



*Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater!*

# Focusing on Prevention and Early Intervention in Crisis Driven Work

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York University, Toronto Canada

**PLATFORM 12 25**   
Queensland Youth Housing Coalition Inc.

*Building a solid platform for  
young people aged 12-25*



12 25

# ABOUT US:



canadian  
observatory on  
homelessness

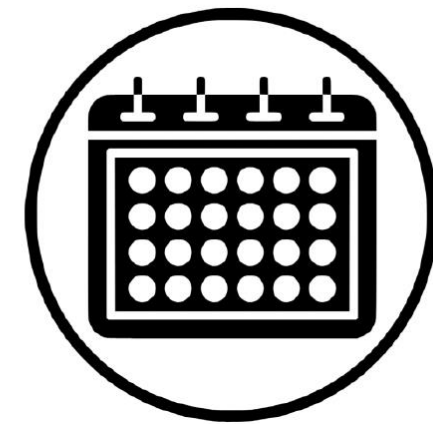
The *Canadian Observatory on Homelessness* (COH) is a research and policy partnership working to conduct and mobilize research designed to have an impact on solutions to homelessness.



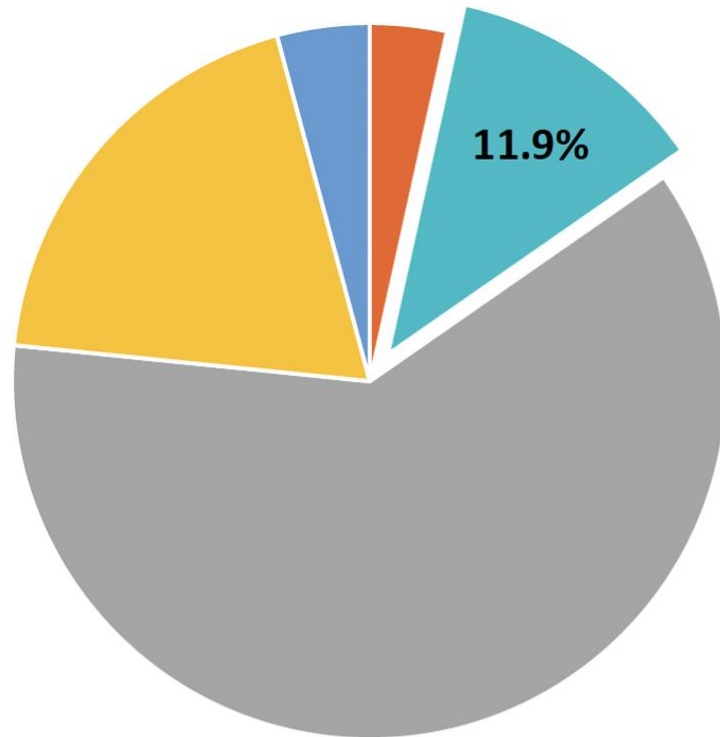
**Why we should  
care about**

***Youth  
Homelessness  
Prevention***

# General Canadian population aged 15 to 24 = 12%



2023

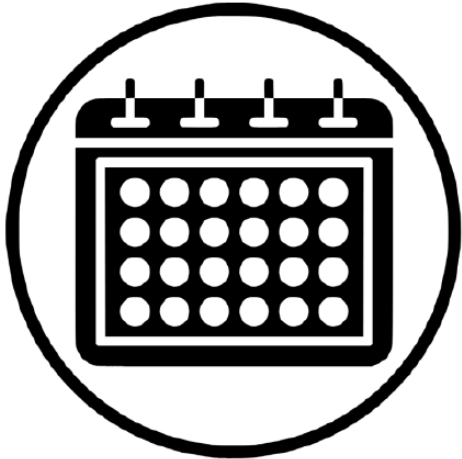


child youth 25-49 50-64 65+ 65+

Youth are proportionally represented among shelter users compared to their distribution in the general population.

***However***

17%



2023

The issue is access. Out of the 449 Canadian communities with emergency homelessness shelter services in 2023, **only 75 had youth-specific services = 17% of communities.**

In all the jurisdictions that do not have youth shelters, youth are required to access family or adult shelters or find alternative arrangements.

Duschene, A. (2025) Long Term National Trends in Youth Homelessness and Shelter Use. Reaching Home, Infrastructure Canada

# Age of first experience of homelessness

Many homeless youth became homeless before they were 16, and youth who leave home at a younger age experience greater adversity on the streets.

# 40.1%

*were younger than 16 when they first experienced homelessness*

THOSE WHO LEAVE HOME AT AN EARLY AGE ARE MORE LIKELY TO:

- Experience multiple episodes of homelessness
- Be involved with child protection services
- Be tested for ADHD
- Experience bullying
- Be victims of crime once homeless, including sexual assault
- Have greater mental health and addictions symptoms
- Experience poorer quality of life
- Attempt suicide
- Become chronically homeless

# Involvement with **Child Protection services**

**57.8%**

*indicated some kind of  
involvement with child  
protection services in the past*

**47.2%**

*had a history of  
placements in foster care  
and/or group homes*

30.9% were in group  
homes

# Mental Health and Well-Being

Findings indicated that a total of 85.4% (942) of the youth fell in the ‘high’ symptom/ distress category. This is indicative, in the general Canadian population, of youth midway between inpatient and outpatient psychiatric care levels.

**85.4%**

*of youth fell in the ‘high’ symptom/ distress category*

**42%**

*reported at least one suicide attempt*

**35.2%**

*reported at least one drug overdose requiring hospitalization*

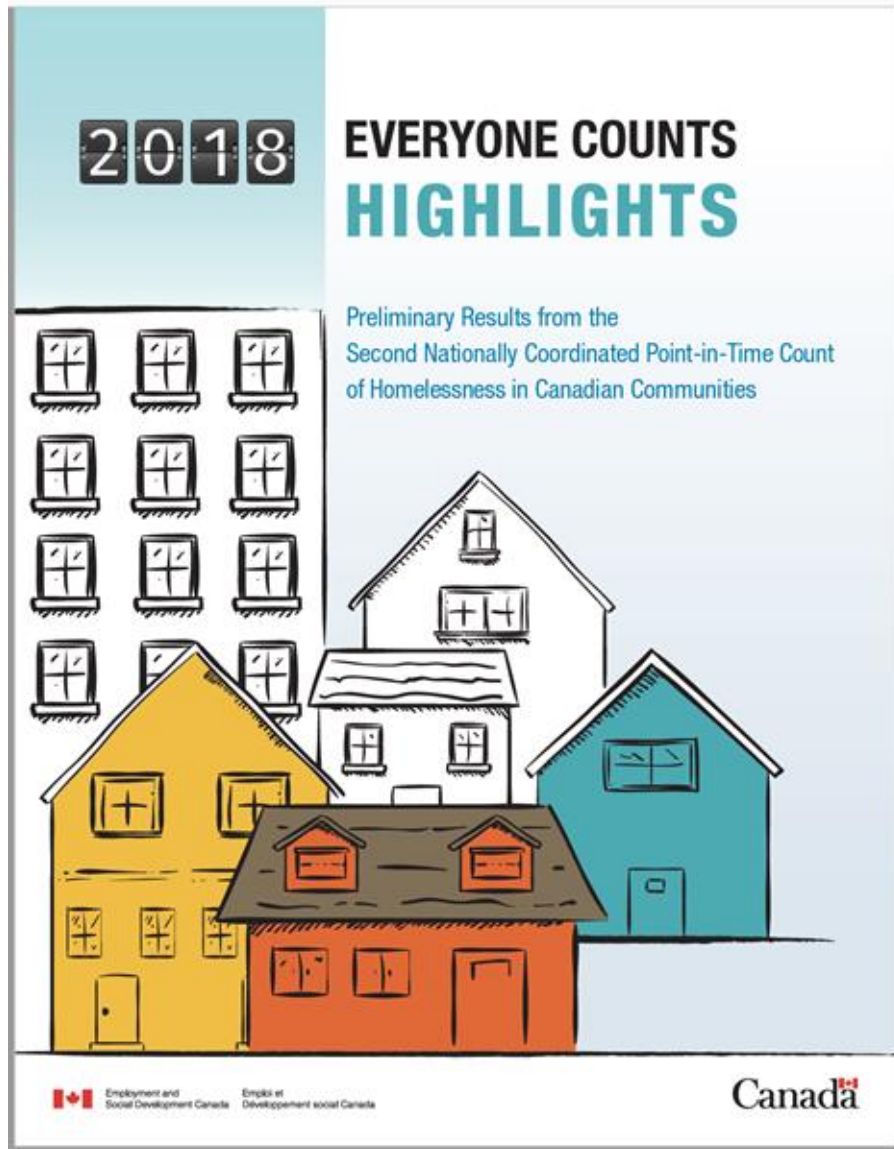
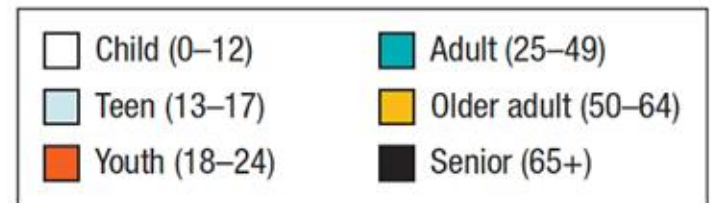
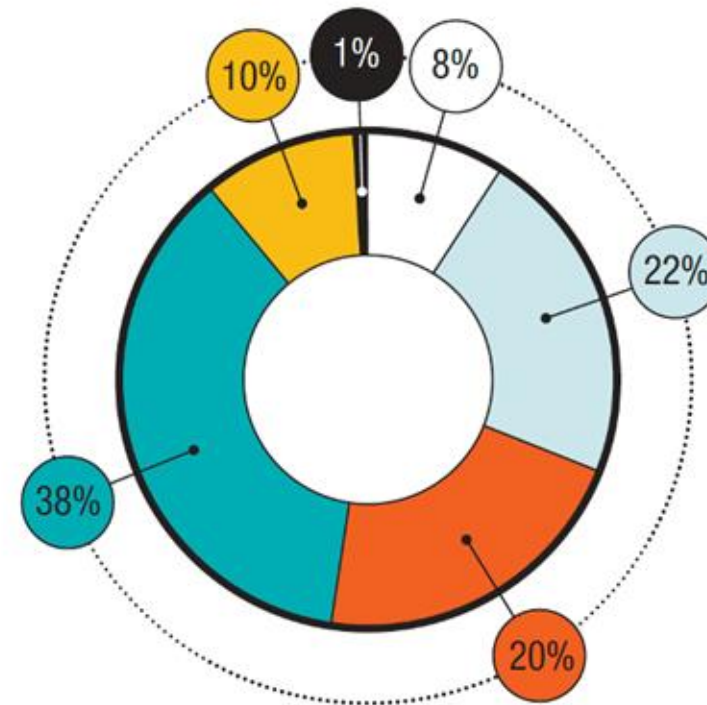


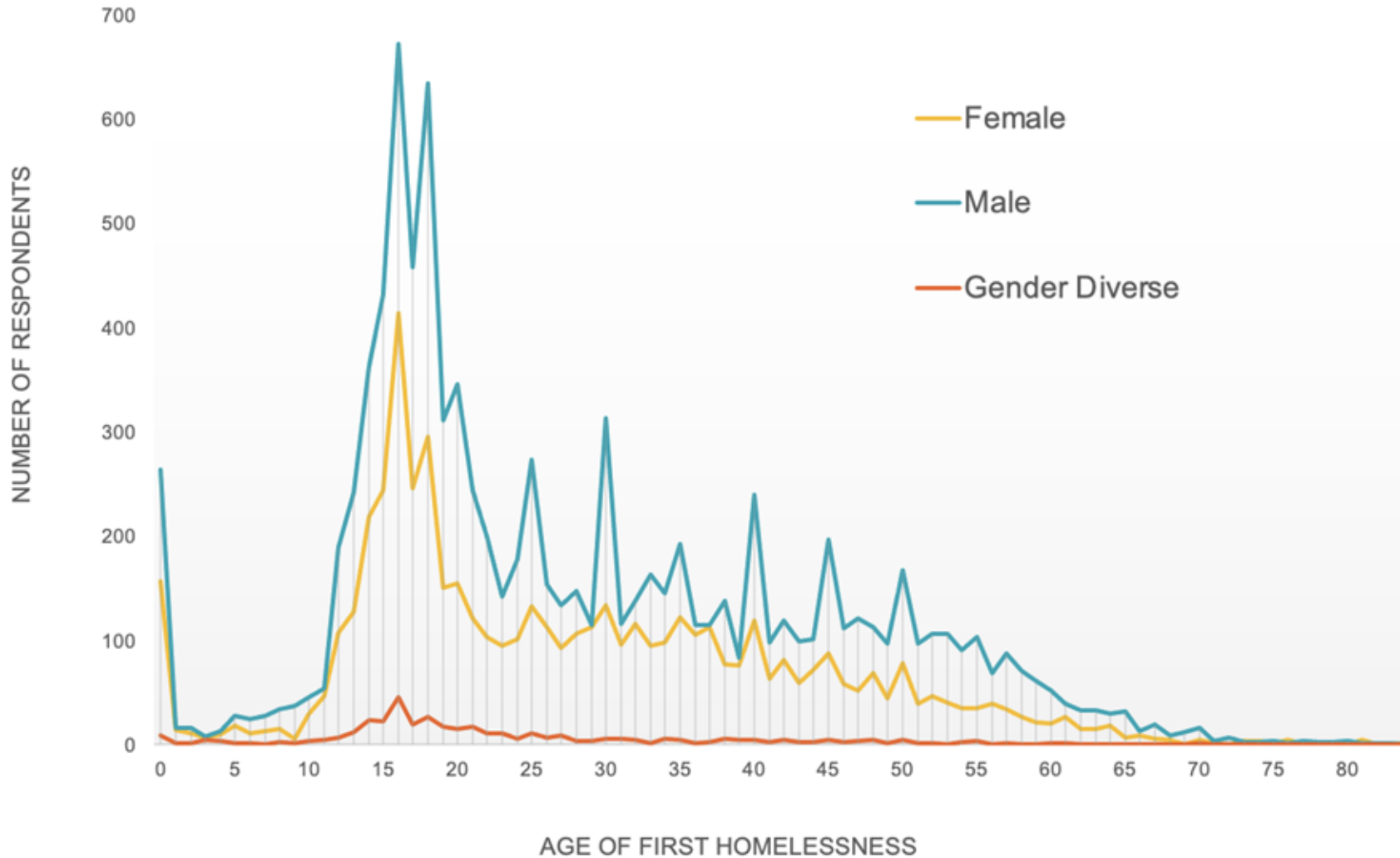
FIGURE 6 Age of First Homelessness Experience

# 50% First experienced homelessness before the age of 25





## Selected research findings on youth (PiT 2018)



The 2018 PiT Count survey asked respondents at what age they first experienced homelessness.

Half of all respondents first experienced homelessness under the age of 25. This percentage was still high among older adults (aged 50-64) and seniors (aged 65+), with 25% first experiencing homelessness before 25.



REACHING HOME  
Canada's Homelessness Strategy

# Everyone Counts 2020-2022

Results from the Third Nationally Coordinated  
Point-in-Time Counts of Homelessness in Canada

## CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

Adults: 71%

Older adults: 72%

Seniors: 68%

**YOUTH: 58%**

It is important to note that rates of chronic homelessness will always be higher in point-in-time data than in data collected over the course of a year. Individuals experiencing chronic homelessness are more likely to be visible in these counts because they are more consistently homeless over longer periods. People who are homeless for shorter periods of time are less likely to show up in PiT counts that occur on any given day.



***DEFINING***  
***Homelessness***  
***Prevention***

# Definition of the Prevention of Youth Homelessness

Homelessness prevention refers to housing led policies, practices and interventions that provide supports designed to stabilize housing, keep young people “in place” in their communities and strengthen relationships between youth and family members as well as other meaningful adults in their lives. This is to be achieved through the following areas of focus:

**Primary Prevention** Reduce inflows into youth homelessness by taking proactive steps to stop young people from becoming homeless in the first place.

**Secondary Prevention** Intervening early to reduce the risk that youth who experience homelessness for the first time will transition to long term or chronic homelessness\*.

**Tertiary Prevention** Providing appropriate supports to reduce the likelihood that chronically homeless youth who exit homelessness will return to it.

\* The Government of Canada's definition of Chronic Homelessness refers to individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness AND who meet at least 1 of the following criteria:

- they have a total of at least 6 months (180 days) of homelessness over the past year
- they have recurrent experiences of homelessness over the past 3 years, with a cumulative duration of at least 18 months (546 days)

# What homelessness prevention is *NOT!*

- Building the life skills of people experiencing homelessness without resolving their homelessness.
- Community based programs and services that support marginalized people who while at risk of many things, are not imminently at risk of homelessness.

**If an intervention does not stabilize a young person's housing situation, it is not preventing homelessness!!**



# Taking account of Homelessness and Prevention amongst Indigenous People



Given that Indigenous people are greatly over-represented within the population of people experiencing homelessness, it is important to consider prevention with an understanding of what this should look like and mean in the context of historical and ongoing colonialism and racism.

# Typology of Youth Homelessness Prevention



**1. Structural Prevention**

**2. Systems Prevention**

**3. Early Intervention**

**4. Crisis Intervention**

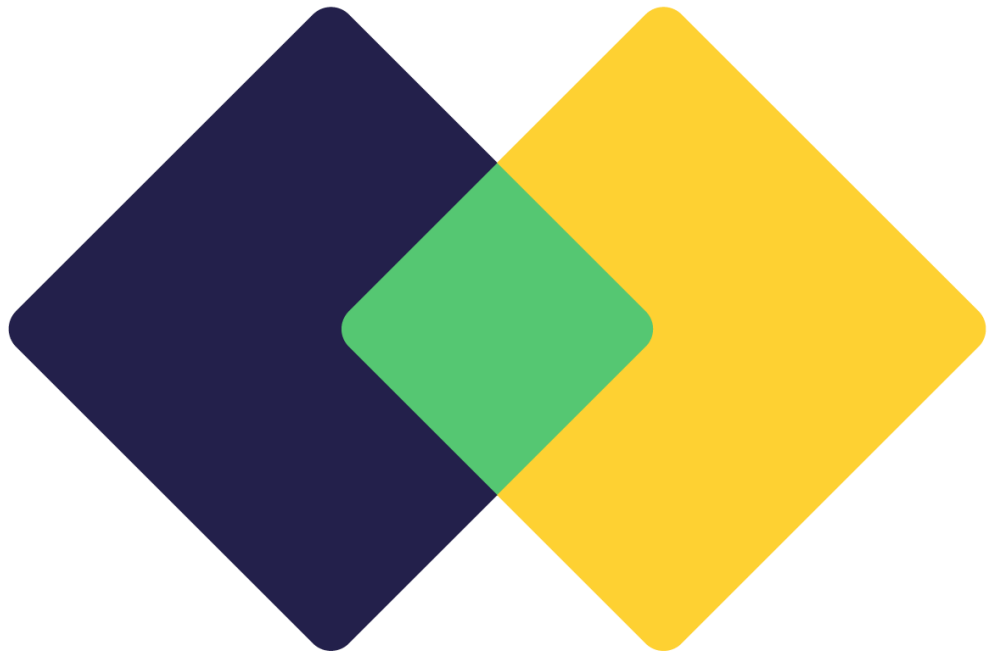
**5. Housing Stabilization**



**Solving problems through**

**Social**

**Innovation**



MAKING  
THE SHIFT

Youth Homelessness  
Social Innovation Lab

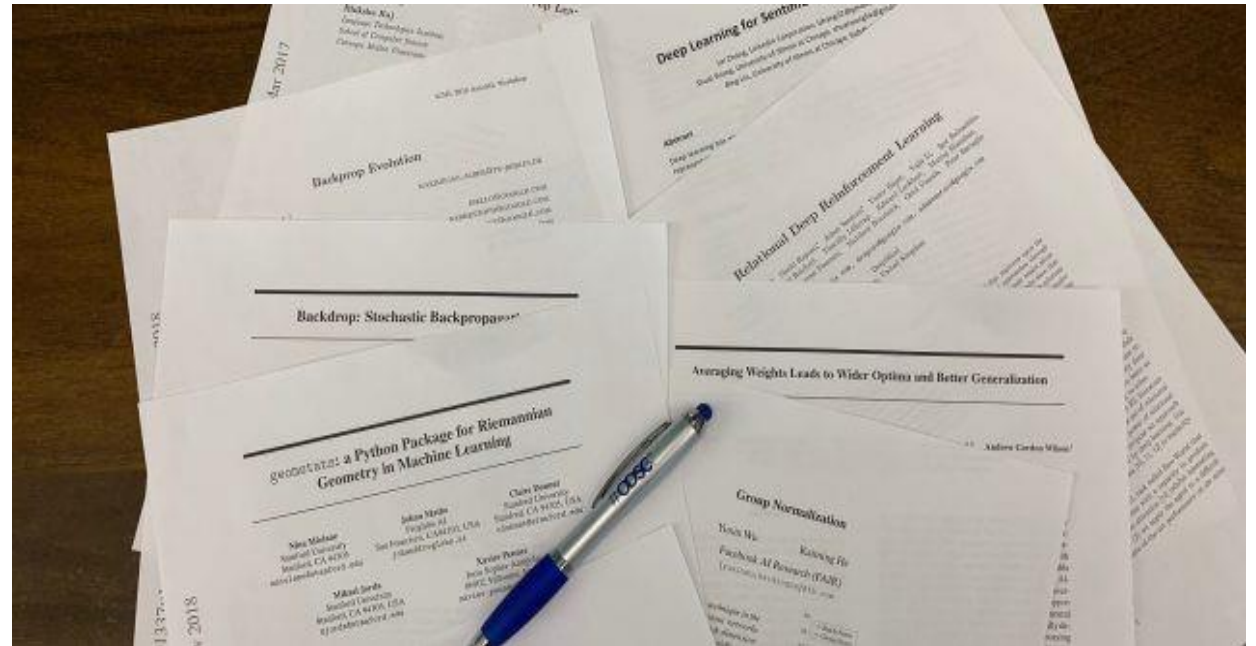
**Building the  
Evidence Base  
for the  
Prevention of  
Youth  
Homelessness**

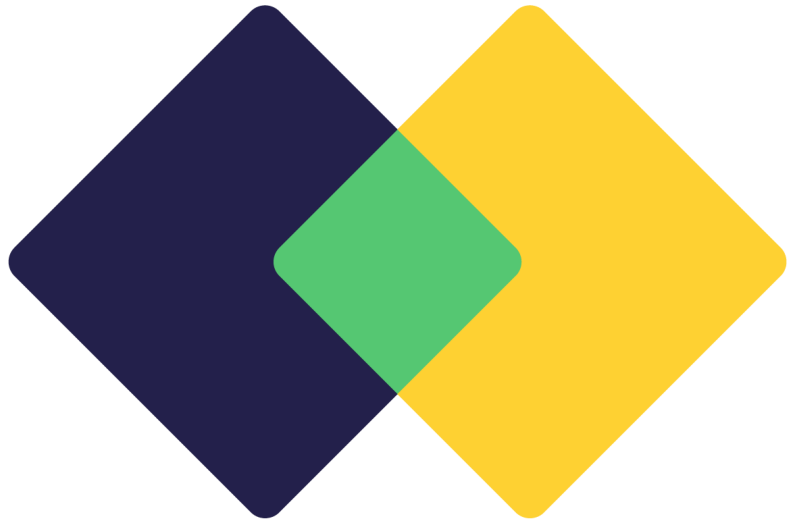


MAKING  
THE SHIFT

Funded Research

Making the Shift has funded **39 research projects** across Canada focusing on the prevention of youth homelessness





MAKING  
THE SHIFT

# Demonstration Projects

Employing design thinking, our ***demonstration projects*** are intended to expand our knowledge and understanding of innovative approaches to preventing and ending youth homelessness by identifying, developing, prototyping, testing, evaluating, and mobilizing innovations in policy and practice.

Demonstration Project Models:  
Upstream, Reconnect, Family and Natural Supports (FNS), Housing First for Youth (HF4Y)

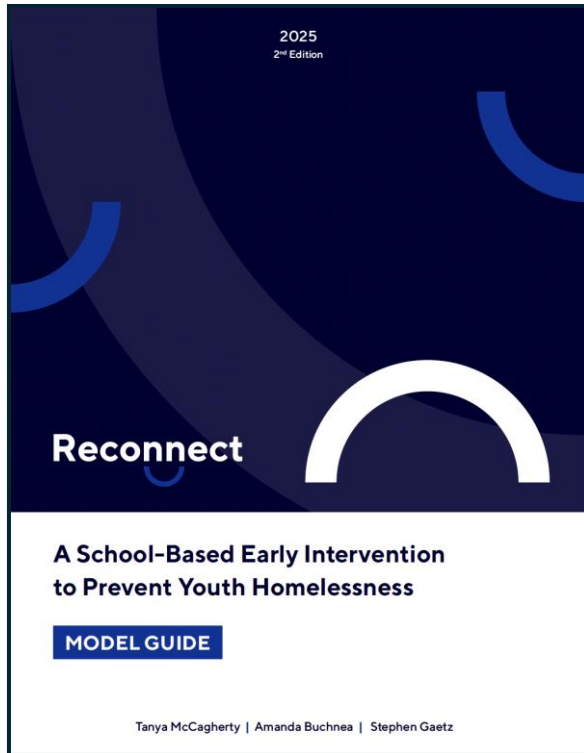
*Key*

*interventions*

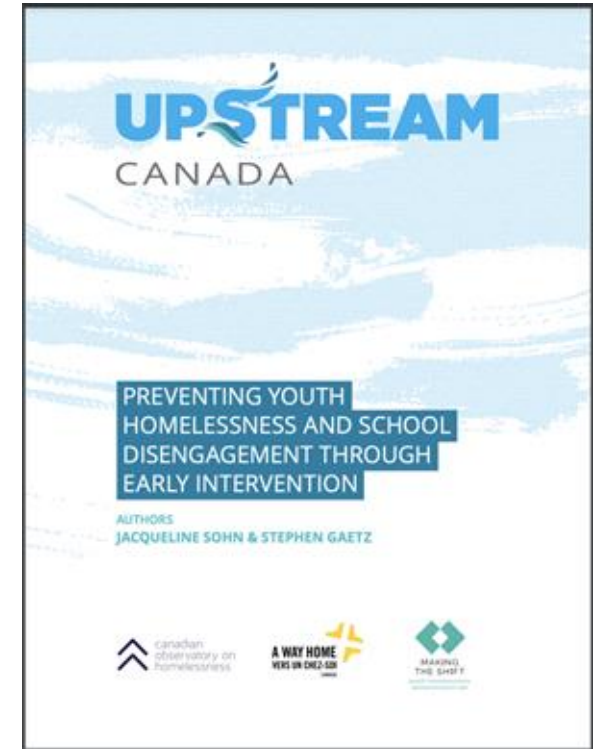
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# SCHOOL-BASED Early Intervention

2



**Reconnect**

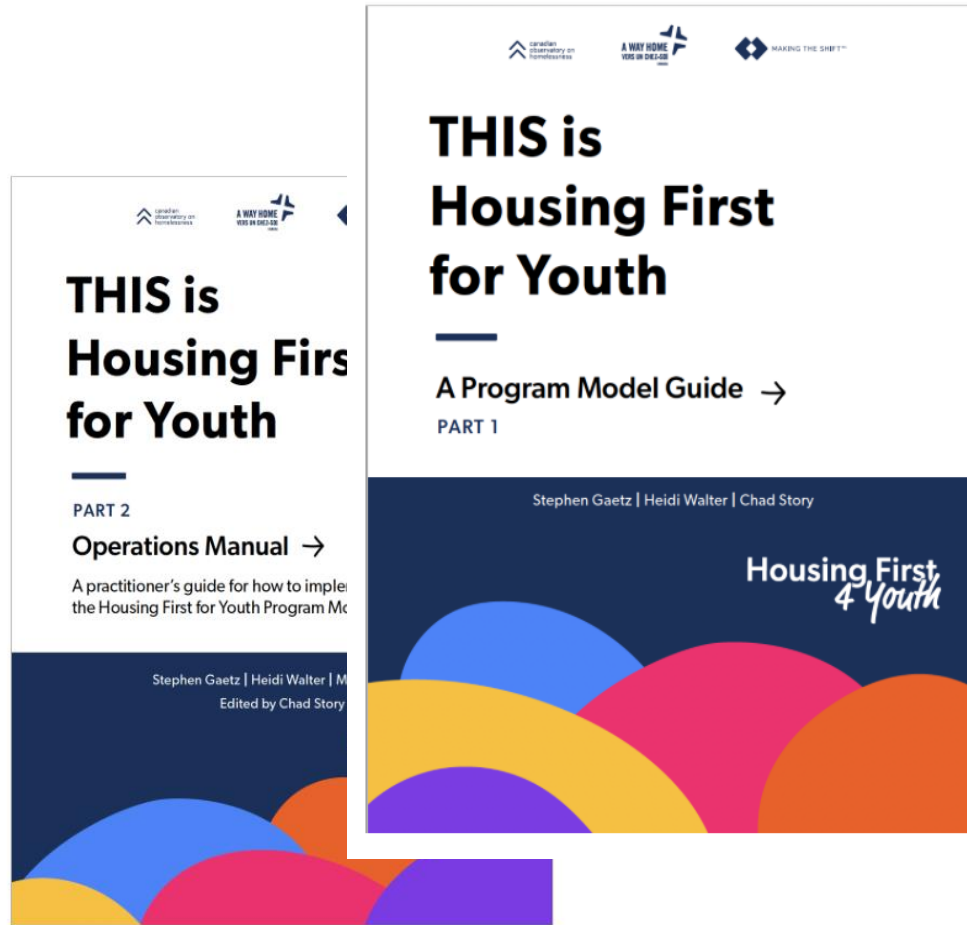


**UPSTREAM**

3

# Housing First *4 Youth*





# Housing First for Youth developed in Canada in 2014

# What is Housing First for Youth?

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Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is a rights-based intervention for young people (aged 16-24) who experience homelessness, or who are at risk. It is designed to address the needs of developing adolescents and young adults by providing them with immediate access to housing that is safe, affordable and appropriate, and the necessary and age-appropriate supports that focus on health, well-being, life skills, engagement in education and employment, and social inclusion.

# The Core Principles of HF4Y

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● 1. A Right to Housing with No Preconditions



● 2. Youth Choice, Youth Voice, and Self-determination



● 3. Positive Youth Development and Wellness orientation



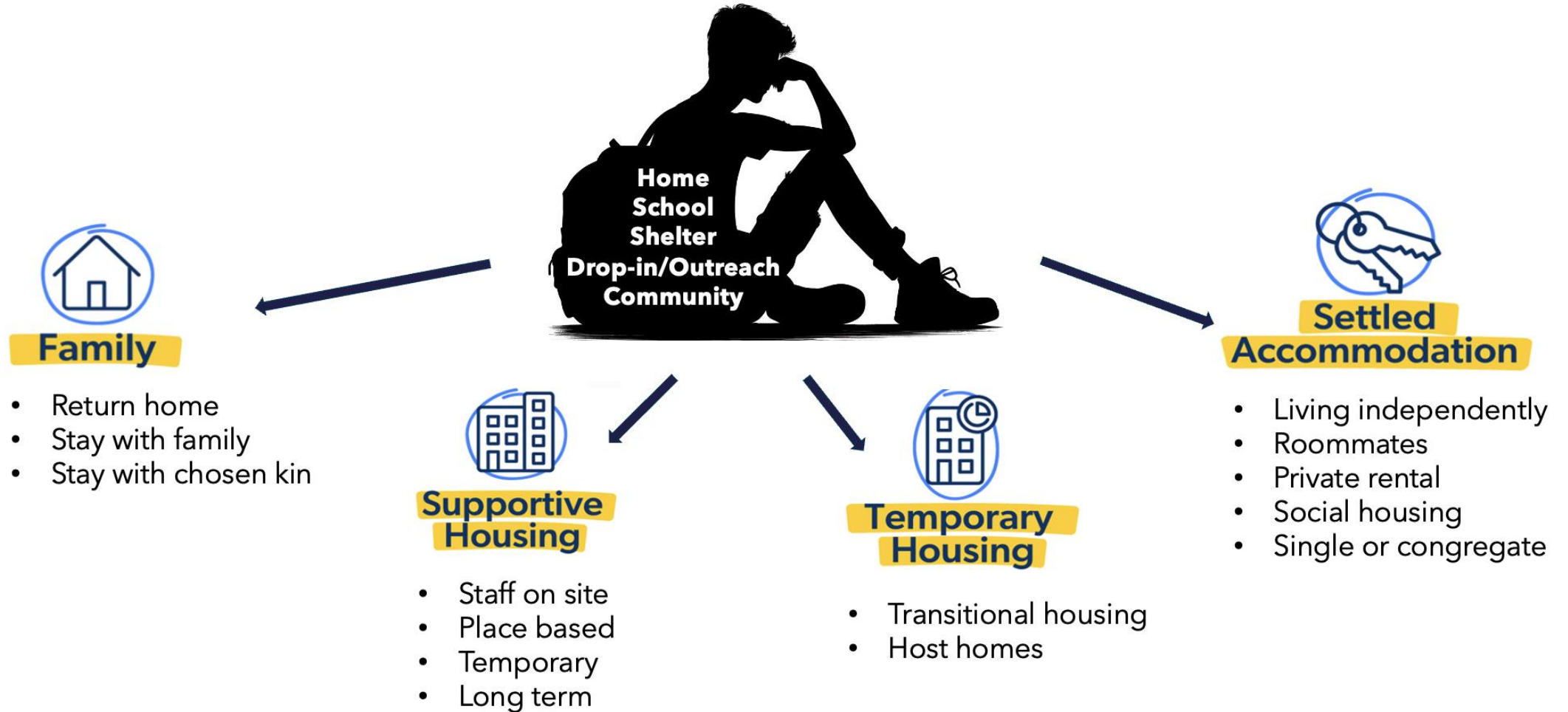
● 4. Individualized, Client-driven Supports with no Time Limits



● 5. Social Inclusion and Community Integration

# Homeless Youth or "at risk youth"

## Pathways to Housing Stabilization



# The Range of Supports

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1. Housing Supports



2. Health & Well-being



3. Access to Income & Education



4. Complementary Supports



5. Social Inclusion

# Evidence

**Does HF4Y  
work???**



# Research Outcomes

## *POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH IN HF4Y PROGRAMS:*

- Enhanced Housing Stability
- Improved Physical and mental health
- Improved Resilience
- Improved Money Management
- Declines in drug use
- Declines in criminal involvement
- Improved relationships with family, friends and significant others.



4

**FAMILY &  
NATURAL  
SUPPORTS**



# Why Family and Natural Supports?

Youth experiencing homelessness identify that enhancing family and natural supports was an important goal on their journey:



- 71.6% of youth surveyed were in contact with a family member
- 77.3% would like to have improved relationships with family.
- Young people who reported positive relationships with friends were much more likely to report high levels of self-esteem.
- Likewise, those who are in regular contact with family members (more than once a month) and who value family connections also demonstrate higher levels of self esteem (Gaetz et al., 2016).
- There is promising research on family strengthening efforts.

## **Conflicts with family members**

***– in particular parents and care givers – are the main cause of youth homelessness***

In the Without a Home survey, **77.5%** of the sample indicated that a key reason they left home was an inability to get along with their parents.



# ***For many young people, family still matters!***

- ***Families are complex. Most young people exist in a web of family relationships, some of which may be problematic, others which may not.***
- ***For many homeless youth, serious family conflict and abuse may not be the defining factor in their leaving home***
- ***Relationships characterized by conflict are not always irreconcilable.***

# What is the FNS Approach?

**Family and Natural Supports (FNS)** aims to strengthen the relationships that youth have with their families or other significant adults in their lives to help prevent homelessness. This approach can be applied in various ways, such as a stand-alone program, a guiding philosophy, or as part of broader interventions like **Housing First for Youth**.

By helping youth and adults in their lives to address conflicts, rebuild relationships, and nurture natural supports, they can move forward, stay in school or access training, address mental health and addiction issues, and transition into adulthood.

# *So what ARE Natural Supports?*

Natural supports are the relationships and personal associations that we develop with family members and other adults in our lives during the course of daily living. They are 'natural' in the sense that they are informally and locally developed, and are based on reciprocity or give and take. (In contrast, professional supports are formal or structured supports that explicitly involve the delivery of a service.)

Change Collective, 2018

# Why does this matter?

By strengthening natural connections and supporting relational interdependence, practitioners can help youth to develop the types of social environments that support healthy development. Positive natural supports also have the potential to:

- Contribute to a youth's recovery and growth process;
- Serve as “powerful motivators and models for positive change”;
- Help young people to reappraise and restructure how they think about themselves and others;
- Reduce psychological distress;
- Help vulnerable youth to successfully transition to adulthood.

*“Feeling connected to an adult has been found to have positive effects not only on general well-being and socio-emotional health, but also can buffer some of the negative outcomes this population is reported to face.”*

*(Samuels, 2008)*

# Case management and service provision

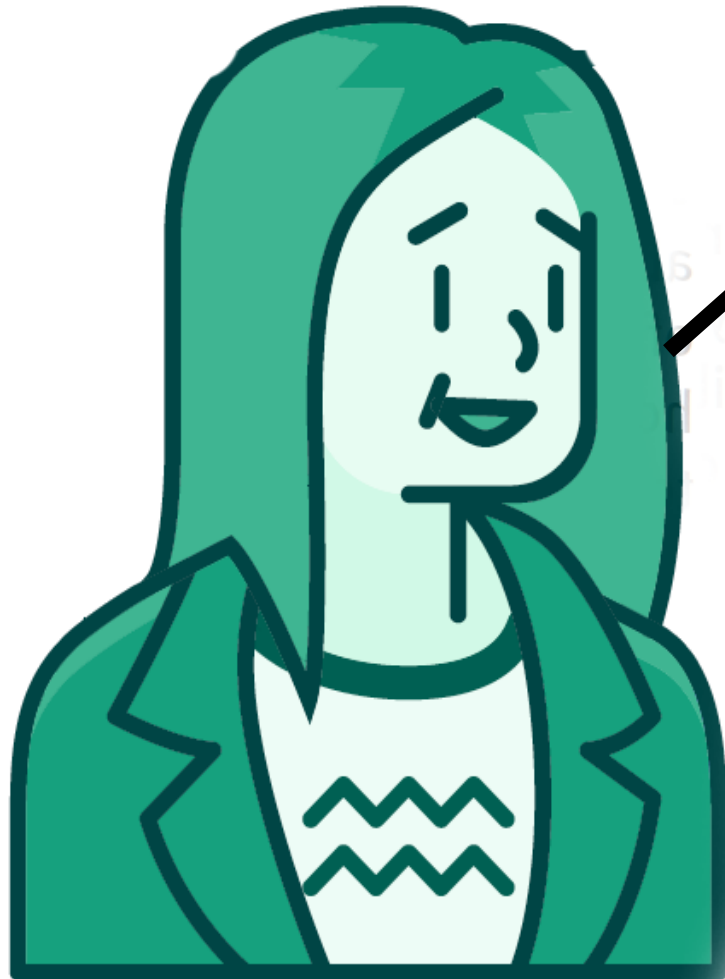
The case management approach is youth and family-led, holistic, and supportive of self-empowerment and self-advocacy. The intensity of the service is determined on a case by-case basis and shifts according to needs.

The work is generally regarding the life areas of:

- Family / interpersonal conflict;
- Enhanced communications and conflict resolution skills
- Parenting (especially for young parents);
- Social / Emotional Learning
- Mental health and addictions;
- Housing and homelessness;
- Education and employment
- Financial issues/basic needs;



# Redefining the Client

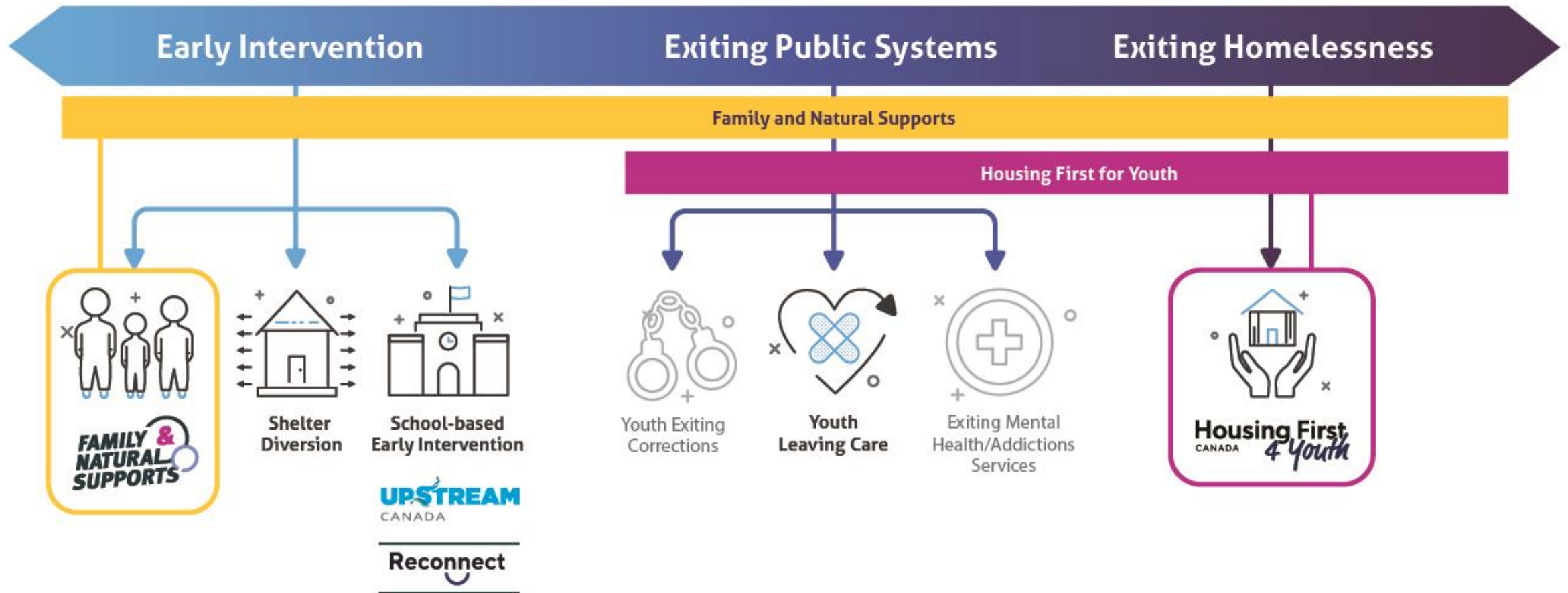


“When we started doing Family and Natural Supports work it changed the way we thought about “who is the client?” Before that, we were clear that we were working with young people – they were our clients. After, we began to think of young people AND their families as the client. This changed everything – how we think about our work, and what kind of staff we need to do the best work we can with both young people and their families.”

Kim Ledene, Director of Youth Housing & Shelter at  
Trellis Calgary.

# Preventing Youth Homelessness

What you can do in your community



# What's next?

**FNS** is an important intervention that can work not only in the context of youth homelessness services, but also in other **public systems**.

- Integrated Youth Service Hubs
- Youth Employment Services
- Youth exiting Child Protection
- Youth exiting the Criminal Justice System



**Is Youth Homelessness  
Prevention  
Cost  
Effective?**

# A Look at the Cost of Housing and Support Models for Youth Vulnerable to Homelessness

Table: Average Cost of Housing and Support Models Per Youth at Risk of Homelessness in Ontario

Approach	Daily	Monthly	Annual	Outcome
<b>⚠️ CRISIS RESPONSES — Higher Cost, No Housing Solution</b>				
Hospital (In-patient)	\$1,133	\$13,500	<b>\$413,545</b>	<p><b>PATHWAY TO CHRONICITY</b></p> <p><b>58% of currently homeless youth are already chronically homeless</b></p> <p>These services are not designed to end homelessness. Prolonged exposure leads to greater dependence on crisis supports, further entrenchment, and eventually chronic homelessness.</p>
Provincial Youth Prison	\$326	\$8,915	<b>\$199,200</b>	
Group Home*	\$315	\$9,580	<b>\$114,950</b>	
Hotel Shelter	\$260	\$7,908	<b>\$94,900</b>	
Emergency Shelter	\$100	\$3,041	<b>\$36,500</b>	
<b>✓ PREVENTATIVE INTERVENTIONS — Lower Cost, Housing Stabilization</b>				
<b>Housing First for Youth (HF4Y)</b> ~2 year intervention	\$55	\$1,671	<b>\$20,050</b>	<p><b>HIGH HOUSING RETENTION</b></p> <p>Both HF4Y and FNS are designed to end homelessness, not manage it. High post-intervention housing retention means young people are stably housed long after support ends.</p>
<b>Family &amp; Natural Supports (FNS)</b> ~1 year intervention	\$36	\$1,100	<b>\$13,250</b>	

\*As high as \$1,200/day for youth with more complex needs who require a one-on-one worker.

***Preventing Youth  
Homelessness is not  
only the right thing to  
do, it is *cost effective!****





**Supporting  
the *SHIFT***

***to***

***Prevention***

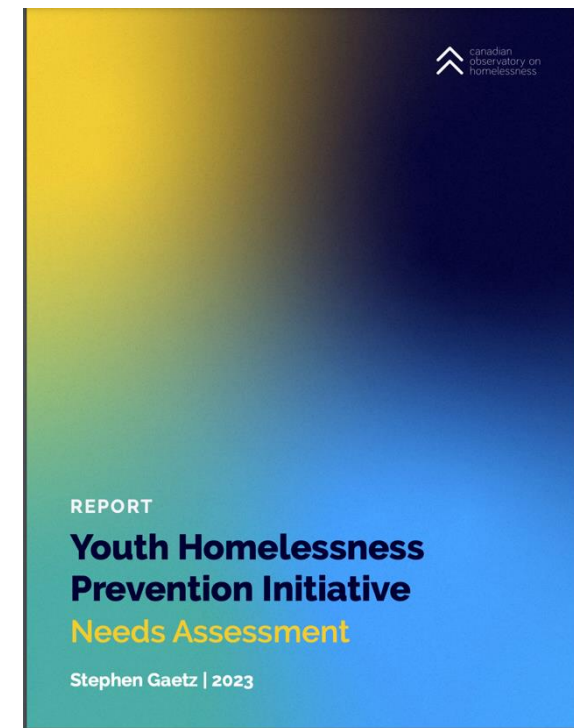
# Is the sector ready?

A survey of over 150 service providers says so.

90% of respondents agreed with the statement: “**Prevention is necessary to solve youth homelessness:**

## ***What the sector needs to get there!***

- We need **support as an organization** to make the shift to prevention **(61.7%)**
- We need **more support from our community** **(91.3%)**
- We could do more homelessness prevention if we were provided with **dedicated funds** **(81.2%)**
- We could do more IF we had access to quality **Training and Technical Assistance.** **(74%)**



# Key assets to help us get there

- The **evidence base for prevention** exists and continues to grow
- *The case for focusing on **YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION** is compelling*
- The **Government of Canada supports investment in the Prevention of Youth Homelessness** (including through Reaching Home's Directives)
- Growing interest in, and support for prevention of youth homelessness by **Community Entities.**



- **Resources**

- Reports
- Program Model Guides
- Policy Briefs
- Toolkits

- **Presentations**

- **Training and  
Technical Assistance**

- **Research**

- Program Evaluation,
- Cost benefit analysis

- **Courses**

- Homelessness Learning  
Hub



# Training and Technical Assistance

## ***Shifting Practices***

Building capacity at the frontlines to deliver prevention-based services that improve the well-being of young people.



**A WAY HOME**  
**VERS UN CHEZ-SOI**

1

## **Training Offerings**

(in person)

- Housing First for Youth
- Family & Natural Supports
- Foundations 101
- Case Management
- Indigenous homelessness

2

## **Technical Assistance**

- Case Consultations
- Policy and Procedures
- Systems Planning
- Program Implementation
- Coaching
- **Fidelity reviews**

3

## **Community of Practice calls**

4

**FREE** Online training/resources on the Homelessness Learning Hub

**NEW TOOLKIT**



 homelessness  
learning hub

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homelessness

 A WAY HOME  
VERS UN CHEZ-SOI  
2020

 MAKING  
THE SHIFT  
youth homelessness  
demonstration lab

# Youth Homelessness Prevention Toolkit

Essential Tools for Communities

ANY  
QUESTIONS?

