provided \$375 per month to cover expenses of their shelter, where the market value for bachelor units in most communities was rarely under \$700 (Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, 2019). For youth in or from care, if their Youth Agreement or AYA application is denied, they are often forced to resort to Underage Income Assistance or Income Assistance. Sometimes youth may not even be able to access these without support in navigating the application processes.

*"How do you expect people to stay off the streets when you pay them a dime on the dollar and charge them a dollar on the dime for housing?" - Daniel Galbraith*

## **FORCED & HARMFUL BELIEFS**

Daniel (2021) spoke of households that have an extreme take on a religious system and coming out as part of the LGBTQ2S+ experience "it's very harsh and it feels like you have been betrayed by the people who are supposed to love you." He compared it to having your faith ripped out from under you because of who you are. Another youth added another perspective on being raised in a religious system. Bee (2021) shared "it can feel very isolating in nature because that's the people you grew up with and it can be hard to find your sense of self after."

As previously mentioned, youth who come out as LGBTQ2S+ to their caregivers also experience an increased risk of homelessness due to family being unaccepting of their identity. This can create harmful impacts as youth may lose their family, home, connections, and support networks.



*"A barrier for me was traumatic spirituality. I was in an extremist household. I was encouraged not to seek out education, I was encouraged to behave in a certain way, and I was not allowed to partake in my community, or anyone that was not in the same belief system. I had to choose a family, a house, or a future that I knew I was going to be happy in. So I experienced a loss of self, because leaving so early I didn't have time to develop who I wanted to be, what I wanted to do, what I liked, what I didn't like. And I feel like a lot of youth today when they have to leave, or can't be in their house, or have to be an adult so young don't get that opportunity and experience extreme lack of self. When there needs to be healing of that. There needs to be more spiritual healing I think that needs to be taken more seriously!" - Bee Foster*

## **FAMILY/CAREGIVER AND SERVICE PROVIDER RELATIONSHIPS**

Youth rely on the guidance of caregivers and mentors throughout all stages of development. How youth see the world, or their worldview, is influenced by their early life experiences. Family privilege can provide the foundation needed for stable emotional growth. Caregivers and mentors can teach and model the need for safety and stability, while encouraging youth to grow their life skills. Having this healthy and supportive relationship creates a smooth and gradual transition into adulthood.

However, having a family doesn't necessarily exclude youth from the potential setbacks of adversity or intergenerational trauma. Without a healthy relationship base for youth to rely on, they may not have the opportunity to learn fundamental or essential life skills. Learning basic activities such as cooking, cleaning, time management and self-reliance may come more readily to those with family privilege. Youth at times are likely to age out of care without having had the opportunity to learn these skills.

Many of us have experienced the absence of safety and permanency from the start. Permanency stems from the consistency or reliability that occurred throughout development. Youths' experiences may vary but their worldview may not. Mel (2021) shared if "they don't have a reliable life, they don't know what the next month, what the next year is going to be [like] or if they're going to be in the same place."

Because of this uncertainty, youth in and from the foster system can have a hard time building trust and reaching out when they have had no permanency or dependability. Katherine (2018 cited Metcalfe, 2018) has shared the foster system "...taught me how to couch surf and sleep in strange places. I learned how to tote all my belongings in garbage bags. I learned how to be homeless at a quite young age through foster care."

For youth without family privilege, having their trust broken by adults turns into a barrier to accessing supports later on in life. Their ability to rely on others may be difficult when there has been no past experience supporting it as a positive action.

Without healthy emotional support youth may not be aware of who they can and cannot approach safely. If a young person doesn't have an understanding of a supportive family system, they are less likely to be open to support from outsiders such as service providers, support workers, or school counselors. There is often a lack of accessible information about services or resources available to at-risk youth.

Furthermore, without healthy emotional bonds, it is harder for youth to relate to their peers. Youth may experience a sense of disconnection and have a difficulty connecting or trusting supports. Youth who have experienced a lack of permanency may find it easier to connect with individuals who practice unsafe lifestyles due to sharing of similar experiences supporting a sense of belonging, trauma-bonding, and/or to fulfill unmet needs. Examples of these can be found within gangs, groups who use substance together, and within unhealthy or inappropriate romantic relationships. Additionally, youth may find themselves involved in gangs or experience sexual exploitation due to seeking out familiar or "accepting" environments.

This trend highlights the need for safe housing spaces. If a youth doesn't have a safe space as an option, they most likely will have a hard time trusting sources and accepting helpful information or resources. Lack of trust makes it incredibly difficult for youth to navigate complex systems and services grounded in communication of their needs. A youth may not have had an environment conducive to self development and understanding. It is essential to heal the trust of youth who are at-risk and provide them with healthy relationships that encourage development.

## **UNSAFE OR UNSTABLE HOUSING**

It is no secret that youth are at a higher risk of experiencing unsafe housing or housing insecurity than adults. As discussed, this experience is often due to the impacts of trauma, a youth's stage of development and their vulnerability to exploitation from others - usually adults (McParland, 2020).

At the Preliminary Summit, Angell (2021) spoke about affordability and how the lack of affordable housing can be a difficult barrier for youth to overcome. Youth who find themselves in these vulnerable situations may encounter ableism, ageism, discrimination, or racism for being Indigenous when looking for a home. Private landlords can also take advantage of the youth's inexperience by renting out houses that aren't up to code, making them pay unnecessary fees, or illegally raising their rent.

## **WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU FACED TRYING TO SECURE HOUSING?**

*"Finding somewhere to rent without a steady income. My best friend (also homeless) and I eventually managed to rent an illegal basement suite where we have lived for a few years now, but even though my friend had over \$10,000 in savings in his bank account, he could not find any place to rent without an income. Because we are both disabled and have PTSD, we are unable to work, and so we ended up staying in a hostel for several months while looking for a place to rent. We are now both on PWD." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

*"I didn't know where to go. Nor did I know the resources that were available for me. If someone would have spoken to me about the resources that were out in the world I could have used, I wouldn't have been homeless." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

Some youth may have options besides rental housing, such as supportive or independent housing programs. However, youth may still encounter barriers to accessing housing programs from wait lists, unrealistic eligibility requirements, strict rules, or lack of choice in housing due to limited resources housing providers have access to. Angell (2021) shared that youth struggling with substance use or addiction usually find their substance dependency a barrier in being accepted to a housing program. Access to housing programs often requires youth to detox or be abstinent from substances, forcing youth to find alternatives to using when they might not be ready.

Companionship from animals was discussed at the Preliminary Summit. Even though youth experiencing homelessness may not have consistent love or companionship in their lives, youth find pet ownership provides a sense of comfort and purpose in caring for the animal. However, pet-friendly rental properties are usually unaffordable or difficult to find. When looking for a place to live not many landlords are willing to rent to someone with a pet, especially when they own a bull breed of dog. When coming in off the streets landlords sometimes believe pets may damage the property or may not be properly trained, often leaving youth in a position to choose between a warm place to live or their best friend who has provided companionship and loyalty.

## **EDUCATION**

When youth are experiencing homelessness, accessing or completing an education at any level becomes a tremendous challenge. The need to survive day-to-day far out prioritizes attending classes, especially when you consider the price of post-secondary education. Without consistent, positive support, youth may struggle to complete their high school education, creating greater barriers to securing employment.

*"When I was in university, I wasn't able to work a full-time job because of my mental illness [...] I had to choose between getting groceries or my textbooks but because I had the proper supports around me, I was able to have my books paid for to afford my groceries." - Haley Hodgkinson*

### **WHAT WOULD HAVE HELPED YOU THE MOST DURING YOUR EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS/HOUSING INSECURITY?**

*"The adults at my old school really LISTENED to what I was saying. I asked for help but because I was known to lie I was never taken seriously. I would love to see schools implement training in trauma reduction. I would like to think if they really paid attention to what was going on around me they would have noticed stuff was off." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

### **WHAT ARE SOME SOLUTIONS TO FINDING STABLE WORK FOR YOUTH?**

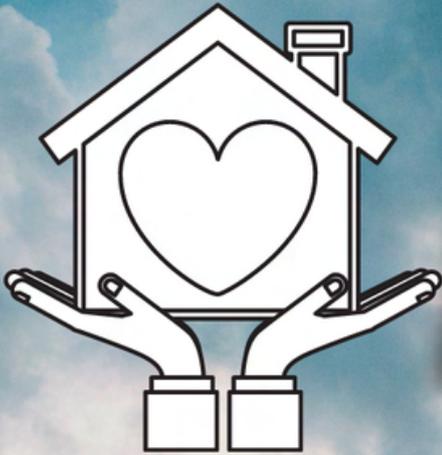
*"Giving youth equal opportunity to pursue post secondary education." - Youth Homelessness Respondent*

### **WHAT DO YOU THINK HAS BEEN THE GREATEST CHALLENGE RELATED TO COVID-19?**

*"I am not currently homeless, but I've been scared as hell that I will be again. I usually rely a lot on freelance transcription work and am in a financially precarious situation - more so than usual - and don't know when or if things will be back to normal. I'm too old for youth shelters now. I don't know if I can deal with all that again." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent, Victoria*

*"COVID has really screwed everything up, isolating people who are already so isolated." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*





Date Taken: June 20th, 2019



Date Taken: August 17th, 2020

**"It is when we face that truth and find the silver lining in those experiences, we can mobilize our truth for change "**



Date Taken: August 17th, 2020





## **SECTION FOUR**

### **VALUING THE LIVED EXPERTISE OF YOUTH**

Impacts are defined through the lived expertise of youth. Lived expertise comes from the lived and living experience of being at risk of youth homelessness and housing insecurity. Supports are defined by the resources and services youth have or are currently accessing; or wish they could have accessed during their experience. Many of the supports highlighted were housing first, wraparound supports as well as continuum of care for youth aging out of the foster system. When a youth ages out, there is often not a proper transition to adult services like counseling.



Mel (2021) gives an example: “There was a gap in funding for my medications when I was in between coverage. I had to go without for about a month even though the amount I needed was around ten dollars.” Supports were described as a foundation, a place to build up youth from where they are. With this foundation in place youth can experience positive support and community connection. We also discussed the significance of how valuing lived expertise empowers a person through their experiences. Haley (2021) mentioned “... wraparound services are essential because it puts the client at center and focus and really allows the person to work on themselves as well as have a community around them. We often use the adage ‘it takes a village’ and I think that’s exactly what those wraparound supports are.” This includes the housing first approach and continuum of care as well.

Community prevention can also mean more inclusive shelters. For example, if a young person is part of the LGBTQ2S+ community, there should be shelters for people who are trans or non-gender conforming to support their specific needs. Without this, youth are at-risk of discrimination and violence from stigmas and outdated views on their gender or sexual identity in a heteronormative society. When everyone feels comfortable and their reality is validated, they can come out of their shell and be who they are meant to be, in their gender identity, personality growth, and development. Safe spaces for LGBTQ2S+ youth to access is vital. These safe spaces would allow youth to have timely access to financial support for their needs like hormone replacement therapy, or sexual health supplies related to their gender identity or sexual orientation; things that could be a source for education without judgment.

## **WHAT WOULD HAVE HELPED YOU THE MOST DURING YOUR EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS/HOUSING INSECURITY?**

*"My best friend became homeless 2 weeks after I did. We tried very hard to find shelters where we could stay together. He was 26 and too old for youth shelters, so we went to a different shelter together. This was so much harder and scarier. My friend is only a year and a half older than me. What would have helped me was knowing that my friend had access to the same quality resources I had access to. I would not have left the youth shelter if I had felt he would be safe, well-fed, and treated with respect - instead I wanted to make sure he didn't have to go through hunger, misgendering, and PTSD flashbacks alone." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

*"Having a safe place to stay where I could still use drugs/alcohol."  
- Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

Again, youth with lived expertise highlight the need to have supportive wet housing options that can provide wraparound support to youth actively using a harm reduction model. Mckenna (2021) shared that "youth need a vast spread of support; one option is not going to work for every single youth. I believe emotional and mental support after gaining housing is going to build a foundation for youth; any counseling that they need, any therapy and building them up from there."

*"Support is amazing in a community, and I'm so glad that I got to know so many now. When I was experiencing the hardest part of my life I was not aware of programs and supports in my community. I had to struggle on my own, and call in favours and get into debt. And being in relationships that weren't healthy, it was a learning curve. It took longer than I wanted to get to a place where I am finally happy with myself. And I know that if I would have known about these resources, and youth advisors, and mentors, I think I would have thrived so much sooner than I am now." - Bee Foster*

Communities need to work together as one to streamline essential supports, to give youth every opportunity to access them all. An outreach center might provide food at noon, but that might create a time conflict with an equally important support group happening at the same time (i.e. Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous). Alongside time conflicts, there are simply times when a service is unavailable. "Crises don't always happen nine to five, Monday through Friday," Mel (2021) shared, "If there's someone who's having a panic attack or needs social support - this is a big gap." For youth, having continuous support is reassuring that they are not going to be dropped off their social worker or support worker's caseload. When service providers take a collaborative and preemptive approach to service delivery, keeping youth voices centered, it better helps eliminate the barriers for youth with lived expertise in accessing the support they require to thrive.

**WHAT WOULD HAVE HELPED YOU THE MOST DURING YOUR EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS/HOUSING INSECURITY?**

*"Housing first, but a mentor to teach me how to become self-sufficient, a person well versed in the broad services available and updated knowledge on how to access those services, ideally staying around and involved long enough to ensure stability and sustainability would have been very helpful as well." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

By listening and valuing to the voices of youth with lived expertise, more proactive and preventative solutions can be identified. Those who lived the experiences are the experts of their stories and as such, they know what would have helped them best. However, youth are undergoing development and require trustworthy, reliable, and healthy adults in their lives to help facilitate a positive experience of growth and development of life skills to support a successful transition into adulthood.

**A Way Home Kamloops**

# Light the Way Summit

**YOUTH HOMELESSNESS**  
Youth ages 13-27 experiencing unstable, unsafe, or inconsistent housing with or without parents, care givers, and/or support.

Still dependent on adult caregivers for safety & stability!

Youth should not be forced to:  
• Live independently...  
• Secure housing...  
While still developing!  
**STOP BLAME ... COVID-19**

for youth in/from care instability & isolation are not "UNPRECEDENTED" but multiplied by the pandemic.

**HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS**  
eg lacking a supportive family system due to intergenerational trauma, substance use  
eg GROOMING: adults set up a relationship to manipulate, abuse, & exploit youth  
eg LGBTQ2S+ phobia  
Extreme religious households  
No sense of self... HOW CAN I BE ME & BE SAFE?

**FOSTER CARE... AGING OUT...**  
in care forced to jump through hoops for basic needs vs learning self-sufficient life skills

**NEED for somewhere safe to come home to & at least 1 healthy supportive relationship MORE THAN EVER!**

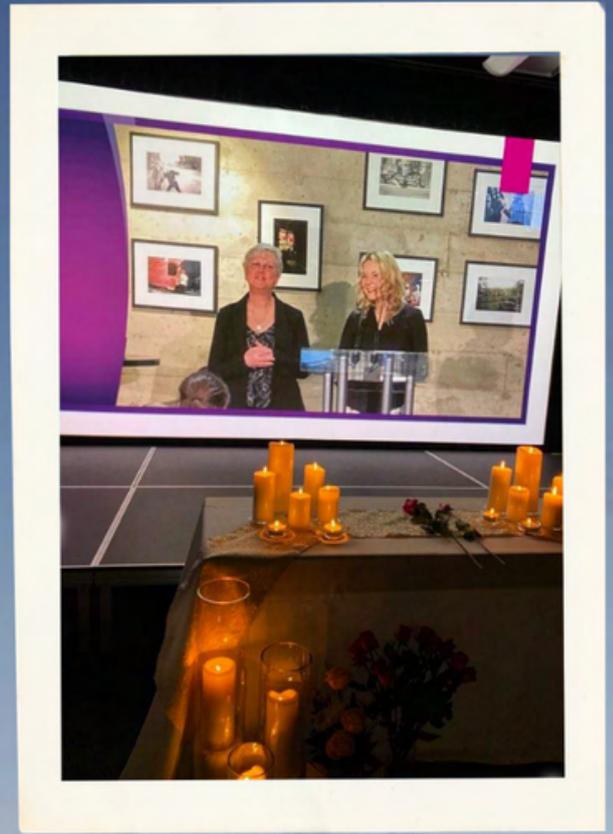
**TOXIC STRESS OVERLOAD OF ADVERSE EXPERIENCES...**  
Substance use is an escape from an overwhelming reality.  
It is easier to find a dead than the support need  
• calling the mental health  
• Results in a 911 call  
• Results in involvement Police / authority fig  
**MORE TRAUMA**

**TRIBUTE TO KATHERINE MCPARLAND**  
Katherine experienced homelessness as a youth & was dedicated to lifting up youth...  
With Katherine's LOVE we made it through...  
• homelessness  
• substance use  
• domestic violence  
**& I AM PROUD OF WHO I AM & HOPEFUL FOR WHAT I CAN BE...**

**READY ANGELS?**

19th birthday being pushed off a cliff...  
• AGE Extensions!  
• Bridge age  
• Specific services!  
• Meet youth where they are at!

*"I stand rooted in  
action, please stand  
with me"*



**#LightthewayhomeforKatherine**



## **SECTION FIVE**

### **PROVIDING PURPOSE AND OPPORTUNITY**



In this section of the report, we would like to summarize our learning and experiences. As an extra bonus, we created a post-event evaluation survey that was sent out to all attendees to provide feedback on their biggest takeaways. We received feedback from 9 attendees, which will be seen throughout this section and in the Appendices.

Before we delve into our personal experiences, it's important to explain why and how employment acts as both prevention and a means of exiting homelessness. For youth coming out of homelessness, employment is vital because it helps them find a purpose and provides the means to get by without resorting to survival tactics. Additionally, youth coming out of homelessness may need a sense of direction that employment opportunities could give. Strength-based programs that empower youth with lived expertise to stand in their truth, allows youth power and control over their decisions to become a thriving member of society.

Most youth start working at places that don't allow them to build their career and work on their goals. These places include fast food and retail, which can be detrimental to their mental health. By finding a job that youth are passionate about and gives hope for their future, you are able to create a greater sense of purpose. Work opportunities for youth with lived experience make them feel included, worthy and gives them opportunity for growth. Overall, having increased job opportunities for youth that are career and passion-focused is a key solution to preventing, reducing, and ending youth homelessness.

AWHK offers an employment and education focused Peer Navigation program that is youth-led and informed by lived expertise, to support youth in all stages of finding employment who may be with or without housing. It operates on a peer support model and aims to build youth capacity to sustain long-term housing stability. The program was developed and created by Kira, former Peer Navigator, in 2018 and has since expanded to include 2 Peer Navigator positions and 5 Youth Advisors positions.

Peer Navigators are youth (peers) with lived expertise that understand the challenges a youth at-risk of, previously, or currently experiencing homelessness may encounter. Their role is to help youth navigate complex systems and secure resources, while helping them meet their employment and educational goals.

By meeting youth where they are at, a Peer Navigator is able to help youth find build employment readiness skills, secure work, and can assist in getting into school, finding financial aid, and other supports. Working with youth on a one-to-one basis can help prepare youth for employment by developing their resumes and doing mock job interviews. All of this helps youth get farther away from re/experiencing homelessness.

Peer Navigators also act as mentors and are often the first point of contact for a youth seeking help. This is because youth are more comfortable connecting with a peer than adults, especially if they have been harmed by adults in authority positions before. A Peer Navigator can reach youth on a level that professionals without who the expertise from experiencing it themselves might not fully understand, which is unlike other experiences youth have described. When talking about homelessness or surrounding experiences it can be triggering and resurface trauma for youth. A Peer Navigator with lived expertise can help de-escalate those feelings where youth might be overwhelmed by using trauma-informed approaches and their lived expertise to make a meaningful connection. Peer Navigators meet youth where they're at, rather than forcing them into work, thus making the youth feel heard and accepted.

At the Preliminary Summit, we had a live Q&A segment where all the current Youth Advisors shared their experiences of working within the Labour Market Partnership and the Preliminary Summit project. Through our experience, we found education opportunities such as internships and leadership that are presented to youth with lived experience can help bridge the gap that many youth fall through.

### **Q1: WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE WORKING IN THIS EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM TO DEVELOP THE PRELIMINARY SUMMIT?**

Youth Advisors shared an overwhelmingly positive experience from participating and leading the development of this project. During the Q&A, experiences of gaining a greater sense of purpose and sense of belonging were echoed. Sentiments of feeling empowered and rebuilding of confidence in themselves were also heard. Angell (2021) expressed how working on this project was “empowering, [has] given me courage, made me feel like a strong independent woman rather than a vulnerable youth.” She added that working on this project “...brought me closer to myself and to youth from around the community. It has given me a sense of home, above all else” (Olsen, 2021).

“This project was kind of like a blessing I didn’t expect to get. It’s given me a network of people that are not only dedicated to the same causes and have gone through very similar experiences in life, but so many supports,” Bee (2021) shared, “It’s also allowed me to regain confidence that I had lost through a lot of experiences I had in life.”

The Youth Advisors agreed that their participation in this project was life changing and provided an opportunity for them to feel important in a work environment. As Daniel (2021) shared, "Your opinion matters and you being there is important, unlike other workplaces where you are replaceable." Mckenna (2021) added to this, "A purpose was formed for me."

Youth Advisors also expressed gratitude and appreciation in building strong relations with one another. "Not only do I get to bond with peers my age but also those with lived experience. I get to learn from them in a professional manner and also on a social level to see all the things they've overcome to be here," Mel (2021) shared "That gives me strength and hope for the future."

### **EVALUATION FEEDBACK:**

*"The power of peer support for youth - youth hearing from youth is very impactful!"  
- Anonymous*

Many Youth Advisors echoed feeling valued for who they are and their lived expertise which helped foster passion to help others. They also shared how the opportunity to have a platform where their voices are heard by adults in decision-making positions, further helped build confidence. Mel (2021) shared that "working on this project has given me a sense of responsibility and made me more passionate about working with other people and youth. Not just that, but more confident in my ability with public speaking and working with adults in places of power. It's given me a sense of a more level playing field." Bee (2021) shared similar thoughts. "It has made me eager to get into the workforce and make a difference. Seeing everyone around me just as passionate, or even more so, it lights a fire in me. It's just been a really amazing experience overall." Adding a voice to the discussion on equalization of power, Haley (2021) said "being able to see myself as an equal in the room with those in positions of power" provided her "strength and confidence in the work I do."

### **WHAT WORKED WELL TO HELP ELEVATE YOUR VOICE IN PLACES OF POWER OR DECISION MAKING?**

*"Having others who have had similar experiences as my own to better strengthen my voice. Also being real and voicing the nitty gritty of how the real world is. I believe atmosphere has a lot to do with it as well." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

Mckenna spoke to feelings of happiness and empowerment. "I'm constantly feeling motivated by my fellow peers and everyone around me. Without this program it would be hard to be happy in a job because that purpose would be lacking. I feel so empowered being here and I'm really grateful" (Smith, 2021).

The sentiment of this opportunity being unique from other work experiences as it was a job they looked forward to, one that provided them with happiness, was commonly expressed. Haley (2021) shared “I can see a focused and bright future for myself, especially with Katherine coming into my life and the way she, [Kira], and Dayna, and the employment program has been set up for us to succeed. For us to be able to learn skills, even if we make mistakes, and flourish and evolve those skills.”

## **Q2: WHAT SKILLS DID YOU DEVELOP FROM WORKING ON THIS PROJECT?**

The Youth Advisors highlighted skills that they had an opportunity to develop or refine from working on this project. Many of them spoke of learning effective communication, teamwork, and planning/organizational skills. Mel (2021) shared “I really like the team building skills I’ve learned, including several grounding techniques which is really good for mental health.” She also spoke to the development of time management, active listening, concise writing, and reported a personal improvement in executive functioning.

Haley (2021) spoke to her development of advocacy skills, effective communication, and planning skills. Daniel (2021) echoed around advocacy, specifically in the realm of public speaking and learning professionalism. Mel (2021) had shared a similar piece on professionalism, speaking to the opportunity to job shadow within a non-profit organization.

### **EVALUATION FEEDBACK:**

*“I was amazed by the knowledge, compassion and insight of the youth leaders. They were all such inspiring and eloquent speakers, who are making true change for the future of our youth.” - Anonymous*

## **WHAT ARE SOME SOLUTIONS TO FINDING STABLE WORK FOR YOUTH?**

*“Implementing programs aimed to help youth succeed in finding work and getting the necessary skills to start work.” - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

## **HOW DO YOU THINK SERVICES CAN BETTER HELP YOUTH IN FINDING WORK?**

*“Offer driving lessons to accommodate the severe class divide that emerges between youth who were privileged with driving instructions and youth who were deprived of such resources. Many jobs I want/require a driver's license, but I was never taught how to drive. Lessons are very expensive and only give you half the road time you need in one dose.”  
- Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

### **Q3: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CONTINUE TO FUND OR SUPPORT PROJECTS LIKE THESE THAT PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO YOUTH WITH LIVED EXPERTISE?**

The Youth Advisors passionately spoke to how opportunities such as these provide value and purpose to youth with lived expertise. Angell (2021) expressed how it is “vitaly important to have voices of each youth. It should be mandatory, to have youth’s voices heard.”

Sentiments around how projects like this one build confidence, empower, and provide youth with support systems they might not have had before. “My traumatic life experiences left permanent scars on my mental health. It’s hard to know where to start, but having projects like these allows youth to have a start line and a team to cheer them one with no longer fear of failure,” Bee (2021) shared. “We need these projects because it creates workers that are not only eager to help others but are unbiased and full of empathy.”

The Youth Advisors agreed that projects such as these “create real change and have a long-term impact, spread awareness, and [provide an opportunity for] discovery of skills or passions youth might not have been aware of having” (Hedch, 2021). Mckenna spoke to how this is just the beginning of their journey as Youth Advisors and imagines the future is limitless (Smith, 2021).

#### **EVALUATION FEEDBACK:**

*“The way in which the youth articulated the issues to professionals tasked with providing services and responsible for making systemic changes for young people was outstanding. Youth leadership is important and in order to have the right solutions youth engagement is key.” - Angela Cooke, BC Housing*

Haley (2021) added, “if youth feel like they have a sense of purpose and belonging, one that can provide them a career that makes them happy, it’s a big piece of homelessness prevention. We are the future generation and deserve to be set up for success not failure. Success includes happiness. If we aren’t happy in our workplaces, we aren’t successful, it doesn’t matter the money we’re making or the title we have.”

#### **WHAT GAPS ARE THERE TO FINDING STABLE WORK AS A YOUTH?**

*“The only jobs that seem to be available to youth are ones that are unsatisfactory.” - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

Daniel explained how job opportunities like this can teach youth their value. "Youth with lived expertise sometimes can't see their value because they feel like they've failed themselves or society. Jobs like these make youth feel valued, empowered, and that they can make a difference. It shows youth even though they've gone through hardships, their life is still half full not half empty" (Galbraith, 2021).

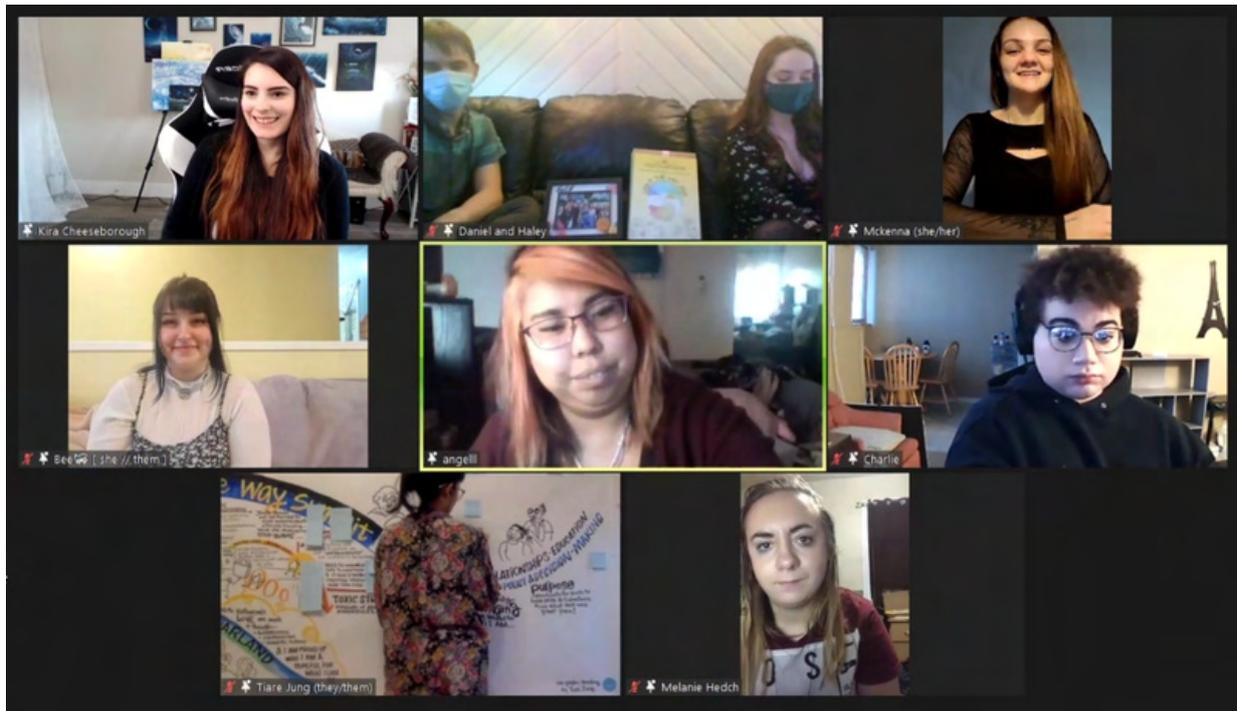
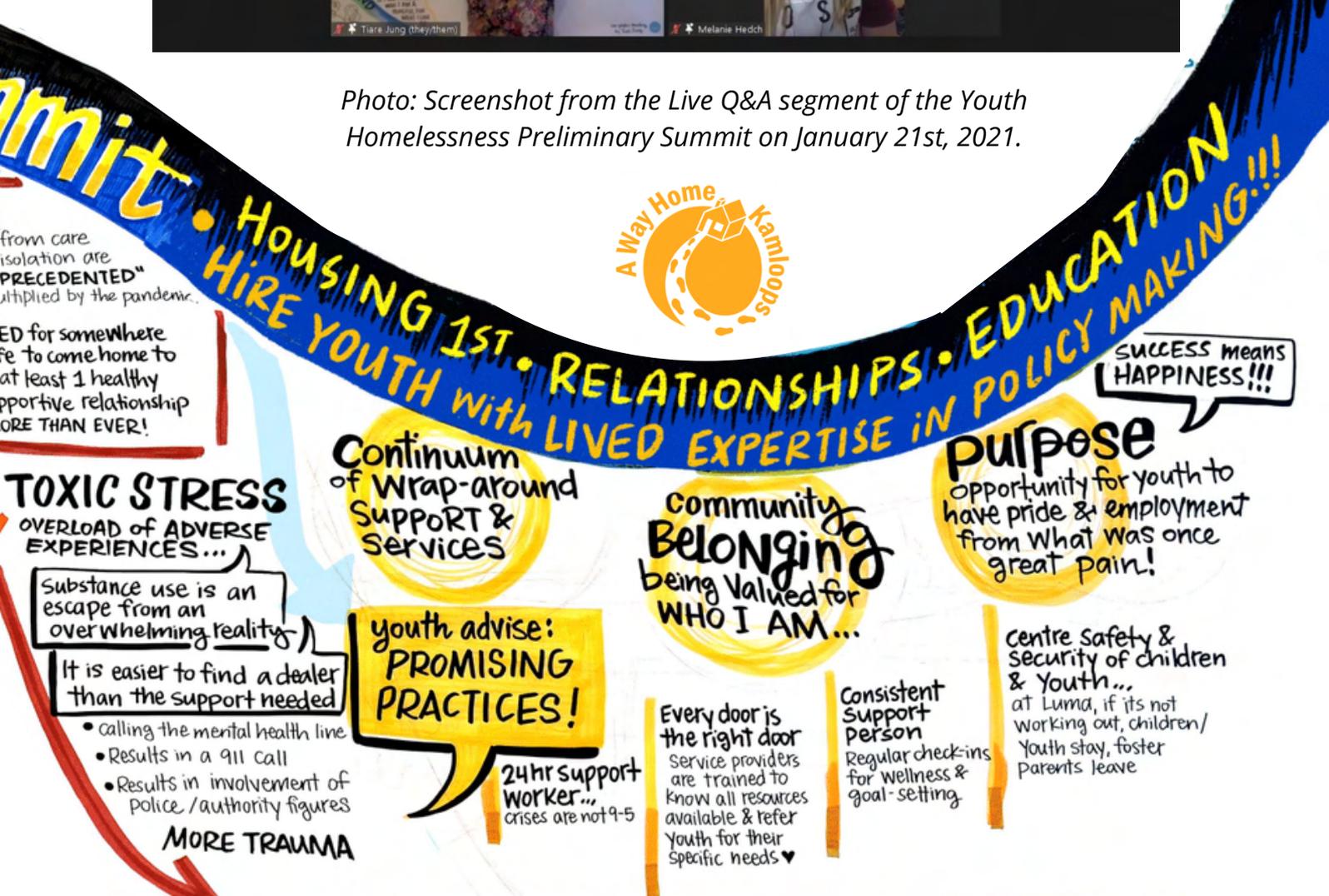


Photo: Screenshot from the Live Q&A segment of the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit on January 21st, 2021.







## SECTION SIX

### PROMISING PRACTICES IN HOUSING



In order to continue to improve on housing models for youth at risk, Youth Advisors spoke to the organizations and housing programs we thought were innovative, and leading the field in promising practices. This list is not exhaustive, as we recognize there are many more incredible initiatives or organizations that provide support to youth. In a future event, we would like to provide a thorough look into all the amazing programs and organizations that are available to youth.

A Promising Practice is **Youth First Care**, ensuring the focus is on the youth who are there, rather than the people who are employed. This builds on the concept of person-centered practices approaches, but particularly looking at the needs of youth.

#### ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS FOR THE SUCCESS OF YOUTH

Multiple stage housing helps meet youth where they are at. Below are some examples of different levels of housing for disadvantaged youth in British Columbia. In low or zero barrier housing youth are provided housing without needing to meet requirements that may not reflect where they are at, such as youth with substance dependency. The youth housing first model places housing as the top priority and acknowledges that growth can come after stable living.

An example of supportive housing is the **Safe Suites** program A Way Home Kamloops provides. This housing is a 24/7 staffed supportive housing for youth the most at-risk of experiencing homelessness. It operates from a harm reduction lens and youth first voices centred approach, to ensure each youth has a say in building this space as a home for themselves.

Safe Suites is a designated life skills program through the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Staff facilitate workshops to help youth build critical life skills that assist in meeting key developmental milestones, such as home maintenance, cooking, cleaning, plant/pet care, employment, and education. We know these life skills build a strong foundation for youth to sustain long-term housing in the future. The house creates a safe and respectful space for youth to learn and grow, with staff meeting them where they are at. Like similar programs, Safe Suites has an outreach worker that youth can utilize.

The **Youth Housing First Scattered Site** program is another step in the housing first continuum offered by A Way Home Kamloops. It's "housing that's there when you are ready for independence" (Sewap, 2021). If a youth is at this stage it has been determined that the youth has adequate life skills and can be successful with less supervision than a 24 hour staffed building. Youth have more freedom, but still have access to support workers and have a case manager to make sure they are well financially, physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

Both Safe Suites and the Youth Housing First Scattered Site program provide youth with wraparound supports, connection to peer support, and bridge connections for youth accessing community support.

*"Every situation is different because every youth's need is different. Youth may need more independent housing, like the Scattered housing, or they need more support like from Safe Suites, so the different elements of housing is really, really important."*  
- Moise Sewap

**The Village Transitional Housing** is affordable transition housing operated by **Chilliwack Community Services** that has 11 spaces set aside for youth at risk, or who are currently experiencing homelessness. There are also 22 units of housing reserved for adults. Youth can stay for up to two years in this housing. The village has good wraparound supports that complement their housing model, with Chilliwack Youth Community Services within the same building.

**Traverse**, funded through Fraser Health and operated by **Pacific Community Resources Society**, is a residential treatment program for youth ages 13-18. For youth to access this program, they must be connected to a community resource to be given a referral to the program.

**The Switchback House** is a combination of low and zero-barrier supportive housing for youth ages 16-24, operated by the **Cyrus Centre** in Chilliwack. It has 24/7 staff on-site and assists with mental health and learning basic life skills. Two beds are available for mothers. When a youth is housed they have access to counseling services.

**Imouto House** was created in 2011 by **Atira Women's Society**. Imouto (meaning 'little sister') House is a low and zero barrier housing for 16 young women, ages 16 to 24, at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Located in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, this housing provides 24/7 online on-site support.

There is a generational mentorship program where older women work with youth taking a relationship based, women-centered approach. The program practices harm

reduction, anti-violence, with a trauma informed approach. Additionally, there are 2 zero-barrier emergency beds meaning that there is no referral required, no interview, or paperwork needed to access. Imouto House is a promising practice that reimagines what emergency housing can look like.

**Lu'ma Native Housing Society** operates the **Aboriginal Child Village**, which is a housing program that offers 13 units of housing for Indigenous youth and 3 units to youth aging out of care. The units dedicated to youth aging out works in partnership with **Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society (VACFSS)**. They also offer the **Lu'ma Aboriginal Youth Mentorship Program** and a Youth Medicine Lodge. The CEO of Lu'ma Native Housing Society has 35+ years of experience in housing Indigenous individuals.

At Lu'ma Native Housing Society, Indigenous youth in foster care are situated with adult caregivers, though if a youth has an issue, the caregivers move rather than the youth. This prevents trauma from having to move from place to place, as youth may potentially face in a traditional foster care placement, which allows a sense of security.

## **WHAT PROGRAMS AND/OR SUPPORTS DO YOU FEEL ARE WORKING WELL TO HELP YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS?**

*"Directions Youth Services." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

**Directions Youth Services** is a division of **Family Services of Greater Vancouver**. They provide youth in crisis or experiencing homelessness under the age of 25 access to low barrier programs and services. They primarily support those impacted by abuse, neglect, substance use, or mental health challenges, but they are open to all youth.

*"BladeRunners was quite good with its broader focus on life skills rather than strictly employment." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

**BladeRunners** is an employment and life skills training program offered by the **John Howard Society of the Thompson Region**. They support youth ages 15-30 in a six week program to gain life-skills, such as goal-setting, planning, morals, motivation, self-esteem, communication skills, ethics and conflict-resolution, and employment training certificates (OFA Level1, Food Safe, Serving It Right, WHIMIS, etc.) that provide youth greater opportunity to be prepared and find employment.

*"Covenant House. There was a lot of staff, so there was always someone around. Rules were not overly restrictive. Good quality meals every day. Activities such as arts and crafts. We were allowed to live our lives, but there was support and guidance there if we needed it." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

**Covenant House Vancouver** serves at-risk youth experiencing homelessness between the ages of 16 and 24. They offer support to youth from diverse backgrounds (including Indigenous and/or LGBTQ2S+ youth) and experiences such as having fled physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, youth who have been kicked out of their homes, or have aged out of foster care. Their programs range from shelter supports, offering 63 beds to youth in crisis in their **Residential Crisis Program**, to outreach and wraparound drop-in services.



*Photo: Safe Suites program operated by A Way Home Kamloops Society*



*Pictured (left to right): Angell, Katherine, and Kira at the Safe Suites program launch, December 9th, 2019.*



***"The most important action our government can take to end youth homelessness is to listen to the youth and put "Youth First Voices First." Youth voice should be required within a provincial plan to end youth homelessness."***

**Katherine McParland**



# SECTION SEVEN

## "NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US"



The adage “nothing about us without us”, was made popular within the disability rights movement in the 1980s. It has been used by many movements to deliver messages of self-determination and empowerment. In *“From Marginalized To Magnified”*, it was reported participants at all youth forums strongly believed in it’s message (McParland, 2020). We too, believe in this. This section will delve into our key recommendations and solutions to ending and preventing youth homelessness, as informed by our lived expertise and the lived expertise of youth across BC, including respondents from our Youth Homelessness Survey.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### RECOMMENDATION ONE: SUPPORT YOUTH FIRST VOICES AND THEIR RIGHT TO CHOICE

When supporting youth, we recommend certain key values, specific approaches, and models to put into practice. One of the leading themes in this section is acknowledging a youth’s right to choose and respecting their autonomy. Meeting youth where they are at can express itself in many ways, such as youth housing first, harm reduction, anti-oppressive, anti-colonial, and strengths-based practices that are inclusive to diverse abilities, and youth who identify as LGBTQ2S+, Indigenous, and/or are young parents.

### RECOMMENDATION TWO: HELP YOUTH IN FINDING PURPOSE AND BELONGING

We know a significant approach to preventing and ending youth homelessness is ensuring youth have a sense of purpose and belonging. By allowing us to stand in our truth and find purpose in our most difficult experiences we are empowered to make a difference in our lives as well as the ones around us. We recommend that wraparound supports provided must be able to assist youth in pursuing, achieving, or maintaining a sense of purpose and belonging.

### **RECOMMENDATION THREE: INCREASE YOUTH-SPECIFIC HOUSING BY USING YOUTH HOUSING FIRST MODELS**

We recommend increasing youth-specific housing that fosters growth and capacity building towards self-reliance and wellness. The Youth Housing First model is imperative to providing youth safety, stability, and sustainability that assures a high quality of life. For youth, housing should supply basic necessities, essential health needs, and access to transitional supports that empower a youth to successfully develop independence. Youth should not have to make a choice between housing or abstinence, especially if substance use is a way of coping.

### **RECOMMENDATION FOUR: PROVIDE YOUTH A CONTINUUM OF YOUTH HOUSING OPTIONS**

We recommend providing diverse housing options to support youth's intrinsic value and unique identity in their self-growth. Having multiple environments built on the understanding of youth's diversity, honors their right to choose a place of well-being. We highlighted the need for a continuum of housing options by listing key types of youth-specific housing, which includes transitional, 24/7 supportive, pet-friendly, affordable, and youth-friendly rental housing options.

### **RECOMMENDATION FIVE: PURSUE RECONCILIATION BY SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND THEIR YOUTH**

We recommend the active pursuit of reconciliation by supporting Indigenous communities' capacity to provide and prioritize housing for Indigenous youth. Because of historical and ongoing colonization, Indigenous youth are over-represented in the government foster system and disproportionately experience homelessness. Indigenous Youth should be supported in reconnecting with their community, culture, spirituality, heritage, language, and the land. As Jesse Thistle's (2017) definition of Indigenous Homelessness identifies, "a loss of any of these is a form of homelessness".

### **RECOMMENDATION SIX: INCREASE YOUTH-SPECIFIC AND YOUTH-ONLY GOVERNMENT FUNDED HOUSING**

We recommend an increase in youth-specific and youth-only government funded housing that keeps diversity and inclusion in mind. This includes increasing funding for youth-specific housing programs and funding to support youth experiencing homelessness during COVID-19.

### **RECOMMENDATION SEVEN: NO YOUTH AGES OUT OF CARE WITHOUT SAFE, APPROPRIATE, & STABLE HOUSING WITH AFTER-CARE SUPPORTS**

The experience of aging out of foster care is a huge transition for youth, as many youth with family privilege remain living at home and are given support years beyond the age of 19. Youth in government care should be supported to begin transition planning years before aging out and automatically receive universal and comprehensive after-care supports to help ensure the success of their transition. We recommend the implementation of a policy that states no youth ages out of foster care before safe, stable, appropriate housing and after-care supports are in place, even if this means extending their transition.

### **RECOMMENDATION EIGHT: GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO BECOME AND ACT AS FAMILY TO YOUTH IN CARE**

Youth in government care often do not have supportive or positive relationships with family and/or caregivers, resulting in a lack of family privilege. The Ministry of Children and Family Development should act as a youth's parental guardian while all other ministries should act as 'Aunties and Uncles'. We recommend implementing a cross-ministry team requiring membership from all government ministries, to provide youth in care with coordinated, cross-ministry supports and active collaboration with health authorities and Delegated Aboriginal Agencies to recreate the experience of having a family to meet youth's needs. We also recommend that this team have an advisory council of youth with lived expertise of homelessness and the foster care system to lead and inform how this team responds to the need of youth in and from care.

### **RECOMMENDATION NINE: PROVIDE YOUTH DEPENDABLE AND CONSISTENT SUPPORT WHILE IN CARE**

It is vital for youth in government care to be made aware of and supported in accessing all resources they are eligible for shared by their social worker. Youth deserve transparent and reliable support from the Ministry of Children and Family Development, where they are told all resources they may be eligible for instead of having to learn for themselves. We recommend that youth in government care are given thorough information and support in accessing, reapplying, and sustaining resources they are eligible to receive by frontline staff, to ensure their wellness, safety, and successful development.

### **RECOMMENDATION TEN: PERMANENT IMPLEMENTATION OF COVID-19 EMERGENCY MEASURES FOR YOUTH IN AND FROM CARE**

Youth in and from care are the most at-risk of homelessness during COVID-19. The Temporary COVID-19 Emergency Measures (Housing Agreement and Supports Agreement) and the low-barrier Agreement with Young Adults program has provided increased accessibility for youth from government care to critical services that help prevent homelessness during the pandemic. We recommend the permanent implementation of these supports, to further prevent youth from aging out of government care into the “superhighway to homelessness.”

### **RECOMMENDATION ELEVEN: YOUTH FIRST WRAPAROUND SERVICES**

Youth need supports that consider their diverse backgrounds, cultures, and identities. Services that meet youth where they are at and provide holistic wellness support and/or life skills development are crucial to preventing and exiting homelessness. We recommend collaborative community approaches to respond to the needs of youth by providing a continuum of wraparound services, options with 24/7 access, and life skills development to ensure stability and that no youth has to choose between food, education, or housing.

### **RECOMMENDATION TWELVE: PEER SUPPORT, YOUTH TO YOUTH**

Youth with lived expertise have often experienced harm from adult or authoritative figures, which impacts their development. We recommend the use of peer support models to connect youth with peer mentors that can facilitate the development of critical life skills and bridge the gap to accessing and/or navigating education and employment opportunities.

### **RECOMMENDATION THIRTEEN: INCREASE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS FOR YOUTH WITH LIVED EXPERTISE**

Youth often encounter barriers in their educational journeys from mental health concerns. The current academic models regularly work against those with lived expertise, creating greater difficulty in successful completion of studies. We recommend greater mental health support for youth with lived expertise as they are exploring and while in education.

## RECOMMENDATION FOURTEEN: PROVIDE MEANINGFUL JOBS FOR YOUTH WITH LIVED EXPERTISE

Youth with lived expertise find securing employment to be difficult, especially when having ongoing experiences of mental health concerns, substance use, and/or homelessness. We know that employment that values youth with lived expertise helps build a greater sense of purpose and youth are generally happier and healthier. We recommend increased employment opportunities for youth with lived expertise, that are career focused, build employment skills, pay a livable wage, do not have extraneous requirements, and provide a sense of purpose.

## SPECIFIC APPROACHES, VALUES, OR MODELS FOR HOUSING

RECOMMENDATIONS ONE - SIX

We recommended that the specific approaches, values or models that should be used in youth housing moving forward included *youth housing first*, which as said by Mckenna (2021) is “100% imperative and meeting youth where they're at.” Diverse housing options are crucial, as “one option isn’t much of a choice” (Smith, 2021), financially accessible, and having a healthy relationship between youth and landlords.

### HOW DO YOU THINK SERVICES CAN BETTER HELP YOUTH IN FINDING WORK?

*“A housing first model. It's impossible to find work while homeless and using drugs.”*  
- Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent

Flexible housing has a continuum of options that vary from 24 hour housing, low/ to independent, subsidized housing. Specialized housing is housing that is pet friendly, accessible to persons with disabilities, LGBTQ2S+ friendly, etc. Youth who are neurodiverse or youth with disabilities, may have more intricate needs than those who are neurotypical. A female-only building would provide stability for young mothers, youth coming out of trauma or fleeing domestic violence. Housing that works from a harm reduction lens helps people that are working on substance use. Another consideration is ensuring youth have a healthy landlord-tenant relationship, either in a program housing, government-funded buildings, or in market housing. Having someone or somewhere that has the youth’s best interest in mind is important to supporting their development and successful growth.

**UPLIFT YOUTH with LIVED EXPERTISE**

## **HOW SHOULD YOUTH HOMELESSNESS BE PREVENTED?**

*"We need to reach out to youth who are struggling. When I was struggling, more and more, no one ever really reached out to me to find out why. The school counselors never made any meetings with me, no community services were aware of my situation. I feel as though I was invisible, but I don't think I was at all, rather, I think our community very often deliberately ignores these issues."*

*- Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

Youth in the LGBTQ2s+ community experience discrimination and may find themselves in unsafe environments. Their home may no longer be an option when their caretakers do not agree with their identity. Holding safe spaces and providing services catered towards their needs allows healing and acceptance. Having these options helps prevent further traumatic experiences for youth at risk. Providing transitional housing and counselling supports would allow youth in these vulnerable situations to ease into their new routine and lifestyle, while lessening the (opportunity/chance/possibility) to re-experience homelessness.

There should be more government funded housing options and a place that any youth can go that has a continuum from youth that have complex needs to those that are ready to live independently. The following below is just some further examples of housing and supports we believe to be valuable in supporting youth:

- 1.** Increased access to low barrier to no barrier and transitional housing
- 2.** Improved access for people with diverse abilities
- 3.** Centers for women, young mothers, and women fleeing domestic violence
- 4.** Increased housing options for youth who identify as LGBTQ2S+
- 5.** Access to Counselling for every youth, having no waitlists
- 6.** Increased funding for Indigenous youth housing and wraparound programs

## **WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SOLUTION TO PREVENT AND END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN A COVID-19 RECOVERY PLAN?**

*"Update our ways of staying in close touch with our youth, incorporating new social media tech to maintain lines of communication."* - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent

*"Give youth financial assistance so they could rent a home. Instead of sleeping on the streets."* - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent

*"I think everyone should be entitled to more money than what has been given. More low income housing needs to be placed so that instead of spending more than half your money on rent you can live properly."* - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent

*"Provide free housing for homeless youth with a focus on keeping them close to the supports they rely on, such as community services or family (whether biological or "found family")." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent, Victoria*

## SOLUTIONS FOR YOUTH IN AND FROM GOVERNMENT CARE

### RECOMMENDATIONS SEVEN - TEN

At the Preliminary Summit, Mckenna (2021) spoke to the Seven Pillars of Support, as outlined in RCY's 2014 report "On Their Own: Examining the Needs of B.C. Youth As They Leave Government Care". Youth's needs are categorized into 'seven pillars'; what they require to ensure the best chance of success in life after aging out of care. Social workers and service providers supporting youth in care, can essentially use this as a checklist to secure on their end that they have done a diligent job at ensuring that success. We've summarized these needs, which build a foundation for a youth leaving care, below (Representative for Children and Youth, 2014):

- 1)** Forming secure relationships for youth aging out of care creates a support network. If a youth has at least one stable relationship, a connection to others can be formed.
- 2)** A youth shouldn't have to dwell on the thought of acquiring enough income for the month, before completing their vital education years, which may have been impacted and/or incomplete due to traumas a youth has faced.
- 3)** Youth are at risk of homelessness after aging out of care, to reduce this risk youth need access to safe and stable housing before aging out, and should not before they have acquired this.
- 4)** A majority of youth are born into family privilege - youth in care require the same life skills that those who are not in care receive.
- 5)** Youth aging out of care are gaining an understanding of who they are, they need to be supported while finding themselves. This includes supports for sexual identity and cultural connection.
- 6)** Providing opportunities for youth's voices to be heard, RCY shares the same value Katherine does: to have youth with lived expertise part of the leadership development and at the decision making table and empowering their voice.
- 7)** The need for continued mental health services after a youth ages out of care is critical when gaining an understanding of the impacts one or more trauma may have on an individual. Emotional healing is a priority.

A youth in care knowing their rights is not common, transparency between government care and the individuals in care is needed. Youth may face a non-stop struggle trying to navigate what services are available to them, if there is advocacy and guidance offered for youth, this problem could be solved. This is especially needed for youth who have historically been let down by adult figures in their lives, as they have an increased lack of trust in adults and the government system. They do not depend on anyone but themselves. "While MCFD takes on the role of a guardian to a youth, the surrounding ministries need to act as aunties and uncles" (Mckenna, 2021; McParland, 2020).

## **WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTION THE BC GOVERNMENT CAN TAKE TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS?**

*"Make Agreements with Young Adults for all youth who age out of care. Not only for those who aged out on specific care statuses or for youth who attend school."  
- Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

We believe that if a higher team composed of cross-ministry leaders were to be implemented, that is led and informed by youth with lived expertise, they could make the higher level decisions needed for supporting youth in and from care, in a much more timely manner. Additionally, if this team could work alongside health authorities and Delegated Aboriginal Agencies they could bridge tremendous gaps in accessing health services for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth alike. This work must be informed and led by an advisory council of youth with lived expertise of homelessness and the foster care system, otherwise it will just be adults making decisions on behalf of youth without knowing directly from them if they will work. As we support, there should be "nothing about us without us."

Not every youth has the transition planning meeting before they age out of care. We need to change this to ensure youth are being supported well in advance - years even - to be prepared to transition from government care. Additionally, there is great significance in reducing pathways to homelessness by ensuring youth encounter little to no barriers in accessing support. By bridging the gap for youth aging out of care, we can prevent the "superhighway into homelessness" (McParland, 2020).

## **A CONTINUUM OF COMMUNITY SUPPORTS RECOMMENDATIONS ELEVEN - FOURTEEN**

Katherine's goal was to have youth with lived expertise be part of the leadership development and at the decision making table and empowering their voice. "Nothing about us without us." Giving youth who have persevered through adverse challenges, the opportunity to speak and share their stories has aided in "creating a sense of belonging - empowering those youth to have pride in their lived expertise and

valuing it - and giving them a sense of community and a sense of belonging like Katherine did for so many of us" (Hodgkinson, 2021). This project is just an example of empowering the experiences of youth with lived expertise.

Not having collaboration between organizations could be detrimental to a youth's chance at overcoming adversities. If someone walks into an organization, but does not meet the eligibility requirements, having the knowledge of where to direct the person to go for the right service can provide the opportunity to change their path in life. This solution has already been demonstrated in Chilliwack, BC - a program called **'every door is the right door'** will help connect service providers in the area, and the ones in need of them.

### WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO GET INFORMATION ON SERVICES OUT TO YOUTH?

*"I think if it's at a school maybe holding a presentation, teaching the youth workers at the school the resources that are available (mine only knew of the Surrey youth hub). Social media is flourishing and in a very media oriented time i think broadcasting all over social media is good. I would also say places where youth can be found. Posters on bus stops, in libraries, bus hubs, the mall." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

*"Outreach teams and fliers in drop in spaces." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

*"Incorporate meme's into your social media marketing across Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, TikTok, (stay updated on how the youth are communicating), meet your audience in their space using their language to address their needs. Use creative youth voices to communicate with youth, empower their creativity and expertise in their own subcultures which are grabbed by different things." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

Additionally, youth would benefit from a 24 hour support worker, someone they can call and reach out to after hours. When you consider that many youth attend school, relying on a 9 to 5 work schedule becomes less sustainable. Most school days do not end until 3 or 4 pm which means the youth may have less time to connect with a worker. A youth may find themselves having to make difficult decisions to keep face with service workers, teachers or employers. The youth may have to prioritize education over their well-being, or their well-being over their education. Having after hours or 24/7 in-person supports available with coordination between different community services would prevent these choices from having to occur.

### IF YOU COULD BUILD A DREAM PROGRAM BASED ON WHAT YOU NEED, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

*"Something with outreach and housing first. Supporting youth to be housed before expecting them to be ready to quit drugs." - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent*

There is a need for wait times to be cut down, or eliminated entirely, along with streamlining of services. This means greater funding should be allocated to community services by the provincial government as well as more government operated programs to help take the burden off of community organizations.

### **WHAT WOULD HAVE HELPED YOU SECURE HOUSING?**

*"Financial assistance changes to Income Assistance and Persons With Disabilities, primarily adjustments to the shelter portion that take into account the reality of the modern housing market (it's very hard to find rent for a mere \$350 or so dollars a month)."*  
- Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent

Youth have expressed throughout this report the importance of peer support. Youth who can connect with other like-minded youth in a safe way can build healthy relationships. Additionally, youth feel more comfortable and safe to approach and share their stories with peer support workers, often making them a preferred first point of contact.

### **WHAT ARE SOME SOLUTIONS TO FINDING STABLE WORK FOR YOUTH?**

*"Mentorship programs that lead to employment with community role models would be a valuable path to success."* - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent

### **WHAT PROGRAMS AND/OR SUPPORTS DO YOU FEEL ARE WORKING WELL TO HELP YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS?**

*"I think peer support is great, as well as outreach. I think outreach is such a great way to connect with youth who are really street entrenched because outreach is a way to reach youth who normally can't be reached."* - Youth Homelessness Survey Respondent



Photo: post-event team dinner with Youth Advisors, January 21st, 2021



# CONCLUSION

## FOR THE FUTURE, WE WILL "LIGHT THE WAY"

As Katherine McParland (2020) stated, "Lived experience must be recognized as lived expertise. This is the silver lining of youth homelessness and why lived expertise must be at the center of all policy and program development. This provides opportunities for youth to find purpose in their most difficult experiences by creating systemic change and better opportunities for other youth by helping the system learn and change"

We believe the voices and solutions from youth with lived expertise should be informing and leading the changes needed to address, prevent, and end youth homelessness in B.C. Though all of the above recommendations will help bridge gaps and prevent youth from experiencing homelessness, we have a greater ask.

# CALL TO ACTION

**WE CALL TO ACTION, THE GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA AND ALL GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES TO SUPPORT AND COLLABORATIVELY PARTICIPATE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROVINCIAL PLAN TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS.**

**A PLAN THAT IS INFORMED BY YOUTH WITH LIVED EXPERTISE AND IMPLEMENTS THE ABOVE RECOMMENDATIONS AS WELL AS THE SOLUTIONS PRESENTED IN KATHERINE MCPARLAND'S 2020 REPORT, "FROM MARGINALIZED TO MAGNIFIED: YOUTH HOMELESSNESS SOLUTIONS FROM THOSE WITH LIVED EXPERTISE."**





# APPENDICES

## DEFINITIONS

### **BC Coalition to End Youth Homelessness (BCCEYH)**

Founded in 2017 by Katherine McParland and Fred Ford, the BCCEYH sought to bring together service providers, youth with lived expertise, and government to create collaborative solutions to address, ending, and preventing youth homelessness in BC. Today, the BCCEYH has membership of over 40 youth-serving organizations, Indigenous leadership, and youth with lived expertise.

### **Family Privilege**

The benefits, mostly invisible, that come from membership in a stable family (Seita, 2001). Affords a privilege to be able to easily access housing for longer periods of time by living at home, financial support (education, rent, etc.), connections to employment, life skills development, etc.

### **Foster System, Life Promotion, Opioid Dialogue, Harm Reduction, and Homelessness (FLOH)**

FLOH was a youth-led project with over 20 youth (ages 14 to 24) across 4 communities in BC's Fraser-Salish/Fraser Health region (Tri-Cities, Abbotsford, Mission, Chilliwack). While not limited to youth with experience in the foster system, more than half of the youth so far involved had direct involvement with the system, and the rest have been strongly affected by the system through family and friends. They focused on raising awareness and reducing stigma around youth concerns by facilitating conferences, workshops and forums.

### **Harm Reduction**

The practice of minimizing or reducing the risks of harm associated with substance use, unsafe sex, and/or negative emotional, physical, spiritual, and social determinants of health by meeting people where they're at.

### **Lived Expertise**

Those with lived experience are the experts of their stories and experiences, thus having the expertise to know how best to respond to these experiences. Those who have not lived these experiences have not had to learn to survive, thus do not have the knowledge to know how to navigate or overcome resulting barriers or impacts.

### **Survival Rape**

The act of trading sexual favours for temporary (unsafe) housing, food, or substances. This act is always non-consensual, as 'consent' is forced due to lack of choice or options for better or safer alternatives.

### **Survival Substance Use**

Survival Substance Use is a term used when a youth experiencing homelessness uses substances to either stay warm or awake or to treat an illness, whether it be physical or mental. For many it can be to "numb" pain and get through each day.

# APPENDICES

## DEFINITIONS

### **Wet Housing**

A type of low or zero barrier housing that does not require a person to be abstinent or clean from substances to access or maintain residence in the housing or program.

### **Youth Against Youth Homelessness (YAYH)**

Originally started as a group of 12 youth leaders with lived expertise that help shape and drive the development of A Way Home Kamloops. YAYH evolved from volunteer-based support to paid employment opportunities through the Peer Navigation program and the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit. Youth with lived expertise have been driving the local organization and provincial advocacy since the grassroots beginnings to now. YAYH is known to be the Heart of A Way Home Kamloops.

### **Youth Against Youth Homelessness BC (YAYH BC)**

The 15 youth leaders who helped Katherine McParland in the development of her February 2020 report, "From Marginalized To Magnified: Youth Homelessness Solutions From Those With Lived Expertise". Supported by Katherine, each youth leader went back to their communities to host youth forums to have youth from their communities voices heard. These youth leaders decided to take on the name YAYH BC in recognition of work done by the local YAYH group in Kamloops.

### **Youth First Care**

A youth-focused person-centered approach to providing care and support.

### **Youth Homelessness**

A youth between the ages 13-27 experiencing unstable, unsafe, inappropriate, unsuitable, or inconsistent housing with or without parents, caregivers and/or support. This definition was created through our work in developing the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit.

### **Youth Housing First**

Youth Housing First is a youth-centered Housing First model to practice, which values providing housing to youth first and then all other supports will follow. Many Youth Housing First programs in BC empower and engage youth with lived expertise to help shape the programs to best fit youth's needs.

# APPENDICES

## PRELIMINARY SUMMIT EVALUATION FEEDBACK

Overall Satisfaction Score

**9.22/10**

Top 5 Topics Asked To Explore In More Detail:

**Mental Health, Substance Use, Indigenous Perspectives,  
Education, Foster Care/Aging Out**

### ***What did you enjoy or appreciate the most from our event?***

*"The stories shared from the youth." - Cori Coutts, Knappett Projects Inc.*

*"The skills of the youth presenters." - Annie Smith, McCreary Centre Society*

*"I very much enjoyed the panels that were pre-recorded and hearing from the youth themselves. Such powerful words of wisdom." - Jessy Neal, Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks*

*"I enjoyed the whole summit and it was one of the most authentic summits that I have participated in that was facilitated by young people." - Angela Cooke, BC Housing*

*"Hearing all the good suggestions of how to better support youth in care." - Cheylene, McCreary Centre Society*

*"It was great hearing all the workers' opinions on how working with AWHK changed their lives for the better." - Eric, McCreary Centre Society*

*"Listening to the youths suggestions on helping youth in our communities." - Anonymous, Hollyburn Family Services Society*

### ***What was the most impactful learning or takeaway from this event for you?***

*"To remove "the stigma of youth in care" teaching them the skills to believe in themselves." - Cori Coutts*

*"What I took away from the summit is that if we are truly dedicated to making a difference in the lives of young people aging out of care, then we need to demonstrate it with real tangible resources to make the transition as successful and as sustainable as possible. As professionals we need to support every aspect the youths journey from the care system as we would if the teenagers were our own family." - Angela Cooke*

*"What a small committed group can do together." - Annie Smith*

*"Understanding that Katherine meant a lot to the people working at A Way Home Kamloops." - Eric*

*"Learning about the definitions of youth and adult homelessness and how the definitions had been very similar when there are dramatic differences." - Anonymous, Hollyburn Family Services Society*

# APPENDICES

## PRELIMINARY SUMMIT EVALUATION FEEDBACK

### **What would you like us to explore at our future "Light The Way" Youth Homelessness Conference?**

*"I would like the participants to really see through lived experience and supplemented by hard facts and data the real emotional, physical and financial impacts of not having a robust system." - Angela Cooke*

*"Online engagement during COVID and beyond." - Annie Smith*

*"Tips to work with community to create more youth housing communities." - Jessy Neal*

*"Possibly finding a way to support youth who are aging out of care." - Anonymous*

*"What kind of resources are available and what resources do we need more of?" - Cheylene*

*"More ways youth want to end homelessness." - Anonymous, Hollyburn Family Services Society*

### **How has your opinions of youth engagement/youth leadership changed, if at all?**

*"It's important for us to listen and learn from the youth who are in need of our help. You can be the change." - Cori Coutts*

*"No change but a great reminder of the benefits of youth engagement/leadership." - Annie Smith*

*"It has reinforced the need for more conversations with youth who have lived experience, and allowing them to become leaders for one another." - Anonymous*

*"Reminded me of the work that I used to do as a young person as well as the power of thoughts, strategies and ideas coming from young people." - Jessy Neal*

*"No, I've been doing advocacy for 9 years now and the organization's I'm apart of all believe in the power of youth's voices and input." - Cheylene*

*"By developing a deeper understanding of youth in care becoming homeless." - Anonymous, Hollyburn Family Services Society*

### **What are you going to do to carry on Katherine McParland's legacy and work?**

*"I will carry on trying to help find a solution to help the youth who are aging out of care." - Cori Coutts*

*"Everything in my power to increase youth access to safe, affordable and appropriate housing with the supports young people need to sustain a tenancy and to be successful in life." - Angela Cooke*

*"All I can do to support [redacted] and address the superhighway to homelessness." - Annie Smith*

*"Be a supporter and facilitator of youth leadership and any programs, funding, initiatives that support youth - they are our future." - Anonymous*

*"Anything I can do to help the cause." - Jessy Neal*

*"I'll contribute as much as possible toward ending youth homelessness." - Eric*

*"The youth knows what's best for their situations and we still have much to learn from them." - Anonymous, Hollyburn Family Services Society*

# APPENDICES

## "LIGHT THE WAY" YOUTH HOMELESSNESS SURVEY RESPONSES

### Survey Participants: 6

In late-summer 2020, we wanted to capture additional voices of youth with lived expertise across the province to be included in this report. At that time, we were still working towards a larger in-person conference that would be bringing together youth from across the province. When we shifted to the Youth Homelessness Preliminary Summit our focus changed to celebrating the local youth leaders in their work and as such, we no longer were promoting this survey. However, we still wished to honour the contributions and voices of those provincial youth who already had contributed through the survey. For our future conference, we hope to fulfil our original mission in bringing together youth across BC and amplifying their voices on stage in front of decision-makers.

Question	Responses	#	Other
Age	19-21	2	
	22-24	1	
	25 and Older	3	
Community	Surrey	1	
	Burnaby	1	
	Vancouver	1	
	Kamloops	1	
	Victoria	1	
	Kelowna	1	
Currently in School	Yes	4	
	No	2	

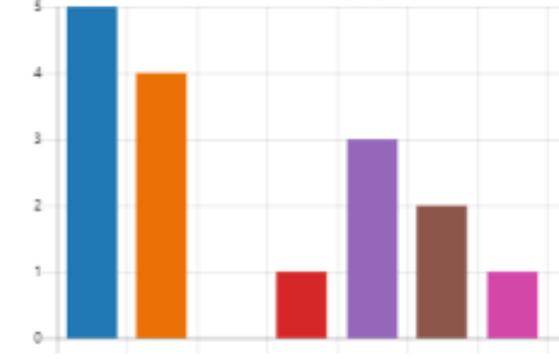
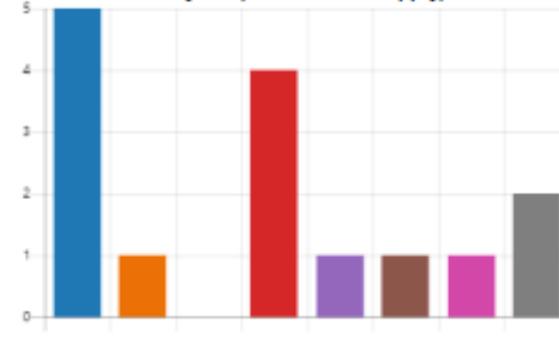
# APPENDICES

## "LIGHT THE WAY" YOUTH HOMELESSNESS SURVEY RESPONSES

Gender Identity	Female	3	
	Male	1	
	Transgender	1	
	Non-Binary	2	
	Other: "Agender"	1	
LGBTQ2S+	Yes	4	
	No	2	
	Don't Know	0	
Indigenous Identity	First Nation	0	
	Métis	2	
	Inuit	0	
	Don't Know Heritage	1	
	Other: "I identify as a multi-cultural mix, which does include Indigenous origins."	1	
Do you identify as belonging to a Racialized Community (Hispanic, Latino/a, Asian, African American, etc.)?	Yes	1	East Asian
	No	5	
Are you currently Homeless or Experiencing Housing Insecurity	Yes	0	
	No	6	
What Age Did You First Experience Homelessness?	11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 23	6	
Have you ever felt represented at a place of power or decision making, as a youth with lived expertise?	Yes	1	
	No	5	

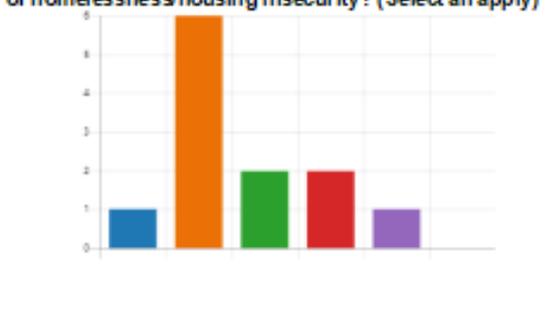
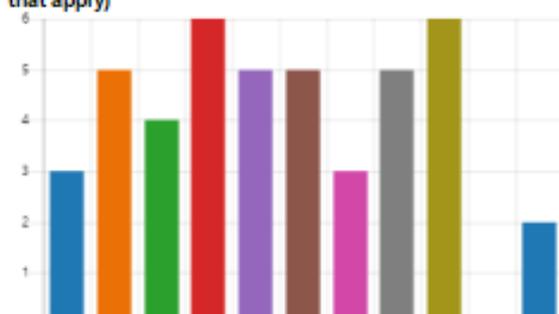
# APPENDICES

## "LIGHT THE WAY" YOUTH HOMELESSNESS SURVEY RESPONSES

Were you aware of supports in your community to help when you were experiencing homelessness?	Yes	2	
	No	4	
What forms of homelessness/housing insecurity have you experienced? (Select all that apply) 	Couch surfing (temporarily staying at someone's else's place)	5	
	Sleeping outside (streets, empty buildings, parks, beaches, etc.)	4	
	Living in a vehicle	0	
	Living in a hotel/motel	1	
	Staying at a shelter	3	
	Camping (tents)	2	
	Exchanging sexual acts for housing (survival sex/rape)	1	
	Based on your lived expertise of homelessness/housing insecurity, which of the following housing options would be most useful to you? (Select all that apply) 	Youth-Specific Supportive Housing	6
Recovery-Based Housing		1	
My own housing (lease in my name) with no supports		0	
My Own Housing in Community with Supports		4	
Living with Peers as Roommates		1	
Support to Return to Family Home		1	
An Appropriate Foster Home		1	
Other: "Wet housing or housing where I could use drugs. I wasn't ready to quit hard drugs but still needed a place to stay so I didn't engage in risky activities like survival sex."		1	

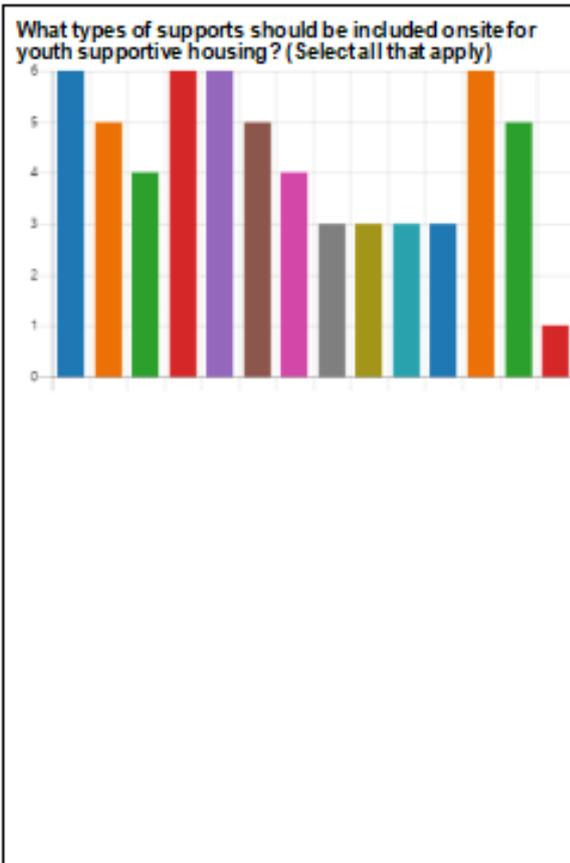
# APPENDICES

## "LIGHT THE WAY" YOUTH HOMELESSNESS SURVEY RESPONSES

<p>Which of the following issues led to your first experience of homelessness/housing insecurity? (Select all apply)</p> 	Aging Out of Foster Care	1	
	Unsafe Family Home (ie. abuse, conflict)	6	
	Inappropriate or Unsafe Foster Home Placements	2	
	Addictions or Mental Health	2	
	Not eligible for Youth Agreement or other income supports (income assistance, disability, etc.)	1	
<p>What are the most important types of supports that government should help homeless youth with? (Check all that apply)</p> 	Getting ID (ex. Birth certificate, picture ID, etc.)	3	
	Getting on Income Assistance	5	
	Getting disability services	4	
	Accessing detox or rehab for substance use	6	
	Getting mental health supports	5	
	Getting mental health supports	5	
	Accessing employment services	3	
	Accessing education	5	
	Counselling	6	
	Skip Question/Does Not Apply	0	
	Other: "I also strongly believe in having a peer mentor."	1	
	Other: "Outreach."	1	

# APPENDICES

## "LIGHT THE WAY" YOUTH HOMELESSNESS SURVEY RESPONSES



Life Skills	6	
Mental Health	5	
Recreation	4	
Social Activities	6	
Drop-In Support	6	
Employment	5	
Education	4	
Conflict Resolution	3	
Group Workshops	3	
Self-Help	3	
Wellness Activities	3	
Mentors	6	
Youth-Driven NA/AA	5	
Other: "Access to donated items such as clothing and household goods, financial help/guidance, nutritionist."	1	

What types of employment support do youth need?

\* There was an error with this question in the survey where participants could not select more than one answer. As such, this question did not accurately capture the potential feedback it could have.

One participant did add in a qualitative question afterwards the following:

"For question 23 I could not pick more than 1 so I wanted to quickly say that ALL of them should be implemented. A lot of youth that are seeking work do not have the proper training or even have any training. this can lead to no job opportunity for youth as they do not have the skills the work is looking for."

Building/Updating my resume	0	
Practice with interviewing	0	
Gaining certificates/tickets (FoodSafe, Serving It Right, FirstAid, Forkliftticket, etc.)	0	
Driver's license	2	
Finding reliable transport/bus tickets	0	
Direct connection to employers	1	
Help identifying aids or accommodations I need to sustain work	1	
Getting work clothes (boots, hardhats, gloves, etc.)	0	
Paid work experience	2	
ID (BC Services Card, SIN Card, etc.)	0	
Support with transportation	0	
Volunteer experience	0	
Mentorship	0	

\* There was an error with this question in the survey where participants could not select more than one answer. As such, this question did not accurately capture the potential feedback it could have. One participant did add in a qualitative question afterwards the following:

*"For question 23 I could not pick more than 1 so I wanted to quickly say that ALL of them should be implemented. A lot of youth that are seeking work do not have the proper training or even have any training. this can lead to no job opportunity for youth as they do not have the skills the work is looking for."*

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We are and always will be a Family

KIRA

Katherine

MOISE

DAYNA

HALEY

BEE MEL

ANGELL

Mckenna DANIEL

WINGS AND PIZZA



#LTWHFK

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# YOUTH HOMELESSNESS



PRELIMINARY SUMMIT REPORT