2.6

COORDINATION AT THE SERVICE DELIVERY LEVEL:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CONTINUUM OF SERVICES FOR STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH

Naomi NICHOLS

Like homelessness in Canada's adult population, youth homelessness is not caused by a single incident, behaviour or action. Homelessness is the result of interrelated structural, personal and inter-personal factors that undermine people's access to stable and appropriate housing (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter & Gulliver, 2013). Youth who experience homelessness represent a diversity of characteristics and experiences (Gaetz, 2014). Although homelessness cuts across demographic categories and identities, sexual-, gender-, racial- and cultural-minority youth are overrepresented in Canada's homeless population. Structural conditions such as racism, heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia, cissexism, poverty, a lack of safe, accessible and affordable housing for youth and insufficient or ineffective inter-sectoral and inter-agency coordination contribute to exclusion and homelessness among youth (Gaetz, 2004; 2014; Gaetz et al., 2013). For example, experiences of oppression linked to colonization shape an overrepresentation of youth with Aboriginal heritage among homeless populations (Baskin, 2007). Many youth who experience housing instability and homelessness report histories of conflict and/or abuse within the family home. For some youth, familial conflict and instability has shaped interactions with child protection services through childhood and sometimes during adolescence. In Jasinski, Wesely, Wright and Mustaine's (2010) study of women and homelessness, almost half of their study participants were unable to live with their biological families during childhood because of poverty and abuse. Other studies corroborate a link between child welfare involvement and homelessness (Dworsky & Courtney, 2009; Karabanow, 2004; Lemon Osterling & Hines, 2006; Lindsey & Ahmed 1999; Mallon, 1998, Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006; Nichols, 2013; 2014; Ontario Youth Leaving Care Working Group, 2013). Many homeless youth experience mental health and addictions issues (Baer, Ginzler & Peterson, 2003; Hughes, Clark, Wood, Cakmak, Cox, MacInnis, Warren, Handrahan & Broom, 2010). Learning disabilities and educational challenges are also common among young people experiencing homelessness (Hyman, Aubry & Klodawsky, 2010; Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006). Like adults who experience homelessness, youth may use a range of services, participating in interventions that "cut across multiple agencies and multiple services systems" (Hambrick & Rog, 2000: 354).

Youth homelessness is a complex problem. It warrants a multi-dimensional response that addresses the circumstances of individual youth as well as the social-structural conditions shaping patterns of exclusion and inequality more broadly. In this chapter, I argue that inter-organizational and inter-professional – or 'joined up' – learning, planning, policy making and working will enable the type of systems-level response that a complex problem like youth homelessness requires. As I see it, an integrated response to youth homelessness requires the following:

1. Conceptual integration (i.e. common terms of reference, goals and frameworks for action);

2. Administrative integration (i.e. via policies and procedures for inter-organizational data collection, accounting and communication as well as methods for distributing leadership and accountability within and across sectors); and

3. The dissolution of traditional sectoral and organizational territories.

This chapter describes the collaborative planning and change process spear-headed by a group of service providers in the city of Hamilton, Ontario:[1] the Street Youth Planning Collaborative (SYPC). The SYPC represents a grassroots-led (or 'bottom-up') effort to collectively identify and address the structural factors and individual circumstances influencing the experiences of street-involved youth in the City of Hamilton. In telling the SYPC's story, I shed a light on the activities of people in Hamilton as they endeavor to create and implement a coordinated system of supports for street-involved youth. As I move through the narrative, I highlight the general implications of this case, teasing out the necessary organizational and behavioural components of a change process that supports a fundamental shift in how people work and think. The case highlights the strategic use of research by a service delivery network to generate a common understanding of a problem and then to identify, plan for and fund a multi-faceted solution. The case also demonstrates the suspension of organizational autonomy that is necessary to joint work. Hamilton's coordinated response to youth homelessness is supported by shared staffing positions and shared funds that support interdependency and shared accountability. As a research case, the SYPC illustrates some of the strengths and limitations of a community-led or bottom-up organizational response to a complex problem like youth homelessness.

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1. The third largest municipality in Ontario, the City of Hamilton has a population of approximately 520,000 people. Hamilton has a long history of industrial activity, particularly in steel manufacturing. The dominance of the steel industry in Hamilton continues to exert considerable economic and cultural influence in the region, even as the municipality experiences a decrease in manufacturing and increase in the arts and service industries.

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection for this particular case study began with a review and high-level coding of the SYPC's organizational documents: meeting minutes, terms of reference, evaluation reports and procedural documents. This preliminary review of materials guided the development of case-specific interview prompts and observational foci relative to the standard interview template and observational guide used to construct all of the cases for a larger project. Fieldwork occurred over the span of a single month in 2014.

Observation

The process began with a period of observation and discussion in a number of the organizations that comprise the collaborative[2]. I also observed a meeting of the SYPC Directors Committee, a meeting of the Youth Housing Support Project Members and a meeting of the Frontline Advisory Committee (FLAC).

Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

In addition to the time spent doing site visits, observing meetings and speaking casually with people about their involvement in the SYPC, I conducted three in-depth semi-structured interviews and seven semi-structured focus group discussions. The focus group sizes ranged from four to 15 participants per group. Targeted interview and focus group discussion prompts were developed for each conversation based on early document analysis, site visits and observations as well as the standard set of interview topics used to inform the development of other case studies in this volume (e.g. Doberstein, Chapter 4.4). Throughout this chapter, pseudonyms are used to refer to individual research participants.

FINDINGS – PART ONE

Envisioning a Model for Service Integration

I have organized the findings into two parts. The first part conveys a generalized model for service integration for street-involved youth that is informed by the SYPC's approach. In part one, I use a number of subheadings to articulate distinctive components of the model. In part two, I illuminate a number of persistent challenges that the SYPC member organizations face. Part two outlines key challenges that influence the efficacy of an integrated service-delivery approach to prevent and address youth homelessness.

Build Professional Relationships and Assess Community Needs and Strengths

Prior to the emergence of the SYPC as a formal collaborative structure, people who worked with street youth in Downtown Hamilton communicated with one another on an ad hoc basis, but made no attempt to formally coordinate service provision or communication pathways. In 2000, two youth homelessness organizations identified a significant service gap: "a lack of weekend support for street-involved homeless youth in Hamilton… Street-involved youth couldn't go home on the weekends, nor could they go to any service" (Carrie, SYPC director).

These organizations led to the development of a Street Involved Youth Network. The network emerged as a space for service providers to share information, support one another's work and discuss systemic and service user trends. The goal was to increase collaboration among service providers as a way to eliminate service

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2. Social Research and Planning Council, Notre Dame Youth Shelter, Notre Dame School, Brennan House, Wesley Youth Housing, Living Rock, Angela's Place (and the School for Young Mothers), the City of Hamilton and Art Forms, Youth Art Studio.

duplication and repair service delivery gaps. In support of this goal, the network partnered with Hamilton's Social Planning and Research Council (SPRC) to produce a proposal for an assessment of the needs of street-involved youth in Hamilton. The National Crime Prevention Centre funded the proposal, and an individual – Janine – was hired by the SPRC to design and conduct the needs assessment research and ultimately coordinate the activities of the SYPC.

In 2005, the SYPC and the SPRC released the *Addressing the Needs of Street-involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton* report with 27 recommendations that were developed to support community planning and action processes. Frontline and management staff from street-youth serving organizations were involved in all aspects of the research process. From Janine's perspective, "by the time the recommendations were developed and we tested them [for feasibility] with leadership and frontline staff… people were bought in." Carrie, a member of the SYPC Directors' Committee, corroborates and extends Janine's position: "Those 27 recommendations [from the needs assessment research] have led the work [of the SYPC]." In fact, the emergence of the SYPC as a structure to support collaboration and coordination among street-youth-serving organizations is, itself, a response to one of the central "needs" the research identified: the need for an easy-to-access, well-organized and integrated service delivery model.

Develop a Model:
A Continuum of Services for Street-involved Youth

The SYPC represents almost 15 years of collaborative work. Currently, the SYPC consists of seven member organizations. Each of the following organizations performs a distinctive function within the street-youth-serving continuum:

- Alternatives for Youth, which offers addictions and mental health services;

- Good Shepherd Youth Services, which is comprised of the following organizations: Notre Dame Youth Shelter, Brennan Transitional Housing and Brennan ACTs 2nd Stage Transitional Housing, Angela's Place – transitional housing, childcare and a school for young mothers and the Notre Dame Alternative School (in partnership with the school board). Good Shepherd Youth Services collectively offer housing, mental health, childcare, prenatal and parenting resources, education, advocacy, trusteeship and wellness services;

- Hamilton Regional Indian Centre, which offers culturally relevant education, outreach, addictions, wellness, employment, prenatal and parenting resources, and legal supports;

- Living Rock Ministries, which offers employment, wellness, housing support, advocacy and nutrition services;

- SPRC of Hamilton, which offers research, planning, evaluation and community development supports;

- Wesley Urban Ministries, which operates Wesley Youth Housing and oversees the Youth Outreach Worker (YOW) program. Wesley Urban Ministries collectively offer housing, outreach and wellness services; and more recently

- The City of Hamilton offers administrative, governance, and funding support.

Each of these seven member organizations offer a suite of programs and services that contribute to Hamilton's continuum of services and supports for street-involved youth. In some cases, a program is linked to a particular organization, but shared by the system. For example, the Mobile Mental Health Clinician team has an office at Notre Dame Youth Shelter, but the clinicians service all of the Good Shepherd organizations, Wesley Youth Housing and Living Rock Ministries. The Youth Housing Support Project is also comprised of a number of shared housing support worker positions, as is the mobile YOW program.

In addition, the SYPC collaborates with a number of other organizations in Hamilton to ensure a comprehensive continuum of services for distinctive populations of street-involved and homeless youth. For example, St. Martins Manor (Catholic Family Services) and Grace Haven (Salvation Army), two member organizations of the community's Young Parent Network, also offer housing and other supports for pregnant and parenting youth. The relationship between the Young Parent Network and the SYPC is supported by the provision of a full-time housing worker position (funded by Catholic Family Services) that is shared between Grace Haven, St. Martins Manor and Angela's Place. Further supporting the links between the two networks, Angela's Place (a Good Shepherd organization) is a member organization of both networks.
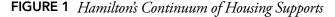
No longer a loosely affiliated network of street-youth-serving organizations, the SYPC is now formally organized to support learning and collaboration within and across three different organizational levels with distinctive mandates:

1. Youth Leaders Committee that offers experiential insights;
2. Frontline Advisory Committee that is responsible for sharing 'on the ground' knowledge and offering advice; and
3. The Directors' Committee that is responsible for making decisions and influencing policy/program directions.

People link the SYPC's three-tiered structure to the collaboration's ability to represent community priorities and concerns: "[it] comes back to that three tier piece… I think it's about youth voice, frontline voice, director voice… other tables that I'm on that don't have all three of those tiers, it's a very different dynamic… [the SYPC] reflects the voice of this community" (Ruby, director). For a change process to "reflect the voice of [the] community," it must begin with – and remain accountable to – local perspectives and concerns.

Identify a Shared Focus and Reorganize the Service Delivery System to Achieve a Shared Goal

Guided by the community-based needs assessment research process, the SYPC identified a shared focus on early intervention and diversion. Their goal is to ensure that young people with no prior street involvement are diverted from the street-involved-youth sector as quickly as possible (within 48 hours) after coming into contact with the system. In support of this outcome, the SYPC has developed a continuum of housing supports that typically begins when a youth enters the system through the Good Shepherd Notre Dame Shelter.

FIGURE 1 *Hamilton's Continuum of Housing Supports*

| SYSTEM ENTRY/
TRIAGE:
Notre Dame Shelter | → | SUPPORTIVE
HOUSING:
Brennan House | → | TRANSITIONAL
HOUSING,
STAGE 1:
Brennan After Care (ACT) Housing & Wesley Youth Housing, 1st floor | → | TRANSITIONAL
HOUSING, STAGE 2:
Wesley Youth Housing, 2nd Floor | → | SUPPORT TO ACCESS & MAINTAIN INDEPENDENT HOUSING IN CITY |

While very few youth actually progress in a linear way through each housing component, the continuum is organized to provide youth with different levels of supportive housing and other required services wherever they enter the system. The Continuum of Housing Supports is not a staircase model – that is, a young person's access to various housing components is not dependent on demonstrations of 'housing readiness' while participating in any single component; rather, the aim is to provide access to an array of housing options that address the diverse needs of youth in the municipality.

The most common access and comprehensive assessment point is the Good Shepherd emergency shelter, Notre Dame.[3] In addition, the Youth Housing Support Workers and youth outreach workers associated with the various SYPC member organizations ensure multiple other access points, relative to the continuum of services. When youth access the continuum of housing services in Hamilton, they also gain access to the Good Shepherd Mobile Youth Mental Health Clinician team, the City of Hamilton's Mental Health Outreach team, and Alternatives for Youth (AY) Addictions and Mental Health Counselors as needed. This type of structure is often described as a 'no-wrong door' approach to service delivery. The idea is that youth in Hamilton "don't need to jump through A, B, C, and D to get services. You get here; you get services" (Jean, manager).

The other important aspect of the SYPC's early prevention strategy is their effort to work cross-sectorally to prevent institutional discharges from other sectors (e.g. justice, child welfare, mental health) into the Notre Dame Youth Shelter. Transitions between systems increase people's vulnerability to homelessness, particularly among youth transitioning from state care. Given the SYPC's goal to prevent youth homelessness, cross-sector collaboration is an important aspect of its work.

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3. Staff at Notre Dame assess incoming youth using a simplified version of the CANS (Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths) tool. Other organizations across the SYPC are currently being trained to use this adapted assessment tool as well.

Expand the Network:
Foster Collaboration Between Sectors

Many of the recommendations from the *Addressing the Needs* report highlight the importance of cross-sector relationships to adequately meet the needs of street-involved youth. To improve cross-sectoral collaboration, the SYPC produced a follow-up report on building collaborative relations between the Child Welfare and Street Youth Service sectors that identified "how well [the two sectors] were or weren't [working] together – and at different levels" (Nicole, current SYPC coordinator). Guided by the two reports, the SYPC has tried to foster cross-sectoral partnerships and/or improve cross-sectoral communication between the street-involved-youth, the mental health and the child welfare sectors.

Cultivate Shared Accountabilities: Joint Work
Between the Child Welfare and Youth Homelessness Sectors

In 2009 – in partnership with the Children's Aid Societies (CAS) of Hamilton – the SYPC applied for and received funding from HPS to develop and implement a Youth Housing Support Project Team. This team of seven individuals is shared by and supports the housing needs of youth involved in one or more of the following partner organizations: Catholic-CAS, CAS, Good Shepherd Youth Services (including Notre Dame Youth Shelter, Brennan House, Brennan House ACTS and Angela's Place), Wesley Youth Housing, Living Rock Ministries and St. Martin's Manor. While a single organization is designated as an organizational lead in order to receive and manage the funds, the positions are shared by the partner organizations.

The shared positions are important in two regards. First, they improve the capacity of individual organizations to meet the housing needs of youth. Second, the shared positions provide a formal structure that connects the street-involved-youth sector to the child welfare sector. The organizations meet regularly to discuss the Youth Housing Support Project Team, but the relationship building that has occurred over the course of this five-year partnership has also opened the door to improved communication between sectors on an informal basis:

> [This project has] solidified relationships and reduced barriers for youth going through systems. Now if things happen, we know we can call Adriano or Mike or Carrie – like we have the relationships… Other than the amazing work of getting kids housed, I think one of the great things that has come out of this is exactly what we wanted, to build a relationship with Child Welfare that wasn't scary for people (Suzanne, member organization director).

Historically, relations between child protection services and the street-involved-youth sector have been strained – largely because a lack of suitable housing for adolescent youth in care (i.e. Society, Crown, or temporary wards of state) has resulted in the placement of these youth at emergency shelters while more suitable housing arrangements can be established. The Youth Housing Support Project has opened the door for ongoing communication and joint problem solving about this and other persistent issues influencing the housing experiences of youth in care. Now, if a former Society or Crown Ward requests a bed at the Notre Dame shelter, shelter staff are asked to give the (C)CAS staff a call to determine whether the youth might be eligible to enter into a voluntary care agreement with the Society. By working collaboratively, the two sectors endeavour to prevent street entrenchment among transitionally homeless youth.

Inter-sectoral coordination is essential to prevent homelessness. In Hamilton – as in many cities across Ontario – the Children's Aid Societies continue to periodically use the Notre Dame emergency shelter as a 'placement' for hard to house youth in care. Many youth who touch the shelter system in this city report prior involvement with the Child Welfare system. In 2014, 52% of youth seeking admission to the shelter were previously involved with the Child Welfare System (Notre Dame, administrative data). Clearly the implementation of a Youth Housing Support Project does not – in and of itself – redress a lack of suitable permanent placement options for adolescent youth in care or for those transitioning out of care. But, the director of the Notre Dame shelter and the (C)CAS managers I interviewed suggest that their collaborative work has improved inter-organizational and inter-professional relations between the two sectors and enabled a coordinated effort to prevent (C)CAS-involved youth from entering the shelter system wherever possible.

The development and implementation of shared staff positions is one way to leverage limited resources and ensure that young people's diverse housing needs are met no matter where youth enter the continuum of care. The shared staffing model is a key component of

the SYPC's collaborative approach and an important driver of sustainable change across the service delivery system. Other important structural and conceptual facilitators of cross-sectoral work are described in the next section on coordinating institutional transitions.

Coordinate Services Across Sectors: Institutional Transitions

Jean, a housing support manager, describes an ideal cross-sectoral response to address the inter-related housing, mental health, youth justice and educational needs of one young man discharging from inpatient psychiatric care. The transition began with a phone call from staff at the inpatient psychiatric ward of the McMaster Children's Hospital to Brennan House, the supportive housing environment for youth. They had a young man – 16 years old – who would soon be discharged and had "nowhere else to go":

He was living independently in student housing, [but] really needed to have the support that we offered. A place where he could be monitored, a place where his medication would be offered to him on a regular basis, a place where he would have some support in improving some of the skills he had learned and some harm reduction (Jean, supportive housing manager).

An ideal cross-sectoral collaboration requires time for transparent communication and planning regarding the needs and expectations of all those involved, including the needs and expectations of the youth:

So the ideal process was for... the hospital to bring the youth to us and introduce him to the program, talk about what we offer, talk about the expectations of the house – not only the mental health piece, but also the daily living piece that we would be providing him with... we also need to identify that the youth fits with the group that we have (Jean, supportive housing manager).

Transparent communication is also necessary to determine and clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of participants relative to the identified needs and expectations of the youth and collaborating agencies. In this case:

> *The hospital is very forthcoming with us with information... We're doing case conferences. This is not taking one day. It took two weeks or three weeks before that could happen... There was no pressure on us to immediately take the youth. Nor was there pressure on the youth to immediately make a decision to come to Brennan House... Everybody was involved and a decision was made around who was going to follow up with what piece... that is the best-case scenario (Jean, supportive housing manager).*

Sometimes described as a wrap-around or case management model, from Jean's perspective the best-case scenario is characterized by cross-sectoral communication, low-pressure timelines and collaborative decision making processes. The ideal process involves friends and service providers – from across a number of sectors, including education, mental health, corrections and housing – collaborating to ensure youth have access to all of the supports they require to experience wellness and stability in community.

In this case, the original point of collaboration was between the youth housing and mental health sectors, reflecting the SYPC's efforts to prevent homelessness among youth transitioning out of inpatient mental health services. The coordination of discharge planning across sectors represents a single aspect of the SYPC's efforts to collectively address the mental health needs of street-involved youth. The SYPC has also capitalized on opportunities for inter-professional learning and sharing to improve the sector's capacity to identify and address the mental health needs of street-involved youth.

Integrate Key Services: Housing and Mental Health Supports for Youth

In response to recommendations from the *Addressing the Needs* report, the SYPC also created a three-person Mobile Mental Health Clinician team to identify and implement effective mental health treatment supports for youth and increase the capacity among frontline staff to effectively and sensitively address the complex mental health needs of street-involved youth. In so doing, the SYPC hoped to limit the number of 'serious occurrences[4]' documented in Ministry of Children and Youth-funded member organizations (e.g. Brennan House or Wesley Youth Housing). By improving staff capacity to identify and proactively respond to youth mental health issues and improving collaboration between the mental health and street-involved youth sectors, the SYPC has indeed decreased member agency use of emergency services. For example, in 2014, the Notre Dame shelter and Brennen House collectively diverted 154 youth from the hospital by implementing in-house crisis support through the Mobile Mental Health team and the use of consulting psychiatry at the McMaster Children's Hospital. The Notre Dame shelter also diverted 260 youth from accessing emergency services by engaging them in the Youth Substance Abuse program, provided in collaboration with the SYPC member-organization Alternatives for Youth.

As Lynn (a mental health clinician) and Jean (a supportive housing manager) explain, the Mobile Mental Health Clinician team exists to improve the sector's capacity to recognise and support the complex mental health needs of street-involved youth:

> *Lynn: So we know from research, right, that there are many, many homeless kids who have serious mental health difficulties, but we weren't working with them... [a youth's] psychiatric support would come from the hospital... there wasn't the expertise within the program to have those young people living with us.*

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4. 'Serious occurrences' are instances where an organization that is funded or licensed by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) is required to notify the Ministry about 'serious' and 'enhanced serious' incidents. For example, an enhanced serious occurrenc" must be reported whenever emergency services are used during a serious incident involving a youth.

Jean: [Now] we are avoiding crises and we are avoiding trips to the hospital, and I think that's what makes the big difference, is that they're not constantly transitioning [into the hospital and then back to the shelter] because we have capacity to support them now.

Rather than simply providing mental health supports to youth themselves, the Mobile Mental Health Clinician team has supported frontline and management-level staff across the SYPC member organizations to identify and proactively respond to mental health issues that have historically undermined a young person's ability to remain housed. They also support staff to collaborate more effectively with mainstream mental health service providers. The Mental Health Clinician team uses a combination of training and professional development, on-site mentorship and the development and implementation of common procedures to enable a proactive, coordinated and collaborative response to the mental health needs of street-involved youth.

The clinicians orient much of their training and capacity building efforts toward improving frontline staff's ability to recognize and proactively respond to young people's mental health needs in-house, while also ensuring that the mental health model used in the street-involved youth sector reflects the approach used by mainstream mental health services: "We started at Brennan House and we got two half-day training sessions from a psychologist at McMaster [Children's Hospital], and that's how it started. We started using some of the basics [of the McMaster approach: Dialectical Behaviour Therapy[5]]" (Lynn, mental health clinician).

As staff across the frontlines of the street-involved youth sector began aligning their approach with the one that the hospital pursued and supporting the development of universal skills among youth across the system of

care, they began to see a reduced number of transfers to the hospital. This more therapeutic approach was paired with general harm reduction training, policy and procedures such as regular bag searches by staff:

If there had been a razorblade in any of our buildings five years ago, there would have been one of two responses: 'Ugh, it's a razorblade,' or the alternate response would be, 'Oh my goodness, this kid may self-harm, we need to send him to the hospital right now…' Whereas now our staff go, 'Oh, that young person tends to keep their razorblades here. Let's check that carefully' (Lynn, mental health clinician).

The Mobile Mental Health team provides formal training opportunities and ongoing coaching to SYPC member organizations' frontline and management staff. These ongoing professional learning and coaching opportunities are designed to change workplace culture and practice across organizations. Professional development and coaching promote changes at the individual staff level. In order to support these changes at an organizational and systems level, policies and procedures were developed and implemented across organizations. In this way, staff's new modes of thinking and acting became standard practices across the sector.

For example, in order to improve frontline capacity to accurately identify the mental health needs of youth, the Mental Health Clinicians – namely Lynn and Esme – developed training and policies for the use of a common assessment tool among all staff who work at the Notre Dame shelter – the main system access point – and a roll-out plan in place to ensure that people are trained to use the tool in member organizations across the SYPC in the immediate future. The shared assessment tool improves conceptual integration and communication across the collaborative:

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5. Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DPT) is an evidence-based cognitive-behavioral treatment approach used with adolescents by staff at the MacMaster Children's Hospital. It focuses on fostering the four skill sets: mindfulness, interpersonal effectiveness, emotion regulation and distress tolerance.

*Esme: And so when youth transfer from program to program...
this little package goes with them that has their CANS and has
their [DBT] skills that they've used... [The common tools and
process for sharing information is] strengthening the partnership
– this intake tool being sort of a common language or a common
way of saying, 'What are the young person's needs and what are
these young person's strengths?' (Esme, mental health clinician).*

The development and implementation of a standardized inter-organizational communication process ensures that staff have a shared understanding of a young person's history of engagement with other SYPC member organizations as well as an assessment of the youth's needs and strengths.

The activities of the shared Mobile Mental Health Clinician team illuminate several key components of the systems-oriented program of reform in Hamilton's youth homelessness sector. In general, the implementation of a shared staffing model provides a framework for ongoing communication and shared investment in one another's work. Specifically, the Mobile Mental Health team sought to align their intra-sectoral work with the larger mental health system so as to improve continuity of care for youth moving between systems as well as communication and coordination between the two sectors. To ensure that programmatic changes acquired traction among frontline staff, the team developed formal training opportunities, which they supported with ongoing on-the-job coaching and mentorship. This new learning was then reinforced by organizational policies and procedures, including shared assessment tools, to ensure a system for intra- and inter-sectoral communication and coordination.

The implementation of a shared staffing model provides a framework for ongoing communication and shared investment in one another's work.

FINDINGS – PART 2

Battling the Headwinds: Barriers to Communication, Collaboration and Coordination

Despite the many gains documented in the sections above, interview participants identify a number of wider systemic influences that continue to make their work difficult. Members of the SYPC agree that they would be unable to do their collaborative work without the organizational and facilitative capacity brought by the SYPC coordinator position. As well as the human resource capacity to support their joint work, fostering collaboration and coordination also requires a sustainable funding base. Partner organizations must be able to share in the economic inputs and outputs of their collaborative work. The loss of economic and organizational autonomy associated with joint working requires flexible and innovative fund distribution, accounting and accountability (e.g. measuring and reporting) mechanisms that support integration at an administrative level.

Funding, Accounting, Administration and Accountability

From the perspective of research respondents in positions of leadership or management, the current funding landscape for non-profit organizations pays lip service to collaboration, that is undermined by the structures that have been developed for distributing and accounting for funds:

> *Most funders are looking for collaboration. But when they say 'collaboration and partnerships,' a lot of funders don't really mean 'collaboration and partnerships.' They mean one agency being the lead, and they just want to have conversations with one committee (Carrie, member organization director).*

There have been times, in the history of the SYPC, where one organization has handed funds across the table to another organization when the collaborative determined that this other organization was better positioned to deliver a particular service. Member organizations share a commitment to positive outcomes for youth that guide all decision-making processes – even decisions about how funds will be distributed between member agencies. In contrast, the reporting and accounting mechanisms put in place by funders anticipate a hierarchical structure between collaborators, with all funds flowing through a single lead agency. This hierarchical structure undermines the distributed approach to leadership and oversight that the SYPC has worked to develop.

The directors of the SYPC observe that government funders might play a role in breaking down funding and other organizational silos, such that productive collaborative relationships between organizations are fostered. It is important that funders do not simply require collaboration at the application stage, but that they enable groups to include a budget line to support the technical and relational work of coordination once funds have been granted. Additionally, if the funding model is going to shift, than the data collection and reporting models will need to change as well:

> *Some of the really good examples where communities have done really high impact work are connected to data. And not just in terms of reporting results… but in terms of really having data that allows you to follow people and follow their progress in really meaningful ways… Especially any group that has multiple partners that touch on multiple systems (Mike, member organization director).*

In order to reap the full benefits of their joint work and to up the ante for the success of cross-sectoral partnerships, the community-led effort spearheaded by the SYPC must be supported by a top-down effort to integrate the administration and oversight of funds and collective outcomes. This change would ensure that the relationship between joint working and shared outcomes is evident and possible to track. In order to prevent youth homelessness, communities need to create and implement systems that sustain cross-sectoral investment in shared outcomes among youth – particularly those youth transitioning between systems of care.

Transitionally Homeless Youth

Young people discharging or aging out of institutional care (e.g. mental health inpatient services or child protection services) and young people being released from youth justice facilities are vulnerable to transitional homelessness – that is, temporary homelessness or shelter use that occurs when discharge planning processes fail to identify and address youth housing needs. Diverting these youth from emergency shelter services is essential to preventing long-term or episodic homelessness. But shelter diversion requires coordinated cross-sectoral communication, decision making and planning processes *as well as* shared accountability for the outcomes of youth transitioning between systems.

In an earlier section, Jean described an ideal discharge planning process coordinated between mental health and street-youth services. Unfortunately, this 'ideal' discharge process remains elusive. Youth continue to be discharged from the hospital into SYPC housing environments without their medication or with insufficient effort to ensure their comfort and readiness: "I was discharged [from psychiatric care into Brennan House], and the next day I was back in the hospital… [The problem] was being rushed into a new place I didn't even know" (Arianne, youth leaders committee). Youth also continue to be discharged into the shelter from inpatient psychiatric care facilities and criminal justice facilities and placed there temporarily by the Child Welfare system. Esme notes that it remains common practice for youth to arrive at the Notre Dame shelter with nothing but a sack of belongings:

> *When a young person or young adult is discharged to the shelter, you're discharging that kid to the streets… And that happens a lot. And then we get to know these kids because they arrive with a sack – I think about that metaphor with a stick and the bag – literally with a sack, and there is [no communication] to precede their arrival.*

Discharging a youth into the shelter system is discharging them into homelessness. The shared goal of diverting youth from the shelter system shapes a continued effort by SYPC and CCAS staff to prevent CCAS-involved youth from becoming involved in the shelter system. By providing former CCAS-involved youth with the option of establishing a voluntary care agreement with the Society, these youth have an opportunity to be quickly transitioned out of emergency shelter services and receive additional housing supports. Even still, Suzanne – a SYPC director – notes that they are seeing more "15 year olds in the shelter and because they're going to be 16 in two months, Child Welfare won't touch them." She adds "[this] is a challenge for us because unless they're involved with Child Welfare, they can't come in [to the shelter] under 16."

The continuous flow of youth into Hamilton's street-involved-youth services from other systems means that no matter how effectively the SYPC organize their service delivery system to identify and respond to the needs of street-involved youth, member organizations will continue to confront youth homelessness and street involvement in their community. Further insight into the effects of these persistent organizational disjunctures in the lives and experiences of street-involved youth are explored in the next and final subsection.

Understanding Cross-sectoral Disjunctures: Youth Perspectives

Of the seven youth that I spoke with, five had used one or more of the SYPC's housing supports. The other two were regular participants (and advisory members) for a street-level youth arts program that operates with sponsorship from Hamilton's Social Planning and Research Council. All five of the housing service users accessed the continuum of housing services through the Notre Dame Youth Shelter. For three of these five youth, access to the Notre Dame shelter was preceded by involvement with residential child protection (Nola), inpatient mental health (Arianne) and a group home (Evan). An additional youth (Camisha) came to the Notre Dame shelter after a conflict with her biological grandparents and another (Sammy) did not describe the circumstances of her initial involvement. Six out of the seven youth I spoke with described struggles with significant mental health concerns – suicidal ideation and self harm, depression, anxiety and oppositional defiance disorder. Their stories illuminate the SYPC's continuum of services in operation and reveal the wider systemic influences shaping the community's efforts to prevent or respond to youth homelessness.

Eight days before his 16th birthday, Evan's parents placed him in a group home for youth who 'weren't suitable for living at home.' While Evan's first point of contact with the SYPC's continuum of services was the main triage and central access point – the Notre Dame Youth Shelter – this was not his first encounter with housing services for youth, more generally. Prior to connecting to "the Dame," he had had accessed street youth services in the same municipality where his group home was located.

"I didn't even last like four days at the shelter there, because there was no way for me to get to school... I was getting cabbed every single day [from the group home in Oakville] all the way to school in Burlington."

One of the consequences for failing to abide by the rules in his group home was to kick a youth out to a local homeless shelter. Evan describes the group home as "very, very structured," and explains that it didn't take long for him to be sent to a youth shelter as a consequencefor failing to follow the rules: "I didn't even last for two months there… in that period of my life I was really hostile and resistant. Like I'm diagnosed with ODD [Oppositional Defiance Disorder]. And so I'm just really resistant to authoritative figures like my parents, teachers, stuff like that."

In Evan's case, being sent to a youth shelter did not result in the behavioural compliance that the group home staff anticipated. As Evan explains, "[When] I got kicked out [of the group home] for the first time. I hadn't been able to have any experience like a normal 16-year-old kid in high school, so I kind of went crazy. I was out partying and I was just doing all that stuff for about three weeks." Instead of following the rules at the shelter so as to earn readmittance to the group home, Evan spent three weeks staying with friends and partying. After living out his welcome at his friend's house, Evan eventually returned to the youth shelter in Oakville where he had originally been placed by group home staff. But, he explains, it was impossible for him to get to school in Burlington while he was staying at the youth shelter in Oakville: "I didn't even last like four days at the shelter there, because there was no way for me to get to school... I was getting cabbed every single day [from the group

home in Oakville] all the way to school in Burlington." Evan eventually returned to the group home after his father: "called me and he told me that if I wanted to go to my little brother's confirmation – my little brother is the most important person in the world to me – I would have to go back to the group home." Upon his return to the group home, Evan quickly learned that his parents and the group home staff would not be upholding their end of this arrangement:

And so Friday night – [my brother's] confirmation was on Saturday – I'm inside my room, I'm trying on my suit and stuff like that, like getting ready for tomorrow, and one of the workers comes in and she goes, 'I have bad news. You're grounded because you've been AWOL [absent without leave] for three weeks, so I'm going to have to take away your iPod.' So I gave her my iPod and she's like, 'And also you're not going to be able to go to your little brother's confirmation.' And then I just stopped caring about trying to make that program work.

At this point, Evan entered into a significant period of housing instability that increased his involvement in street life and undermined his ability to remain connected to school:

Within two weeks of finding that out, I got kicked out again [at the end of February]. And so I started couch surfing… I was sleeping on the street and stuff like that… After a while couch surfing, it just gets to point where like you're going to have to leave, right? So from there I went and lived at the Dame [youth shelter in Hamilton]… [I] kept on getting renewals and stuff like that… [Eventually] my ex-girlfriend's stepmom… took me to the Living Rock where I filled out an application for Wesley at the beginning – or mid-April. It took 'til August until there was a spot available.

Aspects of Evan's story are worth highlighting. The first is that the group home used the local sheltering system as a consequence or punishment for youth who fail to abide by the rules. The second is that the shelter that Evan was 'kicked out to' was located in a different municipality than his school, which meant that he was unable to get to school using public transit. By using a youth shelter as a punishment, the group home increased Evan's contact with street culture and decreased his involvement with school.

The other part of this story that is worth noting is that Evan's first encounter with street-youth services in Hamilton did not – at that time – lead to increased housing stability for him. After accessing shelter services on his own through the Notre Dame Youth Shelter in Hamilton, Evan was unable to secure housing within the period of eligibility (42 days) for emergency shelter use that is funded by Ontario Works (OW) social assistance. As such, he was required to apply for numerous renewals. Other youth – for example those who fail to abide by the rules of the shelter – will be less likely to have their eligibility renewed.

It is important to note that Evan did not access the Wesley Youth Housing Application process until a friend's mother intervened. In other words, the Notre Dame shelter did not, in fact, serve as a point of access for Evan to negotiate a transition to supportive housing. From the time he submitted his application to Wesley Youth Housing, Evan waited almost four months before a spot there became available for him. Four months is considerably longer than the standard length of time an individual is permitted to use emergency shelter services like those offered by the Notre Dame. As Evan's story makes clear, even with efforts to ensure that Hamilton offers a continuum of housing services to street-involved youth, there is insufficient capacity within the system to effectively respond to the housing needs of *all* youth. Significantly, from the perspectives of the service users that I interviewed, youth with the most complex needs have the greatest difficulty getting their needs met through existing channels for service access and use.

The youth I interviewed observed that the roughest and most street-involved youth are less likely to be placed into one of the community's supportive housing environments than more compliant and less street-entrenched youth. While the youth raise important concerns about fairness and access, SYPC members remain committed to prevention and early intervention, which means prioritizing the housing needs of those youth who are new to the system. Additionally, service providers and managers recognize that 'fit' is important for each distinctive housing environment. Jean, a housing services manager, describes the delicate balancing act required to assess the complex needs of applicants to ensure that all the youth in a particular housing environment function well together.

Without the conceptual commitment to diversion or a full picture of the particular needs and strengths of all the youth in residence in a particular place, youth interpret the housing access process as one that excludes some of the more street-involved young people in Hamilton: "[Service providers] send the people that have potential to Brennan House and make other people wait and use and abuse [drugs and alcohol] at Notre Dame" (Nola, youth leaders committee).

From a continuum of care perspective, Brennan House offers the most hands-on support to youth. Medication usage is monitored, the space is designed to feel like a home and staff directly support residents' successful navigation of other institutional processes (e.g. school enrolment). Camisha – a youth who entered the continuum of housing services through the Notre Dame shelter and was quickly transitioned into Brennan House – explains that the staff at Notre Dame recognised "I wouldn't have made it on my own. I was like a baby… I was only [at the Dame] for two days because they could tell I was not going to be there long… I didn't know what to do" (Camisha). The youth I spoke with interpret this type of response as privileging the housing needs of those youth who are more compliant and less street-entrenched; on the other hand, staff see it is a move to prevent street entrenchment among youth without histories of involvement in street-youth culture. The observation that highly street-involved youth are difficult to place within Hamilton's continuum of housing services (beyond their use of emergency housing supports at the Notre Dame shelter) suggests that the SYPC does not presently have the capacity to support the housing needs of the most street-entrenched youth in their community.

A federal mandate to implement a Housing First approach – and as such prioritize housing those individuals with the most complex needs – may lead to an additional set of housing supports for these youth. In any case, it would be important to explore the specific barriers faced by the hardest to house youth in this community prior to the development of further housing resources targeting their particular needs. More than likely, housing these youth will require innovative partnerships with other sectors, given the particular challenges (e.g. dual diagnosis or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) these youth face.

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DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Despite the ongoing work that the SYPC will be required to do in order to contribute to the resolution of youth homelessness, there is much to learn from this case. The SYPC suggests a model for how to improve the capacity for cross-sectoral communication, collaboration and coordination:

1. Build relationships across organizations and sectors and design systems for ongoing communication, collaboration and coordination that support and are supported by these relationships (e.g. shared staffing models);

2. Engage all levels of staff in training and professional development as well as ongoing on-site coaching and mentorship; and

3. Support the relational work with clear operational, administrative and accounting policies and procedures that operate across and link organizational contexts.

In order to better meet the needs of street-involved youth in Hamilton, street-youth-serving organizations have had to engage other sectoral players in collaborative or partnership processes. This work – to improve communication, collaboration and coordination across sectors – is ongoing. Ultimately, if the community intends to decrease the number of young people moving into and out of the youth homelessness system from other institutional settings, they will need to engage decision makers at the provincial and federal levels to ensure sufficient coordination of funding and governance to support this aim. They may look to inter-ministerial or inter-agency councils (e.g. those in Alberta) that operate at the state or provincial levels as models for this work.

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The SYPC is committed to improving housing stability and reducing street involvement among youth. The continuum of services they have developed is organized to ensure:

1. First-time system shelter users are transitioned out of the emergency shelter within 48 hours of accessing the system;

2. The system offers a single point of access for all necessary services; and

3. Youth experience effective transitions as they move between sectors.

This case offers concrete examples of a community's use of research, planning, capacity building and structural supports (e.g. shared policies and procedures) to improve relations between service delivery organizations that engage with street-involved youth. The case also reveals the limits of a single-sector, community-driven approach to service coordination.

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