3.1

PREVENTING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS:
THE NEED FOR A COORDINATED CROSS-SECTORAL APPROACH

Naomi NICHOLS

Youth homelessness is the manifestation of multiple and inter-related personal and structural phenomena that combine in unique ways to shape young people's lives. It is beyond the scope of the homelessness sector alone to resolve such a multi-faceted problem. A comprehensive and sustainable response will require expertise and interventions from across a number of sectors, recognizing that what happens in one organizational setting will influence and be influenced by things occurring elsewhere. The current response to youth homelessness in many Ontario cities remains challenged by insufficient inter-sectoral coordination.

One barrier to coordination is a lack of shared inter-professional knowledge – that is a fulsome understanding of the work organization of the various sectors that need to be working cohesively together. I use the term "work organization" to refer to the distinctive institutional processes, policies, knowledge and cultures in a particular organizational context. The implementation of an effective cross-sectoral response requires that people who work in the homelessness sector understand how things work, so to speak, in the various other sectors where young people experiencing homelessness are active as learners,

service users, in-patients, citizens, defendants and so on. I have written this chapter so that people who work in the youth homelessness sector can improve their understanding of the organizational contexts shaping how things work in the other sectors where homeless and precariously housed youth may be active as service users. I also want to highlight key organizational disjunctures that arise between sectors and influence the degree to which the homelessness sector alone can resolve the problem of youth homelessness.

The chapter offers an ethnographic account of three key inter-sectoral relations impacting experiences of homelessness and/or housing stability among youth in Ontario, Canada. Rather than focusing on the delivery of services in the youth homelessness sector, I reveal how things work in other sectors that influence interactions between service providers and youth in the homelessness sector. By granting visibility to the inter-organizational contexts that influence the development and well-being of homeless and precariously housed youth, service providers and organizational leaders can focus on coordinating their efforts productively across the various organizational settings where youth are active.

THE LITERATURE

An experience of homelessness can operate like feedback loop, exacerbating the inter-related individual, social and structural factors that underpin homelessness or housing instability in the first place (Kilmer, Cook, Crusto, Strater, & Haber, 2012). As such, Kilmer et al. (2012), suggest that a highly contextualized bio-ecological model might be most appropriate for understanding and intervening in the lives of children and youth experiencing homelessness. Effective interventions with precariously housed or homeless children, youth and families must attend to people's evolving social development, cultural and linguistic competencies, as well as the structural determinants of homelessness (e.g. poverty, insufficient mechanisms for rapid re-housing, and generally inadequate safe and affordable housing stocks).

While there is considerable diversity among the needs and experiences of youth (16-24 years of age) who are homelessness, there are also some shared characteristics linked to this phase of social and emotional development. For example, many youth experiencing homelessness have had or will go on to have relationships with other youth institutions, such as child protection, children and youth mental health and/or youth justice (Dworsky & Courtney, 2009; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002; Gaetz, 2002; Gaetz, O'Grady & Buccieri, 2009; Karabanow, 2004; Lemon Osterling & Hines, 2006; Lindsey & Ahmed 1999; Nichols, 2008; 2013; 2014; Mallon, 1998; Serge, Eberle, Goldberg, Sullivan, & Dudding, 2002; Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Raising the Roof, 2008).

Research identifies a connection between childhood experiences of abuse and/or neglect (leading to involvement with child protective services) and delinquent behaviour (leading to involvement in the youth justice system) as well as increased incidence of mental health and substance use disorders and struggles with work and education (Wiig, Widom & Tuell, 2003). Experiences of trauma shape human development and are linked with substance abuse (Suarez, Belcher, Briggs, & Titus, 2012). Trauma and traumatic stress also interfere with learning and development and are linked to a range of mental health disorders, including depression and anxiety as well as conduct and oppositional defiance disorders (Ford, 2002; 2003) and increased use of mental health services and involvement with the justice and child welfare systems. Further, conduct and oppositional defiance disorders also make full participation in school and the labour market difficult.

Clearly, when it comes to youth well-being a coordinated, cross-sectoral response is required to bring key institutions together. In general, this type of response would provide opportunities for inter-professional learning and training, the establishment of shared goals/target outcomes across institutions, the development and implementation of a comprehensive and coordinated policy framework and coordinated processes for sharing information and engaging in monitoring and measurement. Where institutional responses to youth homelessness and its root causes are not effectively coordinated, the interventions we put into place to help youth may actually contribute to further harm.

While there is considerable diversity among the needs and experiences of youth (16–24 years of age) who are homeless, there are also some shared characteristics linked to this phase of social and emotional development.

THE RESEARCH

My research in the area of systems coordination for youth began in 2007 when I collaborated with a youth shelter in a small Ontario city on a project about human service delivery for street-involved youth (Nichols, 2008; 2009; 2014a; 2014b; 2016 forthcoming). During this project, people talked a lot to me about young people who "fall through the cracks." I could see that the phenomena that researchers describe as systems failures were very similar to what youth and adult practitioners describe as "cracks," and that both terms ended up glossing over what was actually happening when young people fail to get what they need and want from their participation in institutional settings. From this early observation, I set out to discover how young people and adult practitioners' work is coordinated across institutional sites such that young people experience this thing we have come to call a "systems failure." This research marked the beginning of a multi-year, multi-sector investigation of the inter-organizational and cross-sectoral disjunctures or gaps that influence young people's interactions and experiences with organizations like schools, child welfare associations, youth justice facilities and so on.

This research marked the beginning of a multi-year, multi-sector investigation of the inter-organizational and cross-sectoral disjunctures or gaps that influence young people's interactions and experiences with organizations like schools, child welfare associations, youth justice facilities and so on.

This chapter draws on findings from three studies in different cities across Ontario: Peterborough, a small city in Eastern Ontario (about 85,000), Hamilton, a mid-size city in Southwestern Ontario (around 500,000) and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), an amalgamated urban centre made up of a number of cities in Central Ontario (2.8 million people). The studies represent distinctive and overlapping periods of data collection. The first project occurred in Peterborough over a year and a half between 2007 and 2008. The second project began in the GTA in 2013 and is ongoing. The third project occurred in Hamilton over a period of six months in 2014. Data collection for all three projects involved participant observation, in-depth qualitative interviews and focus group conversations with youth and human service providers and extensive textual and policy analysis.

In the first project, data was generated through traditional ethnographic fieldwork methods, including 27 formal interviews with young people and 14 interviews with service providers, including shelter workers, educators, youth workers, mental health professionals, police officers and child protection workers. The research also included a focus group discussion with six young people involved with Child Welfare services as Crown wards. Throughout my year and a half in the field, I engaged in extensive participant observation at a youth shelter and in the other institutional settings where youth were active (e.g. welfare offices, the courts, an alternative school and sexual health clinic) and conducted informal conversations with youth and service providers that I later recorded in field notes. I also analyzed the workplace texts, policies and legislation that connect people's work across institutional settings.

The second project also uses traditional ethnographic fieldwork techniques but takes a team-based and participatory approach. For the last two years, I have led a team of researchers (including youth) in an ongoing (2013–2018) investigation of community safety from the standpoint of youth who have been institutionally categorized as "at risk." The research seeks to identify the inter-institutional relations that contribute to processes of exclusion (including interrelated processes of racialization and criminalization). The research is grounded in young people's stories of their experiences in schools, in social housing environments, in youth custody and/or detention centres, in social service agencies and on the streets. To date, we have engaged in outreach, participant observation (and the production of field notes) and policy analysis. We have also conducted interviews with 60 youth, as well as four focus group discussions and 14 individual interviews with organizational leaders and service providers, including educators, police officers, youth advocates, youth workers and correctional staff. In total, we have spoken with 48 professionals who work with youth.

The third project is somewhat smaller in scale than the first two. Following a number of site visits, meeting observations and casual conversations with people who develop, manage, provide or access a continuum of services for street-involved youth, I conducted three in-depth semi-structured interviews and seven semi-structured focus group discussions with youth, service providers, organizational leaders and community planners. The focus group sizes ranged from four to 15 participants per group. This particular study site was chosen because the municipality has endeavored to create and implement a continuum of services for street-involved youth. Given my desire to generate findings that can inform a more coordinated approach to the delivery of services for homeless and otherwise vulnerable youth, I sought to document and understand the organizational change process employed by this city to improve the coordination and delivery of services for street-involved youth.

FINDINGS

The impetus for writing this chapter comes from the results of the research I conducted in Hamilton, Ontario. By all accounts, the grassroots service collaborative I studied in Hamilton has improved the breadth and depth of its services for street-involved youth. Based on the data collected for this project, I observed, heard from participants and reviewed administrative data and reports that suggest the collaborative has:

- Identified and filled service delivery gaps to ensure 24/7 basic needs coverage (e.g. community meal programs);
- Coordinated fund-seeking endeavours;
- Improved inter-organizational communication and joint-working;
- Developed an array of housing options for youth;
- Implemented mobile mental health services and improved frontline capacity to identify and respond effectively to mental health needs;
- Created a number of shared housing support positions;
- Improved in-house addictions and mental health supports; and
- Engaged in ongoing research and data collection.

Despite all this, they have not seen a dramatic reduction in the number of young people who are homeless or street-involved in their city. In fact, the numbers of homeless youth in their city have slowly risen.

While this trend might reflect differences in how the point in time counts of homeless persons were conducted, participants in this study observed that the number of homeless and street-involved youth in their community is influenced by an ongoing trickle of youth entering the street-youth serving continuum of services from elsewhere. Given my ongoing research on the governance and policy relations influencing

young people's access to and experiences in publically funded youth-serving institutions, I wrote this chapter to shed some light on the persistent cross-sectoral gaps that undermine local efforts to coordinate services within the youth homelessness sector, alone. I want show why service-delivery coordination, alone, will not solve youth homelessness.

The three big systemic feeders influencing the numbers of street-involved youth in Ontario are the youth (and adult) justice system, the child welfare system and inpatient mental health services. Youth homelessness is not caused by service delivery failures in these sectors; rather my research suggests organizational disjunctures or gaps occurring between sectors contribute to young people's exclusion and ongoing marginality, including but not limited to experiences of homelessness and housing insecurity. A central gap is the lack of suitable housing options for youth with complex needs.

In 2008, I interviewed a woman named Karma – an educational assistant at an alternative school for homeless and precariously housed youth in Peterborough. In our interview, she paints a damning picture of her community's response to hard to house and at-risk youth. She observes how youth cycle through and then age out of a system that is unable to address their needs:

Karma: There's no one to follow it up with – to sit down and talk to about it. And we know that the shelter workers don't have time to do this. It's not part of their jobs. So there's no one to say, "I think we need to sit down and review the case to see how it's going." Once they are out of your hands, it's like, "I wonder what happened to them." I guess you could find out if you wanted to, but who actually follows it up? And who says, "Ok, it's not working. What can I do to make it work?" Instead, it's "ok, we've done everything [we can]," so whatever.

Naomi: Pass it on to the next guy.

Karma: Or we'll let them back in the door again so it's like, let's grind out the same program we did before... It's like they keep going through the system, going through the system and it's the same people they see and the same strategies and it's not working... And the kid gets so institutionalized that it's almost like, "This is all I know. So I'm just going for this ride and now I know what's going to happen. I'm going to go here and now I'm going to go there." And it's like "ok, let's do it..." They just get stuck in a current – wherever people tell them to go and then, they're 18 and they're told that they better make their own decisions. And it's like well, "I've never had to before... Now what do I do?" Well now we have a problem. Now we graduate from the probation system to the parole system.

Karma made these observations in 2008 – almost seven years ago. But much of what she says still rings true. Some youth continue to cycle into and out of the homelessness, youth justice, mental health and child protection systems until they age into adult services.

During my research in Hamilton in 2014, homelessness sector service providers observed that they have difficulty accommodating the needs of some youth in their programs – particularly youth who have been diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and/or young people (between 18–24 years) involved in adult correctional services that discharge into the emergency shelter system for youth. At a Housing First planning meeting I attended in Peterborough last year, service providers wondered aloud about how they would find and maintain housing for youth who are known to start fires. Without comprehensive and integrated supports (including, but not limited to housing) for youth with complex needs, the end of the road – as Karma alludes in this passage – is the justice system.

YOUTH JUSTICE

My current program of research in the GTA demonstrates how interactions with the justice system are connected to experiences of homelessness and/or housing insecurity – prior to and post-detention or incarceration. A lack of culturally appropriate and coordinated diversion and re-entry supports for youth and their families mean that conflicts at home lead to justice-involved youth being kicked out of family and institutional housing. At this point, street-involvement and shelter use influences a young person's ongoing interactions with the police in his or her neighbourhood, increasing the likelihood that he or she will incur a number of justice offenses (e.g. breaches of one's probation order) and decreasing the degree to which one is able to effectively re-integrate back into the community after incarceration.

In reality youth report that rehabilitative programs in justice facilities have long waitlists, are frequently cancelled or are boring and irrelevant to their lives (ON Youth Advocate Report, 2013).

For youth in custody, planning for community re-integration is meant to start when a youth is sentenced, placed in custody and is assigned a youth correctional officer (Youth Criminal Justice Act, S.C. 2002, c. 1; S. 38(1); 90(1)). The re-integration process ends in community, where ideally the youth is assigned a probation officer and seamlessly transitions into community programming including housing. In reality youth report that rehabilitative programs in justice facilities have long waitlists, are frequently cancelled or are boring and irrelevant to their lives (ON Youth Advocate Report, 2013).

When youth transition out of custody, youth workers and advocates discover that waitlists and narrow eligibility requirements (e.g. educational minimums for participation in job-readiness programs) make it difficult to engage youth in suitable programming in community environments. Some youth are unable to return home and, as such, simultaneously find themselves navigating the province's social assistance and shelter systems – as well as any number of community sector organizations – as part of their re-entry process.

In 2007, I met a young woman named Jordan who was living in a homeless shelter for youth on a permanent basis, having been placed there by child protection services. When Jordan was last released from criminal custody, her mother refused to let her return home. This is a common scenario impacting the re-entry experiences of justice-involved youth across Canada.

In other cases families decline to post bail for youth awaiting trial. As such, there are more youth in Canada detained on remand than incarcerated. According to Statistics Canada, in 2011 and 2012, 81% of custody admissions for youth were to pre-trial detention. This trend is shaped as much by a lack of suitable pre-trial detention housing options and conflict resolution and respite supports for families as it is by the backlog in the court system. The lack of suitable pre-trial housing options for youth and/or family mediation supports to enable families to effectively post bail for their children is another inter-sectoral gap, where the youth homelessness sector should position itself as an ally to the justice system. In particular, communities might want to consider the merits of family and community reconnect programs (e.g. Eva's Family Reconnect program in Toronto or RAFT's Youth Reconnect Program in the Niagara Region), designed to provide young people and caring adults with the support they need to have young people remain in their home and/or community of origin. Otherwise, young people are likely to transition out of the justice system and into a homeless shelter or the streets.

Darren, a GTA youth advocate I interviewed in 2014, explains how he gets "calls from everywhere" for him to help youth navigate a highly fragmented system of supports during re-entry:

I get a call from the courts, from the Crown attorney, from the prohibition officer and sometimes from, believe it or not, police officers who've seen my card. And community leaders, community social workers, school social workers, principals, vice principals, teachers, etc. – I get calls from all of these places and they say, "We have a youth who we think might benefit from your mentorship, doing what you do. Right now the youth is in incarceration and needs you to come out." Or, "right now we're trying to have a bail for a youth. He has nowhere to go, so we think you might be able to help him navigate the shelter system because he can't go home."

Ideally, the re-integration process would be coordinated, targeted and planned. Unfortunately, it is just as likely that a youth will go to court one day and simply not return to custody or detention (field note, ON Youth Justice Facility, school staff). As such the re-integration process ends up occurring with no planning or coordination.

Darren's description of his work suggests an ad-hoc system where the degree to which a young person experiences a sustained transition from custody may depend on whether or not the youth is able to connect to someone like him. But even if youth do connect with an advocate like Darren, his response to housing issues is to place someone in an emergency shelter. Even in the large urban centre where this research takes place, emergency shelters are likely to be located outside of the young person's neighbourhood (i.e. rival gang territory). More problematically, there are no supportive or youth-friendly housing spaces operated by the youth homelessness sector in the neighbourhood where my research on community safety occurs. For youth involved in gang activity and street life, the prospect of entering a homeless shelter in another neighbourhood represents considerable risk. As such, they are much more likely to crash with friends, sleep in a "trap" (or drug) house or stairwell, and return to hustling on the streets to make a bit of money.

A clear understanding of how the community re-entry process is meant to work (and how it actually occurs) is key to the creation of a coordinated response to youth homelessness. Inter-professional learning and planning between youth housing support workers, corrections officers, advocates, youth workers, and probation officers will ensure young people receive appropriate housing supports during re-entry. People who work in the youth justice system have a vested interest in seeing youth effectively re-integrate into the community – this is a key focus of Canada's *Youth Criminal Justice Act* – but it is not something that our youth justice institutions can do on their own. The youth homelessness sector should position itself as a key player in the re-entry process if it wants to support a coordinated effort to effectively transition young people out of custody and into suitable housing in the community. In a large metropolitan area like the GTA, the youth homelessness sector should work with all levels of government to ensure that there is a range of culturally and developmentally appropriate housing options in neighbourhoods where significant numbers of youth are transitioning out of custody or detention.

Child Welfare Services

Another other key inter-sectoral disjuncture influencing a young person's experience of homelessness and housing insecurity is the use of emergency shelter services by child welfare institutions where a young person under the care of the state is deemed to be "hard to house," or where temporary emergency shelter is required after a housing breakdown. When I was conducting research on service provision for homeless youth in Peterborough, for instance, it was common practice for child protection workers to place young people in care at the youth shelter. While I knew that child protection-involved youth touched the shelter system in other Canadian cities, I wondered whether the prevalence of this response was idiosyncratic to a small city with fewer housing options for youth in care. Last year, when I was studying the grass-roots systems-response to youth homelessness in Hamilton, a distinctively more urban city with a much larger population, I observed similar practices employed by child protective services there. Despite efforts to build collaborative relations between the youth homelessness and child welfare sectors, child protection workers continued to use the large youth shelter in the city as a housing placement.

The impacts of this practice are significant for youth. Earlier in this chapter I introduced you to a young woman named Jordan. She was 15 years old when she was released from criminal custody. As such, the child protection system was legally obliged to become her temporary guardian. A temporary care agreement was established with Jordan and her mother, and Jordan was placed at a youth homelessness shelter. No other housing arrangements for Jordan were pursued by her child welfare worker while Jordan was in provincial care.

The temporary care agreement ended when Jordan turned 16. A short-term care agreement with child protection services cannot be established (for the first time) past a young person's 16th birthday and cannot last beyond a young person's 18th birthday. They also require consent. The only way for Jordan to remain involved with child protection services beyond the terms of the agreement was if her case was brought

before the courts in order to establish a protection order. Once a young person turns 16, there are no legal grounds to establish one of these protection orders. Even in situations where a protection order has been established prior to the youth's 16th birthday, once a youth is 16 years of age, a status review can be conducted and the wardship order terminated by the courts if the youth is "refusing to co-operate with the Society" (C04.05.12 – Preparation for Independent Living of a Crown Ward, 2006: 5).

While under the care of child welfare, Jordan refused to attend school and failed to show up for her social work, medical, psychological and legal appointments, attend probation meetings or appear at her court dates. Jordan's refusal to co-operate with the Society, made her an unlikely candidate for a status review prior to the expiry of her temporary care agreement after her 16th birthday. When the agreement expired, she established eligibility for welfare and applied to have them cover the costs of her bed and lodging at the youth shelter. She effectively moved from one floor of the shelter designated for kids in care to the general residents' floor. Shortly thereafter she was discharged to the streets for failing to abide by the rules.

Jordan's story helps us see how the use of emergency shelters as a housing placement by child protection contributes to a young person's street involvement. Capping the length of these placements so that they really do represent an emergency (that is, temporary) response is a first step to preventing the flow of youth from child protection into homelessness. A more sustainable solution is the development of a continuum of youth-appropriate housing options for youth involved with the child protection system. In Hamilton, for instance, the youth homelessness sector has created a number of housing options (with varying degrees of support) to address this void, but the demand for housing for adolescent "youth in care" continues to exceed the city's resources and youth continue to be placed in the emergency shelter by child protection services.

Mental Health

The final cross-sectoral gap I want to focus on in this chapter is the one that arises between the mental health and homelessness sectors. The Mental Health Commission of Canada estimates that between 25% and 50% of people who are homeless in Canada are living with a mental health disorder (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012). While the Mental Health Commission advocates and implements a Housing First approach to recovery, many hospital inpatient psychiatric wards across Ontario continue to discharge people into unsuitable and unstable housing environments like homeless shelters.

In a focus group discussion I conducted with the mobile mental health team associated with Hamilton's continuum of services for street-involved youth, a mental health clinician named Esme noted:

Youth are inpatient for a week to three weeks and there is absolutely no conversation to facilitate a discharge to [the youth shelter]. In my opinion – and I think this is a shared opinion – when a young person or young adult is discharged to the shelter, you're discharging that kid to the streets, right? 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 was just nothing to precede their arrival. And they're incredibly sick – forget about that – they're incredibly without help. So that instability only aggravates all of their compounding difficulties. What we know particularly is mental health and that transience, that instability, that "what next?" that hyper-vigilant life very much disrupts their perpetual complex needs (Esme, focus group discussion, 2014).

In order to staunch the flow of youth from psychiatric care into the city's large emergency shelter for young people, sometimes Esme and her colleague Lynn request that the hospitals discharge young people to a crisis unit, rather than simply discharging a youth straight out of in-patient services into the shelter system. Ideally, this interim arrangement can provide an opportunity for housing support workers to quickly mobilize a more suitable housing plan for the youth. At the very least, it allows for a gentler transition from the hospital to the social complexities and hyper-vigilance that Esme notes are characteristic of shelter living. Lynn explains:

So what we have done for the last few years is we have requested that the hospitals discharge to B--- Centre and then to the shelter, because that – for anybody who has been in hospital – going home is a huge transition. The reality is you're not coming home coming here. You're coming to a shelter. Whereas [with the crisis unit], you know, there's that little step-down, and we work very hard for that to happen during those transitions. Now, I realize other communities likely don't have a B---- Centre, but there needs to be some plan for the transition from hospital to shelter for kids with significant mental health problems, otherwise they're going to be back in hospital very quickly. And I think our back and forth from hospital, I think we can safely say we now have evidence to show that the back and forth tends to occur when it's a poor discharge. When there's a good discharge and we're all working together, the young person tends to settle, either into the shelter, or back to B---- House, and back to W--- Transitional Housing. (Lynn, focus group discussion, 2014).

The mobile mental health team has actively sought to learn how things work in the mental health sector, adapting the hospital's clinical tools and models to fit with a mobile approach. For example, they elected to use common intake tools to facilitate clear communication across sectors. With these systems in place, the team has endeavoured to build capacity among frontline staff in street-youth-serving agencies so that they can now effectively identify and respond to symptoms associated with common mental health disorders, thus avoiding unnecessary discharges from street-youth-serving organizations into the hospital.

The mobile mental health team has actively sought to learn how things work in the mental health sector, adapting the hospital's clinical tools and models to fit with a mobile approach.

Hospital staff, on the other hand, still fail to grasp (in Lynn's words) the "capacity, skills and knowledge" of the street-involved youth-serving sector. As such, hospital staff continue to approve transitions from the inpatient psychiatric ward directly to the shelter, even though Esme and Lynn advise that this is effectively discharging a young person onto the streets and that there is insufficient consulting psychiatry capacity in the community to ensure that such a transition is safe. In Hamilton, the mobile mental health team has deliberately sought to align their work with the way things operate in the mainstream mental health system. In this case, opportunities are needed for the two sectors to engage in inter-professional learning, such that mental health professionals at the hospital grasp the "capacity, skills and knowledge" of the street-involved youth serving-sector, as well as the organizational contexts shaping how work is done here.

DISCUSSION

Cross-sectoral thinking, learning, planning and working are essential to the development of a preventative solutions-oriented approach to youth homelessness. While it is essential to improve service-delivery coordination *within* the homeless-serving sector, a failure to identify and collaboratively repair inter-sectoral cracks means that this important work will not have the desired effect on the numbers of youth experiencing homelessness.

An active and coordinated prevention- and intervention-oriented approach is needed to effectively ensure all youth in Ontario have access to safe and appropriate housing. A systems-level reform agenda begins by shifting professional culture and practice such that collaboration and joint-working are valued and supported. Inter-professional collaboration begins with opportunities to compare differences and similarities in practice, policy, terminology and mandate across the various sectors where youth are active. Later, opportunities for inter-professional learning and training will support the identification of shared language and mutually desirable goals.

Once shared language, goals and targets have been established across institutions/sectors, an integrated policy and accountability framework is necessary to support the implementation of this shared agenda. Of course, for individual organizations to work collectively on a shared agenda, approaches to monitoring and reporting administrative data will need to shift.

Protectionist approaches to the production and sharing of administrative data should be eschewed in favour of an approach to monitoring and reporting that reflects an integrated service delivery model – that is, where service impacts are measured across (rather than within) the individual service delivery contexts where youth are active. Shared budget-lines, staffing positions and/or multi-sectoral funding opportunities are also important facilitators of collaboration. Homeless youth-serving organizations should consider taking the lead in developing collaborative funding proposals that seek to address the interrelated determinants and symptoms of homelessness.

There is also a role for research to play in supporting inter-professional learning and collaboration. Two theoretical orientations stand out as particularly useful in this regard: complex adaptive systems theories and developmental systems or ecological approaches to youth well-being. Human development is the result of complex interactions between our biological, emotional, social and physical worlds (Lerner, 2005). A systems response to youth homelessness requires that we understand how an intervention in one sector influences and is influenced by interventions taking place elsewhere and that we recognize how the experiences of individual youth are shaped by their relations with family, their communities, and various inter-related social-structural phenomena (e.g., housing, health, education, nutrition, poverty, stress).

CONCLUSION

Throughout this chapter, I have highlighted specific inter-sectoral relations that influence the likelihood that a young person will experience homelessness. I've also sought to identify key roles that the youth homelessness sector could play in improving coordination between sectors and/or positioning their organizations as having the capacity to fill the gaps that my research identifies. I think these are important first steps; however, if Ontario really wants to implement a youth homelessness *prevention* strategy, then perhaps we need to shift the discourse – or reframe the problem.

Youth homelessness remains an issue in Ontario because there is a lack of developmentally and culturally appropriate housing options for young people who must, for many different reasons, live outside the direct care and support of their families – particularly those young people who get described institutionally as "at risk" or "hard to serve/house." Every child and youth in Ontario deserves a stable, developmentally and culturally appropriate, emotionally and physically safe home. No strategic effort to ensure that Ontario's youth are well can be successful when this fundamental right is not being met. Clearly, this is not the homeless-serving sector's problem. It is a provincial and federal issue requiring strategic planning and coordination at all levels of government and between government and the non-profit and charitable sectors. Even so, the homelessness sector – perhaps better positioned as the "youth social housing sector" – has a role to play. It is here, where many of Ontario's hardest to serve youth will end up when the other systems fail to meet their needs.

REFERENCES

Baer, J.S., Ginzler, J.A., & Peterson, P.L. (2003) DSM-IV alcohol and substance abuse and dependence in homeless youth. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol,* 64, pp. 5-14.

Dworsky, A., & Courtney, M. (2009). Homelessness and the transition from foster care to adulthood. *Child Welfare, 88(4),* 23–56.

Ford, J. D. (2002). Traumatic victimization in childhood and persistent problems with oppositional-defiance. Journal of Trauma, Maltreatment, and Aggression, 11, 25–58.

Ford, J. D. (2005). Treatment implications of altered neurobiology, affect regulation and information processing following child maltreatment. Psychiatric Annals, 35, 410–419.

Ford, J.D., Hartman, J.K., Hawke, J., Chapman, J.F. (2008). Traumatic victimization, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse risk among juvenile justice-involved youth. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma*, 1(1), 75-92.

Gaetz, Stephen. (2002). Street Justice: Homeless Youth and Access to Justice. Toronto, ON: Justice for Children and Youth.

Gaetz, Stephen, O'Grady, Bill, Buccieri, Kristy. (2010). Surviving Crime and Violence: Street Youth and Victimization in Toronto. Toronto, ON: Justice for Children and Youth and the Homeless Hub.

Goldstein, A.L. Amiri, T., Vihena, N., Wekerie, C., Thronton, T., & Tonmyr, L. (2012). Youth on the Street and Youth Involved with Child Welfare: Maltreatment, Mental Health, and Substance Use. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto.

Hughes, Jean R., Clark, Sharon, E., Wood, William, Cakmak, Susan, Cox, Andy, MacInnis, Margie, Warren, Bonnie, Handrahan, Elaine, & Broom, Barbara. (2010). Youth Homelessness: The Relationships among Mental Helath, Hope, and Service Satisfaction. Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 19(4), pp. 274-283.

Hyman, Sophie, Aubry, Tim, and Klodawsky, Fran. (2010). Resilient Education Outcomes: Participation in School by Youth With Histories of Homelessness. *Youth and Society* 43(1), 253-273.

Karabanow, J. (2004). Being young and homeless: Understanding how youth enter and exit street life. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

Kilmer, R., Cook, J., Crusto, C., Strater, K., & Haber, M. (2012). Understanding the ecology and development of children and families experiencing homelessness: Implications for practice, supportive services, and policy. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 82(3), 389-401.

Lemon Osterling, K., & Hines, A. M. (2006). Mentoring adolescent foster youth: Promoting resilience during developmental transitions. *Child and Family Social Work,* 11, pp 242-253

Lindsey, E.W., & Ahmed, F. (1999). The North Carolina independent living program: A comparison of outcomes for participants and non-participants. *Child and Youth Services Review, 21*(5), pp. 389-412.

Mallon, G. (1998). After care, then where? Outcomes of an independent living program. *Child Welfare, 77*(1), pp. 61-79.

Mawhinney-Rhoads, Lynette & Stahler, Gerald. (2006). Educational Reform for Homeless Students. *Education and Urban Society* 38(3), 286-306.

Mendes, P., & Moslehuddin, B. (2006). From dependence to interdependence: Towards better outcomes for youth leaving state care. *Child Abuse Review,* 15, 110-126.

Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2012). *Annual Report 2011-2012: Together We Spark Change*. Retrieved from http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/system/files/private/document/MHCC_Annual_Report_2011-2012_ENG.pdf

Merscham, C., Van Leeuwen, J.M., & McGuire, M. (2009). Mental health and substance abuse indicators among homeless youth in Denver Colorado. *Child Welfare,* 88, pp. 93-110.

Miller, Peter. (2011). A Critical Analysis of the Research on Student Homelessness. *Review of Educational Research,* 81(3), pp. 308-337.

Morrissette, P. J., & McIntyre, S. (1989). Homeless young people in residential care. *Social Casework, 70*(10), pp. 603-610.

Munson, Michelle R., Scott Jr., Lionel D., Smalling, Susan E., HyunSoo, Kim, & Floersh, Jerry E. (2011). Former system youth with mental health needs: Routes to adult mental health care, insight, emotions, and mistrust. *Children and Youth Services Review* 33, 2261-2266.

Nichols, N. (2008). Gimme Shelter! Investigating the Social Service Interface from the Standpoint of Youth. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 11(6), 685-699.

Nichols, N. (2013). Nobody "Signs out of care:" Exploring Institutional Links Between Child Protection and Homelessness. In Gaetz, O'Grady, Buccieri, Karabanow & Marsolais (Eds.). *Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice.*

Nichols, N. (2014.) *Youth Work: An institutional ethnography of youth homelessness.* Toronto, ON: The University of Toronto Press.

O'Grady, Bill, Gaetz, Stephen, Buccieri, Kristy. (2011). Can I see your ID? The Policing of Youth Homelessness in Toronto. Toronto, ON: Justice for Children and Youth and the Homeless Hub.

Raising the Roof. (2009). Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions.

Serge, L., Eberle, M., Goldberg, M., Sullivan, S., & Dudding, P. (2002). Pilot Study: The Child Welfare System and Homelessness among Canadian Youth. *National Homelessness Initiative.*

Suarez, L., Belcher, H., Briggs, E., & Titus, J. (2012). Supporting the need for an integrated system of care for youth with co-occurring traumatic stress and substance abuse problems. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 49, 430-440.

Wiig, J. K., Widom, C. S., & Tuell, J. A. (2003). Understanding child maltreatment & juvenile delinquency: From research to effective program, practice, and systemic solutions. Washington, DC: CWLA Press. Retrieved from www.cwla.org/programs/juvenilejustice/ucmjd.htm.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Naomi Nichols

Assistant Professor, Department of Integrated Studies in Education,
Faculty of Education, McGill University
naomi.nichols@mcgill.ca

Naomi Nichols is an engaged scholar who studies institutional and policy relations that contribute to processes of social exclusion and marginalization. She is committed to making sure her research contributes to socially just change processes.