A Way Home

A plan to end youth homelessness in Kamloops

***Misconceptions***, *by:*

Maia Walker
South Kamloops Secondary School

"My aim with this piece was to demonstrate the labels and stereotypes that are often put on homeless people. They are often portrayed as being lazy, diseased, or dangerous, most of the time these things are not true. Homeless people are women, children, men, young adults and teens and if you take the time to get to know some of them, you will see that they are normal people who have just made some bad choices or had some bad luck. Misconceptions about homeless people prevent us from recognizing and dealing with the root causes of homelessness"
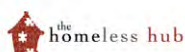
Acknowledgments

The development of this plan and document would not have been possible without the involvement of a wide array of individuals and organizations.

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Thank you to the grade 11 and 12 students from South Kamloops Secondary School for providing the images of their art for this report.

A Way Home: *A plan to end youth homelessness in Kamloops* **3**

It Takes Your Mind, by:

Elizabeth King
South Kamloops Secondary School

"Without a home to provide an element of stability, those with mental illnesses can find that facing daily challenges of life impossible. Without proper housing, recovery can't occur and those on the street are trapped by the constricts of their minds."

This plan is guided by several key principles:

- A shift from managing homelessness to preventing and ending homelessness

- A Housing First philosophy

- System planning and the importance of collaboration across sectors, systems, and institutions

- Healthy transitions to adulthood for youth

- The importance of youth voice in matters that affect youth

- Respect for diversity of background, experience, and identity

Executive Summary

Youth homelessness is a real and pressing problem in Kamloops. Every day, youth in our community experience family conflict, eviction, discharge from institutional care, poverty, and danger in their living situations. Youth in our community struggle with mental health problems, substance use issues, isolation, bullying, and discrimination based on their race, sexuality, background, or capabilities. Despite the impressive resilience shown by our youth faced with such challenges, these experiences may lead to abandonment of education, a life on the streets, a lack of trust, poor health, and unhappiness.

If the human cost weren't enough, youth homelessness comes with great financial costs. We spend a lot of money managing homelessness, through expensive hospital stays, juvenile detention and incarceration, policing, homeless shelters, and other emergency services. While we will always require emergency services, there is a very strong business case (to say nothing of the social justice case) for directing more of our attention and resources toward prevention, housing, early intervention, and effective supports. Communities across Canada are shifting their approach from "managing" homelessness to "ending" homelessness. Taking this approach with youth will allow us to shut the front door to homelessness and prevent it from happening in the first place.

A Way Home: A Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Kamloops lays out clear steps to ending youth homelessness in Kamloops and offers a roadmap to greater collaboration amongst community partners, and ultimately increased stability and wellness for youth. The heart of the plan lies in the Strategic Framework and its recommendations around the areas of Prevention, Housing, and Support. The plan also includes an Implementation Plan, which lays out guidelines for moving forward, including building the proper infrastructure and conducting effective planning and monitoring.

The origins of *A Way Home* stem from Kamloops being selected as a pilot community, along with Kingston, Ontario, in the national Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness (MLC) Program. The development and leadership of the plan has received considerable support from the national MLC Program partners - the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, Toronto-area non-profit Eva's Initiatives, the Catherine Donnelly Foundation, and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association - as well as local organizations including the City of Kamloops, Thompson Nicola Cariboo United Way, the Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society, the Kamloops Homelessness Action Plan, and HomeFree.

The ideas and recommendations in this plan have been supported by the work of a group of dedicated youth named Youth Against Youth Homelessness (YAYh). Together with the planning team, YAYh conducted a broad Youth Consultation, which sought the opinions and experiences of Kamloops youth and youth workers. The findings of this Youth Consultation, combined with research and best practices, feed directly into the plan's recommendations.

Strategic Framework

STRATEGY	RECOMMENDATIONS
PREVENTION	Foster youth resilience and meaningful community engagement Work with schools to educate youth about homelessness and available supports Promote family mediation and support Ensure effective support for youth aging out of government care Ensure youth are not discharged into homelessness Coordinate the activities of youth-serving organizations to best serve youth
HOUSING	Develop a Housing First project for youth Develop transitional housing for youth Develop transitional housing for Aboriginal youth
SUPPORT	Promote relationship-based approaches to supporting youth Explore innovative models of peer-based support and mentorship Provide excellent outreach services to connect youth with housing and support Ensure adequate services for youth with mental health issues Enhance services for LGBTQ youth and foster public awareness Enhance services for Aboriginal youth and foster public awareness Ensure that education, training, and job skill development are accessible to youth

Implementation Plan

STRATEGY	ACTIVITIES
COLLABORATE	Develop and enhance partnerships between all the systems and organizations that deal with youth Develop a steering committee to guide implementation Hire a youth homelessness action plan coordinator Communicate the plan throughout the community
PLAN	Establish priorities, actions, milestones, and benchmarks for Year 1 of the plan Assess available resources Identify gaps and opportunities Develop strategic funding partnerships
MONITOR	conduct a youth homeless count support the collection of data that will help guide and monitor our efforts evaluate programs for effectiveness

This plan will be housed within HomeFree, the community committee working to end homelessness in Kamloops. HomeFree also provides direction for both the Kamloops Homelessness Action Plan and federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy funds in the community. Following the above framework and recommendations, HomeFree and a dedicated Plan Steering Committee will strive to guarantee stable housing, effective support, and ample opportunities for Kamloops youth.

Background To The Plan

Homelessness is an undeniable, pressing, expensive, and unacceptable problem in Canada. According to *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013,* at least 30,000 Canadians are homeless on any given night and at least 200,000 in a given year. That figure doesn't include those living on the brink: combining the homeless with those experiencing insecure housing within the past five years brings us to a figure of 1.3 million. It has been estimated that this problem costs our economy upwards of 7 billion dollars each year.[1]

Communities across Canada have responded with concerted efforts to end homelessness. Provincial governments have developed affordable housing strategies and, in some cases, plans to end homelessness. These efforts are supported by the federal government through its Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) and informed by an increasing wealth of research on homelessness in Canada and in other countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.

In recent years, there has been increasing attention paid to *youth* homelessness and the development of youth-specific homelessness action plans (in our work, we have defined youth as ages 14 to 25). But why, if we already have broad community plans to end homelessness, should we develop a plan specifically for youth homelessness?

1   Stephen Gaetz, Jesse Donaldson, Tim Richter, & Tanya Gulliver (2013): The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Why We Need a Youth Plan

- Youth are in the process of developing physically, socially, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually.
- Youth homelessness stems in large part from problems or conflict in families and homes.
- Youth under the age of 19 have distinct legal entitlements and restrictions.
- Many youth entering homelessness are leaving lives that were previously governed by adult caregivers.
- Youth are served by a distinct infrastructure involving separate systems of justice, education, health, and child protection/welfare.
- Many youth enter homelessness with little or no work experience.
- Many youth are forced to abandon their education because of homelessness.
- Homeless youth – and many youth in general – experience high levels of criminal victimization.[2]

Every one of these features of youth and youth homelessness emerged as strong themes in the Youth Consultation undertaken during the development of this plan. We therefore have a responsibility to enhance the system of care, prevention, housing, research, and strategy to tackle youth homelessness head-on. Our efforts are supported by an increasing body of research on youth homelessness and by the Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness Program. We also owe a debt to the ongoing efforts of communities and governments around the world to ensure that all youth have a safe and supportive home environment that allows them to develop into healthy adults.

If our community does not come together to provide adequate support to our youth, there are grave consequences. Many young people will continue to cycle between corrections, emergency services, and the street. Many will suffer from poor health, exploitation, and isolation. And many will abandon their education. Beyond the human costs, a failure to address the issue comes with great financial cost. Emergency services, hospital visits and corrections are expensive. If we commit our resources *earlier* and *more strategically*, we can save both lives and money.[3]

A Way Home offers a route forward for our community and our youth. The strategies and recommendations outlined in this plan are supported by research and best practice, as well as the opinions and experience of the young people in our community.

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2   Calgary Homeless Foundation (2011): Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Calgary
3   Gaetz, Stephen (2012): The Real Cost of Homelessness: Can We Save Money by Doing the Right Thing? Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Youth Homelessness In Kamloops

Understand, by:

Kayla Morrow
South Kamloops Secondary School

"Empathy means the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Through the mirror I attempt to help people put themselves into a person who is in a less fortunate position. People become homeless for many different reasons and we need to attempt to be more understanding. Society often judges homeless people as second-class citizens, when in reality they are like you and me."

What Do We Know About Homeless Youth in Kamloops?

A common question in discussions of homelessness is "how many people are we talking about?" *Answering* this question is not easy. While homeless counts typically capture a snapshot of the people who are absolutely homeless – living on the street or in shelters – they don't really give us a full understanding of the extent of hidden homelessness. Hidden homelessness includes people staying temporarily with friends and relatives (couch-surfing), in other temporary accommodation, in health and correctional facilities, and in transitional housing situations. Homeless counts also do not tell us about the thousands of people who live in unsafe or inappropriate housing situations.

So what numbers *do* we have? National estimates indicate that approximately 20% of the Canadian homeless population are youth.[4] This ratio may be applied to some of our local numbers to provide approximate figures. The most recent homeless count in Kamloops, conducted in 2012, identified 99 people living unsheltered in Kamloops.[5] Nine of those people were under the age of 19; figures for those between the ages of 19 and 24 are not available, but if we apply the 20% national estimate, we might reasonably guess that about 20 youth were absolutely homeless at the time of the count. A Social Planning and Research Council (SPARC) BC study provides an estimate of 1,167 people who had experienced hidden homelessness in Kamloops in 2010.[6] Applying the 20% estimate again would tell us that about 230 youth were amongst the hidden homeless in that year.

In 2012, the Youth Services and Housing Steering Committee conducted a Youth Survey to determine some of the characteristics of homeless youth. The purpose was not to *count* homeless youth, but of 193 individuals surveyed 54 were identified as currently homeless and a total of 66 reported having experienced homelessness in Kamloops.[7] When looking at these numbers, it is important to remember that many experiences of homelessness are *episodic*. That is, people move in and out of different housing situations. Again, this makes accurate counting difficult, and one of the aims of this plan is to improve our information on homeless youth so we can target our actions effectively.

4   Stephen Gaetz, Jesse Donaldson, Tim Richter, & Tanya Gulliver (2013): The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.
5   http://www.kamloopshap.ca/reportsandresearch.html
6   Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia (2011): Knowledge for Action: Hidden Homelessness in Prince George, Kamloops, Kelowna, Nelson, and Nanaimo
7   Kamloops Youth Services and Housing Steering Committee (2012): Kamloops Youth Homelessness and Related Issues Survey Results

While the 2012 Youth Survey wasn't a homeless count, *per se*, it did reveal valuable information about the local homeless youth population. This information is summarized below:

Youth Who Had Experienced Homelessness in Kamloops

Number of times having been homeless
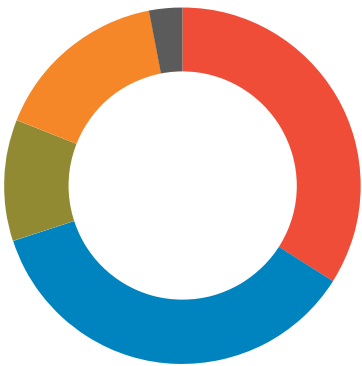
- Once 34%
- Two or three times 36%
- Four or five times 11%
- "Countless" or "lots" 16%
- Unknown or unreported 3%

Longest period of homelessness

- Days 13%
- Weeks 32%
- 1 to 6 months 30%
- 6 months to 1 year 10%
- 1 year or more 15%

Youth Who Were Currently Homeless

Source of income
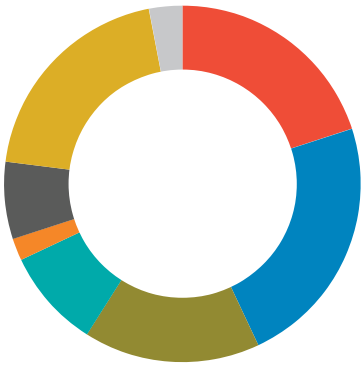
- Work / job 20%
- Income assistance 23%
- Disability allowance 16%
- Family member 9%
- Sex trade 2%
- "Ministry" 7%
- Nothing / other 20%
- Unknown or unreported 3%

Youth Who Were Currently or Previously Homeless

Ethnicity
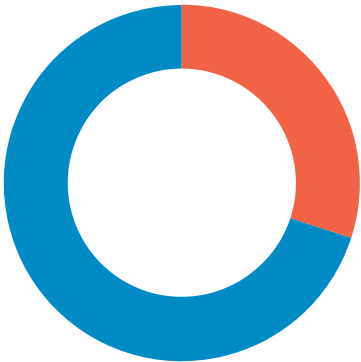
- Aboriginal 30%
- Non-Aboriginal 70%

Gender

- Male 61%
- Female 39%

72%

Been involved with the Ministry of Children and Family Development*

42%
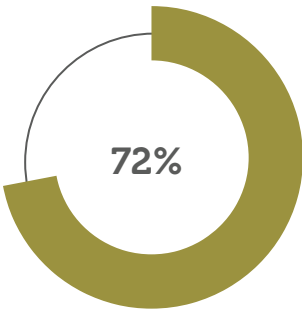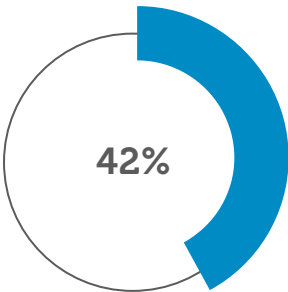
Diagnosed with mental illness

67%
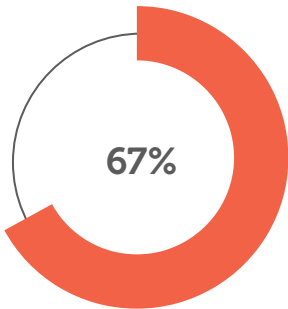
Had problems with substance use

Note: In British Columbia, the Ministry of Children and Family Development is the provincial ministry responsible for child, youth, and family services.

The data from the 2012 Youth Survey underline several key characteristics of the homeless youth population in Kamloops which support provincial and national findings on this population.

- mental health and substance use issues are common among homeless youth[8]
- Aboriginal youth are overrepresented in the homeless population[9]
- males outnumber females in the homeless population (national figures are 2/3 male, 1/3 female[10])
- involvement with the Ministry of Children and Family Development correlates strongly with homelessness (approximately 40% of homeless youth in British Columbia have come through foster care[11])

These findings are supported and complemented by the key findings of the Youth Consultation conducted in 2013 as part of this plan's development:

- Youth often face intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination when they access support services or seek housing. This is particularly acute for LGBTQ and Aboriginal youth.
- Many youth have difficulty establishing trusting relationships with support workers.
- Youth may decide not to access a particular support or service because of the lack of trust in the support worker.
- Many homeless and at-risk youth report a lack of basic life skills necessary for independent living.
- Youth naturally turn to their peers for support.
- Many instances of homelessness (episodic or chronic) are prompted by family conflict.
- Many youth in care feel underserved by their social workers and by the Ministry of Children and Family Development.
- Many youth exiting care feel they require ongoing support to successfully transition to independence / adulthood.

- Many homeless and at-risk youth report having "no place to go."
- Many Aboriginal youth feel disconnected from family, culture, and tradition.
- Most homeless and at-risk youth indicate that poverty is a significant obstacle to finding and retaining housing and achieving health and well-being.
- Many homeless and at-risk youth report that mental health issues present major challenges to retaining housing and achieving health and well-being.
- Many homeless and at-risk youth report that youth do not access support services because they do not know what is available.
- Most homeless and at-risk youth report feeling that nobody listens to them.
- Many youth find it difficult to get around town to look for housing and to access services.
- Some youth have great difficulty in getting ID.

The findings of both the 2012 Youth Survey and the 2013 Youth Consultation underline the different causes of homelessness, which can be grouped into three types:

- **Structural Causes**, including inadequate income, lack of affordable housing, lack of transportation, and discrimination against sexual and ethnic minorities.
- **Systems Failures**, including the difficult transition experienced by youth leaving government care.
- **Individual and Relational Causes**, including family conflict, violence and abuse, personal crisis and trauma, mental health issues, and addictions.[12]

In addressing youth homelessness in Kamloops, our strategies, approaches, and programs must target all three sets of factors.

8   http://www.evasinitiatives.com/2012/05/07/backgrounder-on-homeless-youth-and-mental-health/
9   Stephen Gaetz, Jesse Donaldson, Tim Richter, & Tanya Gulliver (2013): The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.
10 Segaert, A. (2012). The National Shelter Study: Emergency Shelter Use in Canada 2005-2009. Ottawa: Homelessness Partnering Secretariat, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
11 http://www.vancouverfoundation.ca/sites/default/files/documents/YHITransitionsSurveyResults-Report_08102013.pdf
12 Stephen Gaetz, Jesse Donaldson, Tim Richter, & Tanya Gulliver (2013): The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

What Are We Doing About Youth Homelessness?

Kamloops has not ignored its homelessness problem. In fact, we have many organizations, governmental bodies, community tables, and committed individuals who work very hard on prevention, emergency responses, housing, and support services. Our strategic efforts include:

- the Kamloops Homelessness Action Plan, with its 6 goals and 8 strategies organized around the areas of Housing, Supports, and Bridging to Financial Independence

- the City of Kamloops Social Plan, which includes both Housing and Homelessness and Youth Issues among its seven priorities

- the Off-Reserve Aboriginal Action Plan (ORAAP)

These plans, while not specifically dealing with *youth* homelessness, address many of the underlying problems and causes of homelessness. In recent years, we have seen broad stakeholder and community engagement on various councils and committees, including:

HomeFree

the council responsible for directing efforts to end homelessness in Kamloops, which also serves as the community advisory board that administers the federal government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy funds

Kamloops Housing Board

which collects, analyzes, and distributes information about housing in Kamloops

Homelessness Action Plan Leadership Council

a committee of community leaders committed to implementing the goals and strategies of the Kamloops Homelessness Action Plan through policy change

Changing the Face of Poverty

a network of community- and faith-based organizations, individuals, and businesses dedicated to alleviating poverty in Kamloops

Kamloops Off-Reserve Advisory Committee

which oversees Kamloops' Off-Reserve Aboriginal Action Plan

City of Kamloops Social Planning Council

which advises the Mayor and City Council on social issues in the community and oversees the Social Plan, including the priority areas of Housing and Homelessness and Youth Issues

Youth, Children, and Families Advisory Committee

an advisory body to Social Planning Council

These plans and tables have strengthened partnerships and enhanced service coordination between the non-profit sector, Interior Health (the regional health authority to which Kamloops belongs), the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and other key stakeholders. We have also seen the development of research partnerships between the non-profit sector and Thompson Rivers University, which have provided valuable evidence and information to help target programs and services.

Kamloops has a robust network of non-profit and for-profit community agencies that deliver essential services, food, housing, recreational opportunities, and outreach to youth. Several agencies also provide safe and supportive spaces for youth to come together. Collaboration between the homelessness sector and the private sector – including landlords and developers – has grown. Our school district provides alternative educational programs for youth in general and specific programs for Aboriginal youth. We also have agencies dedicated to improving the lives of urban Aboriginal and Métis children, youth, and families.

Our community has a solid foundation on which to build greater strategic efforts to end youth homelessness. The goal of *this* plan is to mobilize local capacity even further, build on our successes, enhance system coordination, enable programs and services to be more responsive to the needs of youth, broaden youth housing options, offer tools to monitor and evaluate progress, and continue to be adaptive in our responses to homelessness.

You Would Never Know, *by:*

Charmain Schocat
South Kamloops Secondary School

"You might never know if someone is living homeless. Behind the colours and messy paint, the person in the mirror is dressed with a nice over shirt and collar, as well as a relatively neat hairstyle. This is the type of person you might see walking down the street or at work without a second thought as to whether they actually have a home to go to. Homelessness is not a cut and dry issue. There are many people and situations, and the problem is not always directly visible."

How This Plan Came About

Mobilizing Local Capacity (MLC)

In the fall of 2012, the City of Kamloops submitted an application on behalf of HomeFree and the community to be one of two pilot communities for the Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness (MLC) Program. The Program originated through collaboration between the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, the Toronto area non-profit Eva's Initiatives, the Catherine Donnelly Foundation, and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association. In November 2012, the City was notified that Kamloops had been selected as one of two pilot communities – the other being Kingston, Ontario – in the initial year of the MLC Program.

The national MLC partners granted considerable flexibility in the fulfillment of the project's goals of developing an action plan and raising community awareness. A public meeting and visioning session was held to formally announce the project and to gather input on how to proceed. One of the key themes from the visioning exercise was that youth should be involved at every step of the process.

A planning team comprised of representatives from the City of Kamloops, Homelessness Action Plan, Thompson Nicola Cariboo United Way, Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society, and an independent project consultant, came together to map out a research and consultation process for plan development. In its initial meetings, the planning team decided that an interesting and bold way to involve youth throughout the process would be to assemble a committee of youth to drive the plan from design to completion. Fifteen youth were recruited from a diversity of backgrounds, experiences, ages, circumstances, skills, and personalities. These youth underwent an initial training period in which they explored homelessness and related issues and developed some ideas about how to fulfill some of the project's two broad goals:

a) enhancing community awareness of youth homelessness, and

b) conducting a youth consultation to inform the strategies and recommendations of the eventual plan.

The youth group, which eventually named itself Youth Against Youth Homelessness (YAYh), visited agencies serving homeless or at-risk youth, volunteered at local events, appeared on television, and created a website, Facebook page, and Twitter feed.[13] While the planning team originally intended to take a support and advisory role after the youth group's initial training, the relationship evolved into an adult-youth partnership. The groups met bimonthly at first, then weekly as it became apparent just how much there was to do and learn. Throughout the summer and fall of 2013, the adult-youth partnership conducted a Youth Consultation, which has informed the development of the plan and provided a strong youth voice to the planning process. With the help of Mastermind Studios, a local video production company, Youth Against Youth Homelessness created a video about their learnings which has garnered national attention and helped fulfill the goal of enhancing public awareness.

Members of Youth Against Youth Homelessness

The Youth Consultation

The Youth Consultation was designed to give youth in Kamloops an opportunity to express their opinions and share their experiences of homelessness. These opinions and experiences would, complemented by research, inform the plan's strategies and recommendations. There were two components to the consultation: (1) youth focus groups and (2) interviews with front-line youth support workers who are themselves youth. Both components used the following set of core exploration questions:

- Why do some youth become homeless?
- Where do young homeless people usually go for help?
- Why don't some youth access services that are available to them?
- What kind of help do you think young homeless people are missing in Kamloops?
- What problems do young homeless people face on a day-to-day basis?
- What do you think society or adults in general need to/should understand about youth today?

13   www.yayh.org
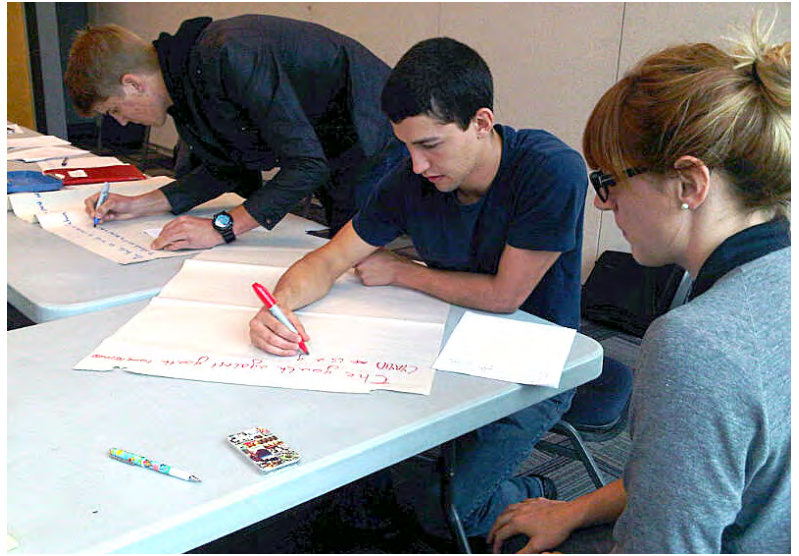
At the beginning of each focus group, the facilitator – either a member of the planning team or a member of YAYh who had undergone basic facilitation training - also asked participants to share what comes to mind when they hear the word "homeless" and to draw and discuss their idea of "home." Focus groups and interviews were conducted by small teams made up of planning team and YAYh members with the help of host agency staff. Food and gift cards were provided to participants. Host agencies included:

- Canadian Mental Health Association (Youth Clubhouse)
- Interior Community Services (Youth Drop-in)
- Interior Community Services Safe Spaces
- Boys and Girls Club of Kamloops
- Elizabeth Fry Society
- Four Directions (School District 73)
- Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society
- Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services
- Kamloops Native Housing Society

Focus groups and interviews were recorded when possible and later transcribed; these transcriptions provide rich qualitative information on the opinions and experiences of Kamloops youth.

The planning team and YAYh met to review the transcriptions and identify emergent themes and key issues that our plan should address. Further research was conducted on the themes and issues, and a long list of draft recommendations was crafted. These draft recommendations were reviewed by key stakeholders, the YAYh group, personnel from agencies that work with homeless and at-risk youth, and managers within the Ministry of Children and Family Development. After further refinement based on input from these stakeholders, the strategic recommendations appeared to fall into two broad categories: 1) direct impact activities (e.g. prevention, housing, and supports) that would make a difference in the lives of youth, and 2) activities that would help ensure that the direct impact activities would be effective (e.g. collaboration, monitoring, and planning). For the purposes of this plan, the direct impact activities are laid out in the **Strategic Framework**, while the supportive activities are laid out in the **Implementation Plan.** Together, these two components form the heart of *A Way Home: A Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Kamloops.*

Important Considerations

The work of *A Way Home: A Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Kamloops* is guided by several important considerations and principles that have been developed through research on best practice and examination of youth homelessness action plans in other cities:

A shift from *managing* homelessness to *preventing* and *ending* homelessness:

Our response to youth homelessness must not focus primarily on emergency services for youth in need. Rather, we must aim to stop homelessness before it happens and move displaced youth quickly into viable housing situations.

A *Housing First* philosophy:

A wealth of evidence supports Housing First approaches to homelessness, including its basic principles of immediate access to housing, consumer choice, recovery orientation, individualized supports, and community integration. Housing First for youth, however, requires special considerations and recognizes the importance of transitional housing for youth who are not well-served by scattered site models.[14]

System planning:

Our response to youth homelessness must be coordinated among all the agencies, governmental bodies, and systems that serve youth or in which youth move. This requires strategic planning and information sharing.

Healthy transitions to adulthood:

While many responses to youth homelessness focus on moving young people toward *independence*, we must acknowledge and support a broader spectrum of developmental issues and tailor our expectations of youth depending on their developmental circumstances.

Data collection and information management:

Serving youth effectively requires an understanding of how they interact with the system of care. With good information, we can also understand as a community where we are, where we need to go, and how well we are achieving our goals.

Youth voice:

To understand youth, we need to listen to them. Youth deserve a say in the policies, processes, services, and strategies that affect them.

Diversity:

Homeless and at-risk youth are a very diverse population and we must tailor solutions to the specific needs and obstacles faced by specific groups. Aboriginal youth, LGBTQ, and youth in government care are overrepresented in the homeless population and need targeted solutions.

Wise use of resources:

Funding should be directed toward programs and activities that can demonstrate measurable results.

Private sector involvement:

Communities that have made progress in addressing youth homelessness – and homelessness in general – have typically engaged the private sector and corporations in being part of the solution.[15]

14   Gaetz, Stephen. (2014). A Safe and Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press.
15   Gaetz, S. (2011) Plans to End Youth Homelessness in Canada - A Review of the Literature. Toronto: Eva's Initiatives.

The Grey Area, by:

Jillian Armstrong
South Kamloops Secondary School

"Homelessness is something that most people don't like to talk about – it's a no-man's land for words – a grey area. The roughness portrayed through the style of painting is how I chose to turn an image into something that reflects the complexities surrounding homelessness."

Strategic Framework

This **Strategic Framework** has been developed to direct efforts to end youth homelessness in Kamloops. The Framework takes a three-pronged approach to the issue:

1 Prevention ▸ **2 Housing** ▸ **3 Support**

Within each strategic priority are several key recommendations, outlined on the following pages…

1 Prevention

Foster youth resilience and meaningful community engagement

Work with schools to educate youth about homelessness and available supports

Promote family mediation and support

Ensure effective support for youth aging out of government care

Ensure youth are not discharged into homelessness

Coordinate the activities of youth-serving organizations to best serve youth

A logical first step in ending youth homelessness is preventing youth from becoming homeless in the first place. Rather than focusing our efforts on providing emergency services to youth once they have lost housing or are living on the street, we should be doing everything possible to ensure they never enter homelessness and intervene quickly if they do. Communities around the world that have made this shift in their coordinated efforts have seen great success; in the U.K., for example, a 40% reduction in homelessness from 2003 to 2006 was attributed to prevention and early intervention strategies. [16]

Prevention relies on activities designed to foster youth resilience, raise awareness of available supports, resolve family conflict, and plan for exits from government care, correctional institutions, and health care facilities. We must also acknowledge that preventing youth homelessness begins before young people reach the age of 14. In Kamloops, many organizations that serve youth also serve children and families in financial and housing need. These organizations are looking even further upstream to foster resilience, awareness, and stability.

Prevention also requires close collaboration among youth-serving agencies, organizations, and systems not only in the homelessness sector but outside of it, particularly schools. By using common tools of assessment and referral, this collaborative system can identify youth at imminent risk of homelessness and connect them with the supports and services they want and need.

16   Pawson, H., Davidson, E., Netto, G. (2007) Evaluating Homelessness Prevention Activities in Scotland. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive

Foster youth resilience and meaningful community engagement

Families, schools, governments, and youth-serving agencies can help prevent youth homelessness by promoting strength, resilience, and community engagement in youth. Our Youth Consultation revealed that many youth want to take part in recreational activities, for example, but lack the money or transportation to do so. Kamloops youth also reported a lack of recreational opportunities outside regular business hours for adolescents. One of the key findings of the Aboriginal Youth Consultation done through the Aboriginal Off-Reserve Action Plan was that youth need more access to resources and activities to help them achieve balance in their lives.

The outcomes for youth with meaningful community engagement are clear. The BC Adolescent Health Survey, for example, found that among youth who'd been abused, feeling their activities were meaningful correlated with lower suicidal thoughts and better mental health. Community engagement must include school involvement. The Health Survey found that youth who reported higher school connectedness were more likely to report their mental health as good or excellent.[17]

We must also promote the development of protective factors that make youth resilient in the face of crisis. Protective factors include conflict resolution, problem solving, and anger management skills. Kamloops youth explicitly identified these skills as important to them.

Work with schools to educate youth about homelessness and available supports

Since most young people spend a significant amount of their lives at school, schools are in a unique position to raise awareness, connect youth with appropriate supports, and assist in early intervention. According to the Adolescent Healthy Survey, 41% of youth approached teachers for support in the past year, while 27% approached a school counsellor, making them third and fourth on the list after friends and family.[18]

In partnership with non-profit agencies, schools can inform youth about the options available to them in case of trouble. During the Youth Consultation, participants were asked why youth might not access services that are available to them. An overwhelming number of participants responded that youth don't know such services exist. Many youth specifically mentioned that schools can do a better job of educating students about options and strategies for dealing with different personal crises, such as abuse. During one focus group, it became apparent that the youth were not even aware of the full range of services available to them at the

host agency. These findings are supported by other research. The BC Adolescent Health Survey, for example, found that 40% of youth who said they needed mental health services but did not access them said they didn't know where to go.[19]

Clearly, it is not enough that services are simply available to youth. Services must be known and accessible to youth. Accomplishing this task in schools is not simply the job of educators, but also youth-serving agencies in partnership with schools. The annual Health Fair held at Twin Rivers Educational Centre is a good example of such a partnership. Health and recreational service providers set up booths within this alternative educational setting and provide engaging activities to help youth learn what is available to them. Many agencies, such as the Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society, also actively promote awareness among students within school settings.

> **"I really need to work on my anger issues."**
>
> *– Focus Group participant*

> **"I want to go swimming, but I don't have money."**
>
> *– Focus Group participant*

17   Smith, A., Stewart, D., Poon, C., Peled, M., Saewyc, K., & McCreary Centre Society (2014). From Hastings to Haida Gwaii: Provincial results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.
18   Smith, A., Stewart, D., Poon, C., Peled, M., Saewyc, K., & McCreary Centre Society (2014). From Hastings to Haida Gwaii: Provincial results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.
19   Smith, A., Stewart, D., Poon, C., Peled, M., Saewyc, K., & McCreary Centre Society (2014). From Hastings to Haida Gwaii: Provincial results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.

Promote family mediation and support

For many youth, the door to homelessness is family conflict. We must therefore consider family mediation and support as a key to prevention, especially since family is – in many cases – the best option for youth. Family can provide the love, support, trust, and respect that Kamloops youth report associating with the idea of "home," even those families that face financial hardship and housing instability. Of course, we must protect youth from unsafe and abusive family environments, but we should not build services on the assumption that most young people need to be protected and isolated from their families. Family – including extended family – is often a key to the solution, not just "a part of the past". [20]

Family mediation and support often involves family counseling and development of conflict resolution skills. With the help of a counsellor, family members can attempt to resolve differences and decrease the likelihood that youth will flee in response to conflict. Promising practices also exist in parent education and bringing services to families in their home settings.[21] Several programs already exist in Kamloops that provide this type of support; we can look to these programs to learn better how to provide other forms of mediation and support.

While we cannot eliminate family conflict, we can reduce the chance that it leads to youth homelessness. Youth often need a "cooling off" period after a conflict, a time to collect their thoughts, calm their emotions, and figure out what their best option is moving forward. We should explore alternative options for youth in this cooling off period. One promising practice is *respite housing*. Respite housing provides an alternative to emergency shelters when youth are engaged in family mediation and require safe and stable accommodation while determining their next steps. The Host Homes program in Ontario's Halton region provides a good example of what Kamloops can explore in this realm. [22]

> "*Just seems that there is a big disconnect… I went and said that to my parents and they laughed. I was like 'man, I miss all of you guys; why can't we all live in the same house?'"*
>
> — Focus Group participant

Q: *"Why don't youth access support services that are available to them?"*

A: *"Well, they don't really know they're there."*

— Focus Group interaction

20   Gaetz, S. (2014). Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.
21   Gaetz, S. (2011) Plans to End Youth Homelessness in Canada - A Review of the Literature. Toronto: Eva's Initiatives.
22   http://www.bridgingthegaphalton.ca/hosthome.html

Ensure effective support for youth aging out of government care

Every year in British Columbia, 700 youth in foster care "age out", meaning they turn 19 and are no longer entitled to the government support they received while in care. The outcomes for youth coming through the child welfare system are notoriously poor. Not only do we see lower rates of education (in BC, only 32% of youth in care graduate from Grade 12 before the age of 19) and employment, we see higher rates of incarceration, substance use, mental health issues, and – not surprisingly – homelessness.[23]

In the 2012 survey of homeless Kamloops youth, just over 70% of youth who had experienced homelessness reported having "been involved with the Ministry of Children and Family Development". Unfortunately, the survey did not explore the exact nature of this involvement. However, we can reasonably expect that Kamloops is in line with national estimates of 40 to 50% of street youth having had involvement with the child welfare system. [24]

The youth consultation revealed considerable frustration with the lack of support for youth aging out of care. Several youth reported facing a system that seemed to be saying "sorry you're 19." Our findings support other consultations, such as the one that produced the 2008 document *Listening to Vulnerable Youth: Transitioning to Adulthood in British Columbia*.

A key point to all the research on this topic is that youth aging out of care require greater support in transitioning to adulthood. Many jurisdictions – a Canadian example being Ontario – have acknowledged the problem and extended the age of care and the age of support. It is time that BC acknowledges the issues and does the same.

We must ensure a system is in place to provide youth aging out of care with basic life skills; financial, psychological, and emotional supports; and access to education, employment, and adequate medical care. The existing system can be enhanced through collaboration between the Ministry of Children and Family Development, schools, and other institutions and agencies that serve youth. Current programs for planning and life skills development can be improved and expanded to prevent youth in care from emerging into chronic homelessness as adults. New supports can be established that target youth of different ages in care, as well as young people between the ages of 16 and 18 with Youth Agreements. In particular, youth in care should receive enhanced support for education and training to address the low graduation rates currently seen amongst youth exiting the foster care system.

> **"***What's an adult? And when is everybody ready at the same time in a certain time in their life, right?"*
>
> *— Focus Group participant*

Ensure youth are not discharged into homelessness

An effective system of care for youth means that no young person is discharged from any facility, program, or shelter into a situation of homelessness. Proper discharge planning in corrections, juvenile detention, hospitals and health facilities, transitional housing, and group homes must involve finding appropriate housing and supports for the youth involved. Emergency shelters must also ensure that youth are not ejected into homelessness. In many cases, and for many facilities, ensuring zero discharge into homelessness means finding alternatives to evicting people for bad behaviour. This can be a great challenge, but housing is a human right, and while evicting people may appear as a temporary solution for the individual program or facility, it doesn't remove people from the system of care. We still need to find a place for them. [25]

This plan recommends the adoption of a "zero-discharge" philosophy when it comes to youth homelessness. This includes following a zero discharge policy in the Housing First and Transitional Housing programs recommended in the Housing section of this strategic plan. If youth are expelled from housing programs and discharged into the street, then our approach can not truly be called "Housing First."

23   Gaetz, S. (2011) Plans to End Youth Homelessness in Canada - A Review of the Literature. Toronto: Eva's Initiatives.
24   Gaetz, S. (2011) Plans to End Youth Homelessness in Canada - A Review of the Literature. Toronto: Eva's Initiatives.
25   Gaetz, S. (2011) Plans to End Youth Homelessness in Canada - A Review of the Literature. Toronto: Eva's Initiatives.

Coordinate the activities of youth-serving organizations

Many of the recommendations in this plan – including a zero-discharge into homelessness policy – require excellent coordination and communication among youth-serving organizations and institutions. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Schools
- Non-profit organizations
- Housing providers
- Provincial Government Ministries

- Federal Government agencies
- Health Authorities
- Hospitals
- Correctional Facilities

> "Services are so hard to get… you have to go through, like so much work and what if you don't even get it after all that work? To be in the exact same position that you were in in the beginning…"
>
> – Focus Group participant

Effective coordination means collaborative planning processes, ongoing communication, and effective management of transitions between and among mandates, programs, and facilities. It also means that youth-serving organizations in Kamloops must agree to the guiding principles of this plan and commit to its recommendations.

One tool of service coordination that has proven successful is a *Common Assessment Framework*, or CAF. A CAF is a process and set of tools used to assess youth when they first enter homelessness and the system built to serve the homeless. A CAF establishes what types of services and support a young person needs and desires and matches these with existing supports in the community. A CAF can be combined with a case management approach to homelessness, in which a case manager works with a young person to facilitate access to supports on an ongoing basis. As described in *Coming of Age*, a case management approach means that "youth therefore become 'clients' not of specific agencies, per se, but rather, of the sector." [26]

What would these approaches mean for youth? They would mean more appropriate matching of youth with supports and an easier time accessing those supports. During the Youth Consultation, youth complained of having to find their own way through the system of supports. In some cases, youth felt fortunate that they just "happened" on a specific service or program. But youth should not have to "happen on" essential supports or experience frustration that they can't find what they need. They should be properly assessed, assisted, and advocated for at first entry into homelessness.

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

2 Housing

Develop a Housing First project for youth

Develop transitional housing for youth

Develop transitional housing for Aboriginal youth

Central to any plan to end homelessness is the issue of housing. For youth, housing often means living with family, whether that's parents, grandparents, godparents, or other supportive relatives. In our approaches to housing homeless youth, we must first look to reconnecting youth with family, if it is safe and appropriate to do so. When it is not, or when youth and family cannot or will not reconcile, then we must look to other housing solutions along the continuum.

A lack of affordable housing clearly underlies the broad issue of homelessness, and any attempt to eliminate homelessness requires efforts to increase availability of safe and affordable housing at all points along the housing continuum. An assessment of Kamloops affordable housing, released in 2013, identified a need for 2,222 additional units of affordable housing in our community, including temporary supported housing, subsidized housing, private market rental, and entry level ownership. [27]

For youth, particularly youth who have been homeless or at-risk of homelessness, the lack of affordable housing is compounded by barriers to renting. Many landlords are naturally wary of renting to young people, and even more cautious when a youth has a known history of substance use, mental health issues, or involvement in the criminal justice system. Being unemployed or underemployed and having bad or no credit makes it even more difficult. For youth in school, it is particularly difficult to maintain an income to pay the rent. Add to this racial and sexual discrimination, and it is unsurprising that many youth report having difficulty finding, or maintaining, appropriate rental housing that they can afford.

Some youth may succeed living independently in rental housing, and we should ensure that support is available for youth who can and wish to find and maintain housing in the private rental market. For some youth, however, living independently in rental housing is not the best option. Many youth lack the life skills necessary to successfully care for themselves and maintain housing. Many youth are developmentally unprepared for independent living. And many youth do not want to live alone and unsupported in rental housing. Indeed, full independence can be isolating, unsafe, frightening, and burdensome. Other youth with substance use issues, mental health challenges, and developmental disabilities may require more intensive supports in supportive or transitional housing arrangements.

The solution to housing youth does not take a single shape. We need a range of options across the housing continuum so that we can properly match young people with options that are suitable, affordable, and safe.

27   http://kamloopshap.ca/images/HAP-Kamloops-Aff-Housing-Study-2012-2.pdf

The Kamloops Housing Board has a mandate to address the general lack of affordable housing in our community. *A Way Home* supports these efforts, but focuses its recommendations on housing options specifically for youth, and particularly "transitional" housing and "Housing First" projects that fill the space along the continuum for youth. The Kamloops Affordable Housing Needs Assessment identified an ongoing need for all types of transitional housing, and a survey of such units dedicated to youth reveals less than a dozen[28]. In the Youth Consultation, and in the 2012 Youth Survey, we have heard time and again that there's simply "nowhere to go" for many youth to make successful transitions and that there are too many barriers to renting. Given the challenges that many youth face in living independently, particularly those aging out of care or dealing with trauma, substance use, and mental health issues, we are best to focus our efforts and resources on supportive solutions that help youth transition into adulthood and community membership.

Develop a Housing First project for youth

The concept of Housing First rests on several core principles:

- Immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements: clients do not need to meet certain requirements before being deemed ready for housing, as is the case in traditional "treatment first" models.

- Consumer choice and self-determination: clients have some choice in where they live and in what supports and services they receive.

- Recovery orientation: clients are given access to a full range of opportunities and supports that will enhance their well-being, rather than just meeting basic needs.

- Individualized and client-driven supports: clients are provided with a range of supports and services that suit their circumstances, and they may accept those supports if and when they feel they are ready.

- Social and community integration: clients are typically (but not always) housed in scattered sites around the community (as opposed to congregate housing) and given opportunities for social and community integration.[29]

28 http://kamloopshap.ca/images/HAP-Kamloops-Aff-Housing-Study-2012-2.pdf
29 http://www.homelesshub.ca/housingfirst

As a philosophy and an approach to systems planning, Housing First is well-supported by evidence. For this reason, Kamloops is formally adopting Housing First, which will be reflected in the upcoming Community Plan under the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

As a program model, Housing First has proven successful in keeping people housed, particularly those traditionally believed to be "hard-to-house", such as people with mental health challenges and active substance use problems. It must be noted, however, that Housing First for youth may look a little different than other Housing First programs, as they must take into account the fact that youth are in a complex process of developing into adults. While there have been relatively few Housing First for youth programs in Canada, what does exist has demonstrated impressive results. The Boys and Girls Club of Calgary's Infinity Project, a Housing First for youth program initiated in 2009, has shown very positive results in terms of housing retention, stable income, and access to services. The project also demonstrated significant cost savings to the community, comparing program costs to emergency or non-permanent housing solutions such as shelters and detention centres.[30]

In line with our community's Housing First approach, and looking to promising practices and recent research, Kamloops should establish its own Housing First for youth program. This will help our community improve outcomes for many of our chronically homeless youth.

A Housing First for youth approach and project must follow the core Housing First principles but also acknowledge the developmental needs of youth. The principle of choice must allow youth to move back and forth between a scattered site Housing First and transitional or supportive housing; it is not uncommon for youth to experiment with independent living periodically as they prepare for long-term independence. Housing First for youth must also make available a strong array of supports, including:

- housing supports (life skills, rent supplements, crisis intervention)
- well-being supports (for mental health, substance use, and sexual health)
- education, training, and employment
- complementary supports (parenting, advocacy, family reconnection, mentoring)
- community engagement (meaningful cultural, social, and recreational activities)[31]

30   http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/BGCC_0.pdf
31   Gaetz, S. (2014). A Safe and Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press.

Develop effective transitional housing for youth

While the Housing First approach does not normally include "transitional" housing options, in which people live in congregate housing for a set period of time and are required to take part in programming or accept certain supports, Housing First for youth must allow for this type of housing. For many youth, transitional housing can serve as a supportive bridge to adulthood. Moreover, many youth express reluctance to live independently and instead opt for congregate living situations, fearing the potential isolation, exploitation, and lack of safety that comes with independent living.

Kamloops currently has a limited number of transitional housing units for youth, and this plan recommends:

1. the support of ongoing enhancements to existing transitional housing programs
2. the establishment of new transitional housing units

One model for transitional housing that has proven quite successful in the United Kingdom is the "foyer model." Youth foyers are a type of congregate transitional housing for homeless and at-risk youth which provides support, particularly in education, training and employment. The three core principles of foyer model programs are:

- Helping young people in housing need successfully transition to independence
- Providing access not only to housing but also to training (education and life skills) and guidance
- A formal agreement between the youth participant and the Foyer regarding the youth's commitment and the use of the Foyer [32]

Another important characteristic of foyers is that they allow for longer term of residency (often two years in the U.K.) than many other transitional housing programs. After all, different youth require different amounts of time to develop the skills and maturity to become independent. Done effectively, foyer model transitional housing programs can help youth build on their strengths to become contributing adults. Kamloops should further explore foyer model transitional housing for youth.

> "Ya, well, where I went first when I got kicked out, I just went to my closest friend and stayed at his place for a while."
>
> – Focus Group participant

> "One of the biggest things I think of is that I believe that in order to succeed you need to belong somewhere. Without belonging somewhere, you're just another person, looking for help."
>
> – Focus Group participant

Develop transitional housing for Aboriginal youth

As has been well-documented, the homeless and at-risk of homelessness population has an overrepresentation of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples. As a regional hub city with a large hospital, a university, a variety of social services, industry, and a correctional facility, Kamloops is a destination for many Aboriginal people from communities and reserves throughout the interior, particularly the Thompson Nicola Cariboo region. Yet the Aboriginal community faces some serious obstacles, with the legacy of the residential schools system and racial discrimination, as well as high unemployment, poverty, and involvement with the criminal justice system. And while Aboriginal children make up just 8% of all children in British Columbia, they make up 52% of children in foster care. [33]

Recognizing the unique obstacles faced by the Aboriginal community in Kamloops, and in line with our community's Housing First approach and emphasis on the need for transitional youth housing, this plan recommends the development of Aboriginal-specific transitional housing programs for youth. These programs may follow the foyer model of transitional housing, with a unique cultural component. The hope is that such a program will assist local youth in transitioning to adulthood, as well as youth from outlying areas. Our consultation revealed stories of Aboriginal youth migrating to Kamloops – to join family members, attend university, or seek other opportunities – who experienced culture shock, felt a lack of support and belonging, and found difficulty in maintaining stability and housing. Our community must explore innovative housing options for this population, including the possibility of housing youth and Elders together in a program that features a strong mentorship component.

32   Gaetz, S. & Scott, F. (2012). Live, Learn, Grow: Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Homeless Youth – A Framework for the Foyer in Canada. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.
33   http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/foster/pdf/about_fostering.pdf

3 Support

Promote relationship-based approaches to supporting youth

Explore innovative models of peer-based support and mentorship

Provide excellent outreach services to connect youth with housing and support

Ensure adequate services for youth with mental health issues

Enhance services for LGBTQ youth and foster public awareness

Enhance services for Aboriginal youth and foster public awareness

Ensure that education, training, and job skill development are accessible to youth

Different youth require different forms of support, depending on their background and experiences, their level of street entrenchment, their education and skills, their health (physical and mental), and their stage of development. Chronically homeless youth will require more intensive support in order to gain stability and maintain housing; youth experiencing homelessness for the first time will need early intervention to connect them to the help they need to prevent a slide deeper into homelessness.

Promote relationship-based approaches to supporting youth

One of the most important ideas emerging from the Youth Consultation is the importance of trusting relationships. Unfortunately, youth do not always feel that they are able to build trusting relationships with the people who attempt to support, serve, or help them. Reported perceptions and feelings include:

- Mistrust of authority figures, particularly those in the systems and institutions that closely govern or monitor the lives of youth, including the Ministry of Children and Family Development, police, health care, and schools

- Judgement, discrimination, and lack of acceptance
- Misguided attempts to "fix" youth and a focus on deficits rather than strengths
- Fear of loss of freedom and control once plugged into systems of care

These perceptions and feelings emerged when focus group participants were asked why youth might not access services that are available to them. It is important to note that these negative perceptions are only part of the story about why youth don't access services; other factors include lack of awareness of services, pride, lack of transportation, and the challenges of navigating a complex web of supports.

Regardless, these feelings and perceptions must be taken into account in the delivery of services, programs, and supports to youth. Agency staff, social workers, police, health care providers, teachers, and guidance counsellors must work very hard to build positive relationships with youth in order to establish the trust necessary to provide effective support.

Explore innovative models of peer-based support and mentorship

Related to the importance of trusting relationships and help-seeking behaviour is the importance of peers and mentors. When participants in the Youth Consultation were asked who they turn to for help, the overwhelming majority indicated that they look to peers or friends. In the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey, youth were asked who they approached for help in the past year; the number one response, at 73%, was "friends." [34]

Youth reliance on peers is a complex issue. While there may be negative peer pressure to engage in risky behaviours, having supportive friends is a fundamentally essential part of well-being. The health survey reports a statistically significant correlation between number of friends and mental health reported as good or excellent (although the difference between having no friends and one friend was not statistically significant). [35]

Given the importance of peers in the lives of youth, we should explore innovative models of peer-based support.

Peers, however, are not the only source of support. Youth may also develop constructive and supportive relationships with mentors, either older youth or non-parental adults. The Aboriginal Youth Consultation found that Aboriginal youth in Kamloops see access to more role models and mentors as possible inspiration and motivation for career and life planning. And many participants in our Youth Consultation reported the desire for support from non-familial adults.

For these reasons, we should also explore innovative models of mentorship for youth.

Q: *Where do youth go when they need help?*

A: *Friends.*

– Focus Group interaction

"*If we have young people who are not accessing the resources in the community… ok, well, where are they then? If we have people who go into the youth centres, but don't want to leave their name, or don't leave a first name, or don't have an address… you know… it's like chasing a ghost around.*"

– Interview with youth worker

Provide excellent outreach services to connect youth with housing and support

One of the keys to prevention and early intervention, and to connecting homeless and at-risk youth with the housing and supports that are available to them, is outreach. Many youth are reluctant to present themselves at an agency, food bank, shelter, government program, or health service in time of need, even when they know they exist.

To overcome obstacles to help-seeking and to connect in particular with chronically homeless youth, we require good outreach services: workers who maintain a street-level presence and have the ability to build trusting relationships with youth. Outreach workers can be key players in the implementation of a Common Assessment Framework and in connecting the different pieces of the youth-serving sector, as they work to put youth in touch with both mainstream and emergency services.

Effective outreach must be guided by the same spirit of relationship-building as all youth support services.

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34   Smith, A., Stewart, D., Poon, C., Peled, M., Saewyc, K., & McCreary Centre Society (2014). From Hastings to Haida Gwaii: Provincial results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.
35   Smith, A., Stewart, D., Poon, C., Peled, M., Saewyc, K., & McCreary Centre Society (2014). From Hastings to Haida Gwaii: Provincial results of the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society.

Ensure adequate services for youth with mental health issues

The prevalence of mental health issues among the homeless population, and homeless youth in particular, is staggering. Studies have shown that between 40 and 70% of homeless youth report mental health issues[36]; these figures that are supported by the 2012 Youth Survey in Kamloops, which found that 42% of youth who have experienced homelessness in Kamloops report having been diagnosed with a mental illness. Clearly, we cannot address youth homelessness without accounting for the need for mental health supports.

There are currently efforts underway in Kamloops to enhance the system of care as it relates to mental health supports. The Interior Health Authority, provincial ministries, and community-based agencies are collaborating to connect homeless youth with the mental health supports they require. It is essential that these efforts are supported through the work of this plan.

Enhance services for LGBTQ youth and foster public awareness

While Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) individuals make up 5 to 10% of the overall youth population in Canada, they represent 25 to 40% of the youth homeless population. [37]

The experiences of homeless LGBTQ youth are marked by emotional distress, coming to terms with sexuality, homophobia, and invisibility.[38] These experiences, and the isolation, mental health challenges, and exploitation that stem from them, emerged strongly during the Youth Consultation. Discrimination and exclusion were reported not only in schools, on the street, and in homes, but also in support services and programs targeting youth.

Given these issues and the overrepresentation of LGBTQ youth in the homeless population, our community must pay special attention to the services for this population. Enhancing services for LGBTQ youth involves:

- Ensuring that emergency services and shelters provide safe environments for LGBTQ youth
- Enhancing training for all those who engage with youth in the issues faced by LGBTQ youth
- Promoting policy development among all youth-serving institutions, organizations, and programs that recognizes the unique experiences, needs, strengths, and culture of LGBTQ youth

Because sexual discrimination/intolerance and exclusion of LGBTQ youth is a widespread social phenomenon, we must also work more broadly to enhance public awareness of this population and their experiences.

> "*The mental health, the Aspergers, takes away the basic thing that everyone else takes for granted – they understand directions, they understand basic motivations, body language -- sorry guys I'm… I have had troubles for a very long time.*"
>
> *– Focus Group participant*

> **Q:** *What problems do young homeless people face on a daily basis?*
>
> **A:** *Maybe trying to get help but being rejected by family, friends, services… trying to find some place to go and if you can't find somewhere that would be a big challenge.*
>
> *– Focus Group interaction*

36   Gaetz, S. (2014). Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada. Toronto: The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.
37   http://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/population-specific/lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-transsexual-queer-questioning-and-2
38   Abramovich, I. No Safe Place to Go: LGBTQ Youth Homelessness in Canada: Reviewing the Literature. Canadian Journal of Family and Youth, 4(1), 2012, pp 29-51. University of Alberta.

Enhance services for Aboriginal youth and foster public awareness

Aboriginal youth are overrepresented in the homeless population. The 2012 Youth Survey revealed that approximately 30% of youth who had experienced homelessness identified as First Nations, Metis, or Inuit. Aboriginal youth also make up 52% of children in care in British Columbia, which means they are disproportionately affected by the obstacles faced by youth both in care and aging out of care. Factors such as discrimination, intergenerational trauma, poverty, and loss of cultural identity create significant obstacles to housing and stability. [39] These factors emerged in our Youth Consultation through discussion with Aboriginal youth at three different agencies/programs.

Kamloops serves as a regional hub and is home to many Aboriginal youth who have migrated from outlying communities and reserves throughout the Thompson Nicola Cariboo region. In recognition of the importance of Kamloops as a hub for Aboriginal people and the challenges of the urban Aboriginal population, our community was chosen as one of five pilot communities for development of an Off-Reserve Aboriginal Action Plan (ORAAP), in collaboration with the provincial Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation and Aboriginal Affairs. The work of A Way Home must align with the work of the ORAAP.

To address the issues faced by homeless and at-risk Aboriginal youth, our community can undertake several key initiatives:

> **"***Why do we have to become individuals? Like, why are we, we come from a collective upbringing, you now, history... and now we are told to become individuals…***"**
>
> *– Focus Group participant*

- Enhancing training around the unique challenges and strengths faced by Aboriginal youth for all service providers and organizational staff who deal with homeless or at-risk youth

- Supporting existing programs and developing new programs that foster Aboriginal youth's unique cultural identity

- Involving Elders in meaningful ways in the education, development, and care of Aboriginal youth

- Acknowledging and involving extended family in the care of Aboriginal youth

- Actively engaging Aboriginal organizations and service providers in all initiatives that impact homeless and at-risk youth in general

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39   Patrick, C. (2014). Aboriginal Homelessness in Canada: A Literature Review. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Ensure that education, training, and job skill development are accessible to youth

Our efforts to end youth homelessness and ensure that youth have the opportunity to find stability, wellness, and independence require us to think about more than just prevention and housing. A key component of supporting youth is ensuring that they have adequate access to education, training, and job skill development.

Education, training, and employment were common themes in the Youth Consultation. Youth frequently pointed out both the importance of education and the challenges that homelessness or lack of stability presented in pursuing their education. Homeless youth face significant barriers to employment, particularly those with experience of trauma, addictions, mental health issues, and involvement with the criminal justice system. Employers may perceive great risks in hiring young people in general, and young homeless or at-risk people in particular. One key finding of the Youth Consultation is that most homeless and at-risk youth indicate that poverty is a significant obstacle to finding and retaining housing and achieving health and well-being. For these reasons, efforts to ameliorate poverty through education and employment can directly address the concerns of our youth.

Overcoming the challenges outlined above can involve several activities:

- Building on the successes of existing alternative education programs such as Four Directions and Street School
- Enhancing funding for post-secondary education
- Providing job skills training designed for youth facing barriers to employment
- Engaging the private sector and promoting the employment of youth with experience of homelessness, with support from community-based agencies and support workers
- Exploring social enterprise for youth that provides low-barrier opportunities for job experience

One area deserving of special attention is engagement with the private sector. As corporate social responsibility becomes more deeply entrenched in the values and culture of Canadian business, there is great opportunity for productive partnerships between efforts to end homelessness and the private sector. The Raising the Roof organization, which aims to facilitate long-term solutions to homelessness in Canada, undertook a year-long Private Sector Engagement Project[40]; our community can learn from organizations like Raising the Roof on how to involve the private sector in our solutions.

Ultimately, improving the education and training of youth will not only improve their earning capabilities, but also their self-worth, engagement in community, and independence.

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40   http://www.raisingtheroof.org/Our-Programs/Youthworks.aspx

Empty Footsteps

"It's cliché to say that my art piece shows the example of "walking in someone else's shoes", however, my intent was for my artwork to show understanding of the situation that the little girl is in and for the viewer to think of how they would feel if they were faced with homelessness."

– Amy Dixon,
South Kamloops Secondary School

Home Sweet Home, *by:*

Breanne McAmmond
South Kamloops Secondary School

"I wanted to create an image that didn't necessarily portray what most people would classify as a "homeless" person. I was surprised to learn that many adolescents in foster care are forced to leave home once they reach the age of nineteen: this puts them in a tough position and many end up living on the streets as a result. As an eighteen year old myself, I cannot imagine being put in this predicament. This a type of homelessness this is often forgotten or ignored and I wanted to bring attention to it."

Implementation Plan

We have talked to youth, we have studied the issues, and we have laid out strategies for helping end homelessness in Kamloops. Now the question is: how do we go about implementing these strategies, putting thought into action, and improving the lives of youth in our community?

Implementation will involve three ongoing and intertwined activities:

1 Collaborate **2 Plan** **3 Monitor**

1 Collaborate

A Way Home will be housed within HomeFree, the community committee working to end homelessness in Kamloops. Implementation will be overseen by a Plan Steering Committee, and the plan will be supported by a Plan Coordinator. However, carrying out the strategies of this plan will be the responsibility of an array of organizations and systems.

Ending youth homelessness must be a joint effort. Every organization, every institution, every system that impacts the lives of youth must be a part of the solution. A strong collaborative framework must be built to implement the recommendations of this plan; this framework must involve a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including:

- non-profit organizations
- municipal government
- provincial government
- federal government
- schools

- health authorities
- police and corrections
- housing providers
- the private sector
- funders

Different representatives from these sectors will have different roles to play. Some will be involved in planning. Some will deliver ground-level initiatives. Some will help fund the activities of the plan. But all must be involved at every step of the way to ensure the success of the plan and the proper implementation of the strategic framework.

Plan Oversight

This is not the only homelessness action plan in Kamloops, and it should not work independently. Instead, it should build on the successes of other plans and adopt their infrastructure. This plan will be housed within HomeFree. HomeFree will provide broad oversight and direction to a Plan Steering Committee, which will serve as a "Partner Committee" to HomeFree and which will be directly responsible for:

- managing the Plan Coordinator
- continuous planning, goal-setting, and carrying out action items
- measuring and monitoring progress and success
- fund development

Since one of the guiding principles of this plan is a strong youth voice and youth engagement, the Plan Steering Committee must include strong youth representation. This may be a combination of youth with lived experience and youth without lived experience of homelessness. This voice is essential in keeping the plan grounded in youth experience, ensuring its relevance, communicating the work of the plan to youth, and engaging youth themselves in some of the initiatives stemming from the plan. The Plan Steering Committee must develop mechanisms for ensuring that youth representatives are fully engaged in implementation and that processes are designed to accommodate the youth.

A Plan Coordinator

Implementing the plan requires a dedicated coordinator position that will be responsible for engaging stakeholders, organizing planning processes, monitoring and data collection, reporting out to the community, working with the overseeing body, building working relationships, maintaining solid communication channels, and serving as a spokesperson for the plan. Reporting to the Plan Steering Committee and to HomeFree, the coordinator should help to keep the overseeing body and the general public informed about the developments in our community as well as current research and best practice.

Coordination with Other Plans and Processes

Collaboration will also involve coordinating the activities of the Strategic Framework with related community efforts to end homelessness and address social issues that contribute to youth homelessness. Partners groups and organizations must include:

- HomeFree
- Kamloops Housing Board
- Kamloops Off-Reserve Advisory Council (for ORAAP – the Off-Reserve Aboriginal Action Plan)
- Social Planning Council (City of Kamloops)
- Youth, Children, and Families Advisory Committee (City of Kamloops)
- Changing the Face of Poverty
- Thompson Rivers University

Next Steps for Collaboration - Year 1

Collaborative steps toward implementation:

1. Formalize the Plan Steering Committee responsible for implementation of the plan through the development of a Terms of Reference and procedures and mechanisms that will effectively support youth representatives on the committee
2. Hire a Plan Coordinator
3. Communicate the plan and its priorities throughout the community
4. Engage and develop strategic partnerships with all stakeholder groups
5. Develop strategic partnerships with other plans and initiatives to end youth homelessness, both provincially and nationally

"The Plan Steering Committee must include strong youth representation."

2 Plan

An effective plan is a learning, living, and adaptive document. Planning is not a one-time endeavour followed by several years of implementation. Rather, planning is a continuous activity that changes in response to environmental changes, success and failure of efforts to implement the Strategic Framework, shifts in government and governmental funding priorities, availability of resources, and changing capacity within community-based organizations.

Action Planning

While this strategic plan lays out recommendations for our community, the Plan Steering Committee, in collaboration with HomeFree and a variety of community stakeholders, must now work to plan out the actions that will fulfill the recommendations. Action planning must involve:

- Prioritization of recommendations
- Identification of specific actions, programs, and services that will fulfill the strategic recommendations
- Description of resources necessary for implementing action items
- Assigning responsibility and points of accountability for action items
- Developing timelines and the establishment of benchmarks and milestones

Fund Development

The action items that emerge from this process will require money. The Plan Steering Committee and Plan Coordinator must work continually to develop the financial resources necessary for implementation, and to keep in mind funding diversity.

Consistent funding must be made available to the non-profit and community-based organizations that will enhance existing or develop new programs and services; manage supportive housing units; and coordinate the support systems necessary to end youth homelessness. The non-profit sector will play a key role in these efforts, and their involvement must be accompanied by appropriate financial resources.

Sources of funding for implementing this plan's recommendations could include:

- Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) funds for specific programs and services
- Foundations and private donors
- The three levels of government
- Corporations and the private sector
- Social enterprise

Funding diversity is very important in ensuring the success of the plan. Particularly when faced with shifts in governmental funding priorities and economic uncertainty, it is necessary to develop funding partnerships with a wide variety of community stakeholders.

Next Steps for Planning – Year 1

After forming the Plan Steering Committee responsible for plan implementation and the hiring of a Plan Coordinator, HomeFree, the Plan Steering Committee and the Coordinator will collaborate with community stakeholders in order to:

- establish broad strategic priorities for the life of the plan
- establish key priorities and action items for Year 1 of the plan
- establish clear benchmarks, milestones and indicators for Years 1 of the plan
- assess resources available for plan implementation
- develop strategic funding partnerships for plan implementation

Next Steps for Planning – Beyond Year 1

The ongoing planning process will include:

1. an annual plan review, including:
   - review of achievements and successes
   - review of the Strategic Framework, as well as revision to the Framework as informed by new research, data, circumstances, achievements, and environmental changes
   - establishment of the following year's priorities and action items
2. regular reporting out to the community about the achievements of the plan, new priorities and action items, and developments in our community that impact our efforts to end youth homelessness
3. ongoing fund development

It's Not All Black and White

"*Although these hands were glazed in black and white, the message behind the sculpture is intended with a deeper meaning. People of all ages, genders, and ethnicities are faced with homelessness and hunger on a daily basis, and although viewers can't see the pain in a young boy's eyes or sadness in the face of an old man, the gesture of empty hands begging for money or food implies the same emotions."*

– Jillian Armstrong, South Kamloops Secondary School

3 Monitor

Effective implementation, evidence-based decision-making, and proper planning require good data collection and monitoring, as well as research. Monitoring will assist HomeFree and the Plan Steering Committee in measuring success and setting new directions for the plan.

Research

A learning, living and adaptive plan requires ongoing research into the causes of youth homelessness, the unique obstacles faced by specific demographics, and effective strategies for prevention, housing, and support. We must follow research developments in British Columbia and Canada, and we may look to the research being done in countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. We can learn from practices and program models developed in other communities, both close to home and abroad. One key to conducting good research is building on existing partnerships between the homelessness sector in Kamloops and Thompson Rivers University.

Data Collection and Information Management

We need to know more about our youth homeless population, including how many homeless youth there are, how they interact with the system of care, which services they are accessing, and how long they retain housing with different supports and strategies in place. We also need information about the characteristics of the homeless youth population; while the 2012 Youth Survey revealed valuable information, it did not give us a complete description of our homeless youth population.

For *A Way Home*, data collection and information management depend on two activities:

- a regular youth homeless count and assessment; traditional Point-in-Time counts do not always give a complete picture of hidden and episodic homelessness, so we must develop or adopt new methods of counting homeless youth

- community-wide implementation of a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS); these systems allow communities to track information about the homeless population, including shelter use, access of services, housing, and case management; such a system can provide a community with excellent information that can be used to target new programs and services and guide case management

Program Evaluation

The strategies recommended in this plan will find ground-level expression through programs, services, and housing. It is essential that we evaluate these programs to determine whether and how they are achieving their goals. Program evaluation is necessary if we are to allocate resources effectively and adapt our actions and strategies in order to build on proven success.

Indicators of Success

How do we know we're succeeding in our efforts? We need to develop clear indicators of success and key performance measurements to evaluate the ongoing implementation of this plan and its actions. Using good data and information as well as best practices in outcomes evaluation, HomeFree and the Plan Steering Committee should work to establish these indicators, which may include:

- improvements in housing retention
- improvements in delivering services and supports for homeless and at-risk youth
- improvements in community integration and homelessness prevention
- improvements in education, employment, and income
- evidence of the cost-benefits of the activities and strategies implemented as part of this plan

Next Steps for Monitoring - Year 1

Monitoring activities must begin immediately after the formal adoption of this plan and the establishment of the plan's infrastructure. Year one activities include:

1. assemble all research conducted in the preparation of this plan for HomeFree, the Plan Steering Committee, and the Plan Coordinator to use as a resource in their action planning, prioritization, and goal-setting
2. conduct a youth homeless count
3. support the adoption and implementation of a Homeless Management Information System for the community
4. develop indicators of success

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HomeFree is the central community body working to end homelessness in Kamloops. It brings together representatives from the three orders of government, the business sector, non-profit housing and homelessness service providers, and persons with lived experience of homelessness. It also acts as the community advisory board that determines the allocation of federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) funds to homelessness related projects in the community. For more information about HomeFree, contact the City of Kamloops Project Manager – Housing and Homelessness:

Claire Macleod
Phone: 250-828-3758
Email: cmacleod@kamloops.ca
http://www.kamloops.ca/socialdevelopment/homefree.shtml

Kamloops Homelessness Action Plan (HAP) is a plan to end homelessness in the community through strategies targeting housing, support services, and creating financial independence. For more information, contact the HAP Coordinator and visit the HAP website for helpful information and local research, including the *A Way Home* document:

Tangie Genshorek
Phone: 250-571-9665
Email: info@kamloopshap.ca
http://www.kamloopshap.ca/index.html

The National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, Eva's Initiatives and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, with funding from the Catherine Donnelly Foundation are in their second year of a five-year national initiative called the **Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness Program**. The MLC Program will draw on the resources of its unique partnerships to build community awareness about youth homelessness and support communities to develop and implement plans that will prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness. For more information, contact Eva's Initiatives:

Phone: 416-977-4497
Email: info@evas.ca
http://www.evasinitiatives.com/2012/11/19/mobilizing-local-capacity-to-end-youth-homelessness-in-canada/

Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness Program

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