

Purpose of THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit is designed for shelters, housing providers, youth-serving agencies and other organizations concerned about homeless and at-risk youth in Canada. It outlines some ideas for a youth employment project for at-risk youth and is designed to create a model that is flexible and adaptable. The case studies and resource materials are based on the Train for Trades program at Choices for Youth in St. John's, Newfoundland.

Groups are encouraged to consider this model as a promising practice but to modify it where necessary to create a program that fits the unique needs of their community. Whether groups are interested in adapting one part or the entire model, the toolkit provides support and resources to help develop the program, establish staffing roles, understand funding expectations and to create the policies, procedures and rules needed to get it up and running as quickly and smoothly as possible.

Please note: the information contained in the toolkit is accurate as of March 2015 but the programs are continually evolving to better meet the needs of the youth they serve.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the staff and service users (past and present) of Choices for Youth and the Train for Trades program in St. John's, Newfoundland who assisted in the development of the toolkit by taking part in interviews, providing data and resources and reviewing information.

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- **Matthew**, age 21, Tier 1 participant
- **Brad**, age 22, Tier 2 participant
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Thanks also to the community partners for their involvement in this toolkit and in the program overall.

- **Dennis Kendell** – Regional Operations Executive Director, Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation
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CANADIAN OBSERVATORY ON HOMELESSNESS/HOMELESS HUB

Thanks to the staff, students and volunteers at the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness/Homeless Hub for their efforts in collecting and analyzing the material, transcription, review of materials and creation of the toolkit.

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The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness acknowledges with thanks the financial support of The Home Depot Canada Foundation.



CREATION *of the Toolkit*

As with most projects of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness/Homeless Hub the toolkit was developed through a very collaborative process.

- » A brief review of literature related to youth employment and social enterprise initiatives was conducted (this toolkit is not a literature review and this research was conducted primarily for background material).
- » Phone and in-person interviews (the latter were filmed) were completed with a variety of staff and participants of Choices for Youth (CFY), Train for Trades (T4T) and partner organizations.
- » Transcriptions were made of each interview.
- » CFY/T4T staff provided copies of their materials including policies, forms, guides etc.
- » All of the materials were analyzed to determine what information needed to be included in the toolkit.
- » The video interviews were edited to create approximately 10 short videos to help supplement understanding of the written content.
- » Each participant in the videos had the ability to review their contribution and confirm their acceptance of the video.
- » Key staff at CFY/T4T had an opportunity to review content of the written toolkit. Special thanks to Eddy St. Coeur and Rosalind Curran for their continual feedback.

How the Kit is ORGANIZED

We begin with an overview of youth homelessness and youth employment, as well as backgrounders on social enterprise, energy poverty and employment.

We then move into an overview and history of Choices for Youth. This is followed by a thorough discussion of the Train for Trades program including history, program and support elements, partners, funding and evaluation. We end with some lessons learned and recommendations for programs adopting a similar program. Additionally, Train for Trade recently underwent some changes to the way it is organized so these are all discussed and outlined.

“It’s a wonderful program. If anybody can adopt it and do it again, it’ll be a great thing to do for sure.”

—Ronnie O’Neill, Site Manager, Train for Trades

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Overview

Many different terms are used to describe young people who are homeless, including street youth, street kids, runaways, homeless youth etc. Youth homelessness refers to young people who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, and importantly, lack many of the social supports deemed necessary for the transition from childhood to adulthood. In such circumstances, they do not have a stable or consistent residence or source of income, nor do they necessarily have adequate access to the support networks needed to foster a safe and nurturing transition into the responsibilities of adulthood. Few young people choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing.

There is no formally agreed upon age definition of a homeless youth (or in many cases, even a youth) in Canada. However, there is a [Canadian Definition of Homelessness](#) that has received wide support from community groups, government and researchers. A youth definition of homelessness is in the process of being created. It will follow the Canadian Definition in terms of types of homelessness, while at the same time distinguishing the unique pathways that youth follow into homelessness.

Even within the proposed definition there is recognition that it is being created to help provide some definitional coherence despite not necessarily reflecting specific program, policy and jurisdictional definitions that already exist.

Depending on the jurisdiction, the state will define the ages for which child protection services are responsible for care, what kinds of mental health supports are accessible and the age when one can live independently, obtain welfare and other government benefits, or leave school, etc. (Gaetz, 2014a: p. 13).

The category of youth therefore can range from 12 to 29. According to the census *youth* means those aged 12-19, while *young adults* includes individuals between 20 and 29 (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011). A young person under the Youth Criminal Justice Act is someone over the age of 12 and younger than 18. Federally, the age of majority is considered to be 18 (when youth are allowed to vote) but in many provinces youth cannot buy alcohol until 19 years of age (Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta, 2013; Youthworks, 2009).

The child welfare mandate is determined by the provinces and territories and the age of protection ranges from under 16 to under 19. This means, for example, that youth leaving home or being removed from their home under these ages fall under the responsibility of the child welfare system. However, above these ages children can be “aged out¹” of foster care and restrictions may be placed on new entries. This is particularly true in Ontario where new access to the child welfare system is extremely limited for 16 and 17 year olds. A bill before the Ontario Legislature to address this issue died on the order papers before it could be approved into law (Justice for Children and Youth, 2013; Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal, 2011).

Most youth homeless services in Canada provide supports beginning at 16 or 18 and continuing up to the youth’s 25th birthday (Youthworks, 2009). Age is an important consideration because the developmental needs of youth vary from those of adults, but also vary within the youth category itself. The “needs, circumstances, and physical and emotional development of a 14 year old compared to an 18 year old or a 23 year old [are different] (though it must also be acknowledged that the factors that produce and sustain youth homelessness – including violence, trauma and abuse, may also contribute to developmental impairment for older youth)” (Gaetz, 2014a, p. 13).

Over the course of the year the number of young people who become homeless in Canada is at least 40,000 and there may be as many as 7,000 homeless youth on any given night (Gaetz, Gulliver, & Richter, 2014).

The Government of Canada estimates 1 in 5 shelter users in this country are youth between the ages of 16 and 24. Males outnumber females by a ratio of 2:1 in most shelters (very little specific data is collected about trans* youth). Segaert reports that 63% of youth in shelters are male, and 37% are female. Because of violence encountered by young women on the streets they may be more likely than young males to access alternatives to shelters (Segaert, 2012; Gaetz, 2014a; 2014b).

While only 20% of shelter users across the country are youth, [Choices for Youth](#) reports that youth make up 30% of the homeless population in St. John’s, Newfoundland (Choices website).

There is significant overrepresentation amongst homeless youth who identify as [lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer or 2-spirited \(LGBTQ2S\)](#). They are estimated to make up 25-40% of the youth homeless population, compared to only 5-10% of the general population (Abramovich, 2013; Gaetz, 2014a; 2014b).

Additionally, as with the homeless adult population, there is significant overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth. Furthermore, depending upon location there may be an increase in the number of homeless youth of colour (i.e. black youth in Toronto) (Springer, Lum, & Roswell, 2013; Baskin, 2013; Gaetz, 2014a; 2014b).

1 Refers to the process of a child becoming independent and leaving the child welfare system. Many homeless youth have become too old to remain under the jurisdiction of the child welfare system and yet lack the necessary skills to live independently.

2 Trans* is an umbrella term that signifies the broad diversity of gender variance found within the transgender community including, but not limited to, transgender, transsexual, agender, bigender, genderqueer, genderfluid, non-binary etc.

Pathways into and out of homelessness vary. We know that over 40% of homeless youth have been involved with the child welfare system and over half of homeless youth have previous involvement with the criminal justice system. Additionally, homeless youth experience greater mental health issues (40-70% compared to only 10-20% for housed youth) (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Gaetz, 2014a).

The key causes of youth homelessness, then, include a) individual / relational factors, b) structural factors and c) institutional and systems failures:

1. **Individual and Relational factors** - A main cause of youth homelessness is a breakdown or conflict in key relationships within the home. The vast majority have chosen or forced to leave an unsafe, abusive, neglectful or otherwise untenable situation. Many young people leave home because of mental health problems or addictions issues that either they or someone else in their household is experiencing.
2. **Structural factors** - This includes ongoing problems that a young person cannot control, and which largely originate outside of the family and exist at a broader societal level. This includes social and economic conditions like poverty, inadequate education, underemployment and lack of housing stability which may also frame the experience of young people and can underlie stressors within the family that can lead to conflict, meaning “home” is no longer a viable option. Discrimination in the form of homophobia, transphobia, racism and bullying can also be contributing factors.
3. **Institutional system failures** - Sometimes young people wind up homeless after having slipped through the cracks of the systems we put in place as “social safety nets” (such as child protection, health and mental health care, juvenile justice). Many young people in government care (child protection) wind up homeless when their placements break down leaving them without a place to live, or who choose to leave their placements; and/or have been discharged from a situation of care (e.g., for non-compliance) without a place of residence to which they can or will return. That we discharge young people from systems of care without adequate discharge planning and ongoing supports increases the risk of homelessness.

Homeless youth may be physically on the streets, staying in emergency shelters or youth hostels, “couch-surfing” with friends or family, renting cheap rooms in boarding houses or hotels, or staying in squats. All of these are risky housing situations, which may lead to imminent loss of shelter. Homeless youth, also tend to move between various housing situations over time as is outlined in the typology below which has been expanded from the National Alliance to End Homelessness. Gaetz argues that “it is the instability of their housing situation that characterizes their status as homeless youth”. (www.homelesshub.ca).

"Becoming homeless then *does not just mean a loss of stable housing, but rather leaving a home in which they are embedded in relations of dependence*"

Youth homelessness is defined by inherent instability, profound limitations and poverty. At a time when these young people are experiencing loss and potentially trauma, they are simultaneously charged with managing a diverse and complex set of tasks, including obtaining shelter, income and food, making good decisions and developing healthy relationships (Gaetz, 2014a: p. 9).

Youth homelessness then must be considered separately from adult homelessness. Just as the pathways into homelessness are different so are the possible interventions and solutions. Homeless youth generally are leaving a situation – whether it is family, child welfare or correctional services – where they were dependent upon adult caregivers for their overall support.

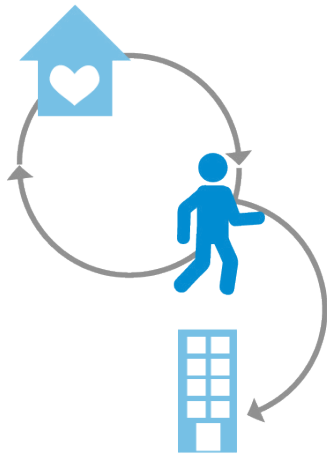
Becoming homeless then does not just mean a loss of stable housing, but rather leaving a home in which they are embedded in relations of dependence, thus experiencing an interruption and potential rupture in social relations with parents and caregivers, family members, friends, neighbours and community (Gaetz, S., 2014a: p. 7).

The diversity of homeless youth notwithstanding, the lack of experience with independent living is an important factor. A critical component of this is the ability to achieve education and employment to provide a suitable level of income. This toolkit presents a model of employment for at-risk youth that can help them develop the life and job skills necessary to obtain further education or a decent job.



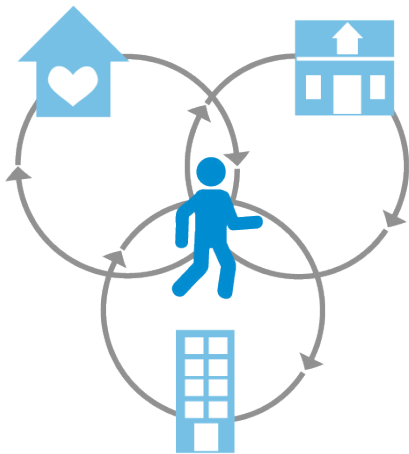
Matthew, a Tier 1 Train for Trades Participant, discusses life at The Lilly.

FIG.1 THE NAEH TYPOLOGY OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS



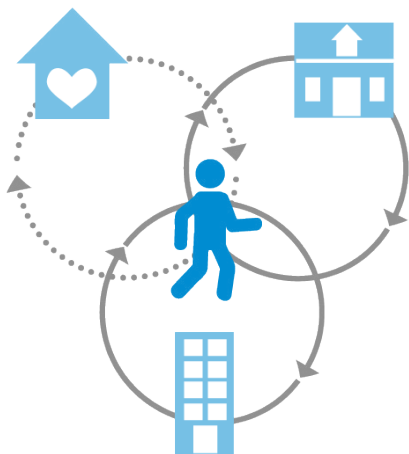
Temporarily Disconnected

As Kuhn and Culhane (1998) point out, the vast majority of people who become homeless do so for a very short time, typically find their way out of homelessness with little assistance and rarely return to homelessness. This is as true for adults as it is for youth. The NAEH suggests that between 81 and 86 percent of homeless youth fit into this category (NAEH, 2012). This group is characterized as generally being younger, as having more stable or redeemable relations with family members, a less extensive history of homelessness and are more likely to remain in school. There is a strong need for prevention and early intervention to divert this population from the homelessness system.



Unstably Connected

This population of homeless youth has a more complicated housing history and is likely to have longer and repeated episodes of homelessness (Toro et al., 2011). They are more likely to be disengaged from school and will have challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment. Most will have retained some level of connection with family members and are less likely to experience serious mental health or addictions issues than chronically homeless youth. This is a group for which family reconnection interventions, as well as transitional housing programs are recommended, particularly for youth under 18.



Chronically Disconnected

In terms of numbers, this will be the smallest group of homeless youth, but at the same time the group with the most complex needs with the heaviest reliance on the resources in the youth homelessness sector. This group is defined by longer term homelessness and a greater likelihood of repeated episodes. They will also be more likely to have mental health problems, addictions issues and/or a diagnosed disability. They will have the most unstable relations with families and in some cases there will be no connections at all. Young adults in this category may require more comprehensive interventions, as well as more supportive and longer-term housing programs.

(from Gaetz, 2014a).