Homeless in Europe

Spring 2016

Preventing Youth Homelessness: Case Studies from across Europe and North America

FEANTSA

Editorial

Can we really prevent young people from becoming homeless in Europe?

By **Samara Jones**, *Policy Officer at FEANTSA*

The short answer is yes. We can dramatically reduce the flow of young people into homelessness by ensuring that there are measures in place to address their needs at all crucial stages in their lives. Research and evidence from North America and Europe indicate that the best prevention strategies take a holistic approach, focusing on both the personal and structural factors that contribute to a young person becoming homelessness."[1]

Some countries in Europe have already started to shift their policy focus from *managing* youth homelessness to *preventing* and *ending* youth homelessness. A number of these examples are highlighted here by members of FEANTSA Youth, a new network of professionals dedicated to advocating the prevention and end of youth homelessness in Europe. Launched at a FEANTSA Study Session held in cooperation with the Council of Europe on the prevention of youth homelessness in 2014, FEANTSA Youth is actively working to raise awareness about youth homelessness, in particular the lack of data about the number and profile of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Europe. Trigger factors for youth homelessness are sadly consistent across countries: problems in the family home (often due to lack of income and poor housing conditions); discrimination based on sexuality (25% of homeless youth are LGBTQI[2]); personal substance abuse, mental health (often undiagnosed) issues, learning disabilities, and other structural factors including problems within the education system, involvement with the criminal justice system; and of course young people leaving the care system can be particularly vulnerable to homelessness at the point of transition to independent living.

Additional pressures from funding cuts, austerity measures affecting family incomes, increasing housing prices in many major cities including London, Edinburgh, Copenhagen, Berlin and Paris, to name just a few, have jeopardized progress towards prevention models. The economic crisis continues to disproportionately impact young people, with youth unemployment rates in some countries at the highest they have been in decades. The European Union's response to this crisis for Europe's young people is the European Youth Guarantee, which as FEANTSA has pointed out[3] fails to reach those young people who are most vulnerable – those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

1 Gaetz, S. (2014). Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada. Toronto:The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press. http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/ComingOfAgeHH_0.pdf
2 Study by the Albert Kennedy Trust: http://www.akt.org.uk/webtop/modules/_repository/documents/AlbertKennedy_ResearchReport_FINALInteractive.pdf
3 FEANTSA Policy Statement, 2012, Does the European Youth Guarantee Meet Young People's Needs, http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?action=acceder_document&arg=2405&cle=b9da57abf19edf51c3c2964c366c26559e4044ee&file=pdf%2F4_youth_guarantee_and_homelessness_final-2.pdf

There is some cause for optimism, however. Recognition by people working with young people that housing led approaches can be adapted and successful in preventing recurrent homelessness have led to interesting projects, including Housing First for Youth in Canada and Ireland, as well as innovative programmes in France. In Ireland, the devastating evidence that the child protection system was failing many who were 'aging out' of care at 18 years old led to a new, robust 'aftercare guarantee' which is serving as a model for other countries in Europe (see article by Wayne Stanley of Focus Ireland).

This edition of Homeless in Europe shines a light on the situation of young homeless people in a number of European countries: Croatia, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Serbia, Ireland, The Netherlands, Scotland as well as Canada and the USA. We also look at some of the prevention models being pioneered in Canada, in particular the A Way Home approach, which serves as a catalyst to bring together the sectors beyond the homeless service sector, who must work together to make prevention of youth homelessness happen.

While the few available statistics on youth homelessness in Europe make for depressing reading, there is reason to hope. We know that preventing youth homelessness *is* possible, and with the support of FEANTSA Youth's members and others, we can convince partners across different sectors and levels of government to work together to shift the focus from emergency responses to effective preventive strategies.

For more information about FEANTSA Youth's work on prevention of youth homelessness, housing-led responses for young people, participation, and aftercare for young people leaving the child welfare or justice systems please visit www.feantsa.org or the Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/FEANTSAYouth/

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We would like to give you the chance to comment on any of the articles which have appeared in this issue. If you would like to share your ideas, thoughts and feedback, please send an email to the editor, emma.nolan@feantsa.org

FEANTSA Youth: advocating for young people's right to housing in Europe

By **Chloé Serme-Morin**[1], *Project Officer, FEANTSA*

FEANTSA Youth is a European network of young professionals aiming to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness by advocating for housing rights, developing prevention strategies, raising public awareness, training professionals and building cooperation/coalitions within the service providers or other stakeholders. FEANTSA youth is the only European network of young professionals working exclusively with homeless people. Our goal is to prevent and alleviate the poverty and social exclusion of young people threatened by or living in homelessness. We want to achieve this through building the capacities of the members, sharing knowledge, cooperation and networking, research and data collection and implementation of policies and practices. Every person has a right to adequate housing and our mission is to enable access to this right for young people and end youth homelessness.

In most European countries, young people between 18 and 29 years old represent 20 to 30% of all homeless people. In Denmark, the number of young homeless people has increased by 80% from 2009 to 2013. Among those, 51% had mental health problems, 58% were concerned by problematic drug or alcohol use, and 32% were concerned by both.

Being homelessness is not just sleeping rough or using a shelter. It means not being able to access your basic rights for housing, security, private possession, education, employment, health and social protection. The European Commission, through the Europe 2020 Strategy and its European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, identified homelessness as one of the most severe forms of poverty and deprivation and called for the development of appropriate and integrated responses in the framework of a wider EU social inclusion policy. But a growing number of European and local stakeholders, including FEANTSA and FEANTSA Youth, are asking for coordinated, cross-policy collaboration towards prevention of youth homelessness. This could be instigated at all levels of government, including within the European Commission, national, regional and local governments. Excellent models, like the Canadian A Way Home approach, could serve as inspiration. See article by Dr. Stephen Gaetz and Melanie Redman.

In order to achieve this goal, we need to switch the paradigm from emergency response to the prevention of homelessness. We need to react as early as possible.

Youth homelessness is distinct from adult homelessness: causes and conditions are different; therefore, responses and solutions have to be different too.

Since young homeless people often have complex needs and may find themselves in vulnerable positions, the longer they are stuck in homelessness, the more difficult they will find it to escape, the more likely they will be exposed to the risks of experiencing trauma, declining health and addictions, being a victim of exploitation, violence and human rights abuses. Consequently, reducing this worsening problem must be a priority in Europe, and not only by focusing on emergency services but also by putting more efforts into preventing youth from becoming homeless in the first place as well as assisting others to exit homelessness as quickly as possible through housing-led approaches.

FEANTSA youth is committed to:

- Engage in constant dialogue with the European Union institutions and national and regional governments to promote the development and implementation of effective measures to prevent homelessness and fight youth homelessness.

- Conducting and disseminating research and data collection to promote better understanding of the nature, extent, causes of, and solutions to youth homelessness.

- Promoting and facilitating the exchange of information, experience and good practice between FEANTSA youth members and relevant stakeholders with a view to improve policies and practices addressing homelessness.

- Raising public awareness about youth homelessness and the concept of housing first as a solution.

FEANTSA Youth has had the opportunity to gather every year for a one-week Study Sessions hosted by the Council of Europe's Youth Department. In 2016, during this latest Study Session, participants shared their experiences and ideas in order to come up with a common advocacy plan for FEANTSA Youth, including local/regional advocacy actions for the next 10-12 months. After some intense and enthusiastic workshops allowing participants to build ideas together, different thematic and structural Working Groups have been created by participants in order to cover the different issues they identified as relevant for the network, such as prevention, youth in social/justice system and aftercare, Housing First for youth, and youth participation.

FEANTSA Youth will be actively participating in FEANTSA's annual policy conference on June 9th and 10th 2016 in Brussels, through a dedicated hotspot and a workshop on "How can we effectively work together to prevent and end youth homelessness?"

> "Every person has a right to adequate housing and our mission is to enable access to this right for young people and end youth homelessness."

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Youth Homelessness in Germany Prevention and Case Studies

By **Petra Schwaiger** and **Johan Grasshoff** *(FEANTSA Youth)*

This article presents two case studies from urban areas in Germany – Hamburg and Berlin – in order to show practical examples of social work with homeless youth. The practical example "Home Support"[1] focuses on how prevention of youth homelessness is implemented, whereas the second example, Berlin's "Gangway e.V."[2], focuses on how, once homeless, youth can be supported in regaining their own living space.

Due to a lack of research, an accurate number of the youth at risk of being homeless or who are currently homeless can only be estimated. According to Diaconia Germany, around 500.000 persons are socially excluded in Germany.[3] According to the national board on homelessness, 335.000 people were considered homeless in 2014.[4] The number of young homeless people has been rising in the past few years,[5] which shows the need for prevention methods and emergency aid for homeless youth.

In Germany, a key point of reference for providing services to the homeless are articles 67-69 of the Social Security Code Chapter XII and Social Security Code Chapter II – relating to unemployment benefit and social assistance.[6] To manage the specific challenges of youth homelessness, the German youth welfare system provides housing support services to young people up to the age of 21 (Art. 41 Social Security Code, Ch. VIII. In general, the current disputes between the authorities from three Social Codes (SGB II, SGB VIII and SGB XII) are an obstacle to an early, broad and need-based support for young homeless in Germany. More often again, young people will initially seek informal help from friends and relatives, coming into contact with "official" support only some time after they have lost their homes.

The German constitution states that municipalities are responsible for providing services of general interest and most cities have established a system for homelessness prevention. There are usually central offices for coordinating these services. But because of the complex nature of youth homelessness, many young people fall through the gaps between services for children and those for adults. Adding to state and municipality services, NGOs such as "Home Support" and Gangway offer support for youth at risk. The following example shows how the homelessness of young people leaving care can be prevented:

"HOME SUPPORT – FOR YOUR OWN FOUR WALLS"[7]
A project example from Hamburg

For young people who cannot rely on a supportive social network, it is truly difficult to find an apartment in Hamburg. This problem even concerns young people who are, or were previously, connected to the youth welfare system. When turning 21 years old, young people have to leave the supported youth accommodation due to legal restrictions. As the young adults leave the system they also lose their usual professional support from a social worker.
Therefore "Home Support – for your own four walls" is a project that helps former residents of supported youth accommodation– or so called care "leavers" - by providing assistance with their first move into independent living. It aims to support young people in coping with their new independent housing situation, to support with multiple problems and for the vocational orientation. Thus it tackles the specific challenges for care leavers in Hamburg. By offering continuous support the project contributes to avoiding homelessness and prevention of housing emergencies among young adults.

"Home Support" offers support to young people who have moved to their own apartment within the last 12 months, are initially not older than 21 years and were connected to the youth welfare system in the past. Young people who were housed via the Youth Office in a supervised youth flat, stayed in a district crisis or guest flat, or who are released from intensive socio-educational individual help, or lived in a foster family.

Many young people, who come to "Home Support", have to deal with a complex set of problems. For almost all participants of the project, subsistence needs are a priority issue. They have only very limited financial resources and thus often live in poverty or precarious conditions. Social consultations and accompaniments to authorities' offices (Jobcentre, Youth welfare office) to enforce legal claims are indispensable. Almost half of the participants have debt problems.

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1   Contact: Home Support, Reimerstwiete 11, 20457 Hamburg,
    Tel: 0049 (0)40-22 659 44 00, http://www.homesupport-hamburg.de/, info@homesupport-hamburg.de
2   Contact: Gangway e.V.; Team Startpunkt, Matthias Gutjahr; http://startpunkt.gangway.de, E-mail: info@startpunkt-berlin.de.
3   http://www.diakonie.de/media/01_2016_Junge_Menschen.pdf. p 3
4   http://www.bagw.de/de/presse/index~81.html
5   http://www.diakonie.de/media/01_2016_Junge_Menschen.pdf p. 3
6   Sozialrecht (Social Code) Chapter II: Arbeitslosengeld II, Chapter VIII (Jugendhilfe) and XII: Sozialhilfe (Social benefits), § 67, http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/sgb_12/. Last accessed 25/04/16.
7   The project "Home Support – Support for your home" is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and co-financed by the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg. The team consists of social workers and a project manager/leader - Factsheet: http://www.homesupport-hamburg.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/hs_english_2-2015.pdf

The extremely limited financial resources often lead to problems with paying the rent. Rent arrears and threats of forced removal are the result. "Home Support" attempts to secure rented flats by rapid intervention. The social workers contact landlords and regulatory bodies, and accompany clients to the coordinating offices for housing needs. During the last year "Home Support" supported 61 participants, 12 participants (20%) were at significant risk of housing loss. In all cases so far, the apartments could be secured by intensive emergency measures.

Furthermore, vocational guidance as a perspective for the young people's future development and independence is also an important topic for participants. Approximately 33% of the participants have health problems, including physical illness, psychosomatic stress disorders and depression, anxiety or border-line disorders. Participants barely have any resources to manage their daily lives due to problems such as debt and mental health difficulties. The social workers have to concentrate on providing and finding further support to meet these basic needs.

The project "Home Support – Support for your home"[8] is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and co-financed by the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg. The team consists of social workers and a project manager/leader.

GANGWAY E.V.
A project example from Berlin

This case study points out the importance of professional support for young people leaving care. If this support mechanism is not applied at all, or fails, many young people end up homeless and then become clients of low-threshold services for homeless, such as "Gangway" – an outreach program supporting youngsters and young adults in Berlin, Germany. Gangway was founded in 1990, and is financed by the city senate, municipalities, and individual donations. Gangway employs approximately 75 social workers who are divided into 21 teams; 14 of these teams work specifically with homeless youth under the age of 18. These teams focusing on young people visit different locations where homeless people gather, such as public squares and streets. Their working methodology can be described as the following: Gangway offers client-orientated support for young people who are homeless. They help youth regain responsibility for their lives, offer support in working with public authorities, assist in finding education or work opportunities, and conflicts with parents and relatives, schools or places of work. The organization also offers leisure activities and various training on topics like anti-violence training, social competence, etc. Gangway is engaged in community work, committee work, networking and public relations.[9]

> "Young people will initially seek informal help from friends and relatives, coming into contact with "official" support only some time after they have lost their homes."

Gangway's analysis of the problems youth face today:

At the moment, there is a lack of affordable housing in metropolitan areas in Germany, such as Berlin. Single room options are especially rare in Berlin's housing market and, if available, are often located in the outskirts of the city.

Berlin's local housing policy is adapting to this reality too slowly to meet the growing demand for social housing.[10]

Even institutions that offer support for homeless people are facing difficulties in finding adequate apartments for their clients. Consequently, public homeless shelters that only offer emergency help are overrun; many people have no options but to move into a public shelter.[11]

Against this background, there is strong competition between single persons, social welfare recipients, and students for the few available and affordable social housing options in Berlin. Youth and young adults hoping to lead an independent life have few opportunities considering the competition.

This is why Gangway focuses on young people in finding their own living space and apartments: youth who have atypical backgrounds face particular difficulties. They often come from difficult family situations that make it impossible for them to live at home, or they have left shelter housing. They do not have regular income and often have debts, which results in a negative credit rating and not being credit-worthy. It is especially difficult for young people who are in prison and close to being released. Often, a housing solution remains vague even on the day of their release. After their release, they often move from one place to the next, becoming "couch hoppers" who have no option but to stay with friends and acquaintances. This situation makes planning to find work or educational opportunities nearly impossible, as they instead must focus on finding nightly accommodations. This can lead to becoming involved in "street" life (again) and prevents their full reintegration into, and participation in, society. When asked about the most important issues young homeless people have to face in Germany, Matthias Gutjahr, a social worker at "Gangway" points out, that there is a severe danger that young people will fall through gaps between services for children and those for adults. Therefore, besides emergency aid, a focus on prevention is absolutely necessary. Nevertheless, Gutjahr points out as well, that prevention and emergency help can only be effective if there is a sufficient market of affordable housing.[12]

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8   Home support – support for your home" is under the roof of the Evangelische Stiftung der Bodel-schwingh-Gemeinde.
9   cf.: Gangway e.V.: who we are: www.gangway.de, http://gangway.de/ueber-uns/selbstdarstellung/ last accessed 24/04/2016.
10 cf.: BAGW (Federal board on homelessless Germany, press release 15/10/2015. http://www.bagw.de/de/presse/index~81.html (accessed on 21/04/2016)
11 Public shelters operate on the legal basis of ASOG (Allgemeines Gesetz zur Sicherheit und Ordnung), a Berlin police law stating that homelessness is seen as an issue of public order and safety. Police therefore have a duty to find accommodation for homeless people. See also: https://www.berlin.de/imperia/md/content/seninn/abteilungiii/vorschriften/081103_asog.pdf?start&ts=1252489038&file=081103_asog.pdf (last accessed on 16/04/2016).
12 Interview, Mathias Gutjahr, „Gangway", E-mail from 25/4/2016.

How homelessness will never be ended unless we shift our focus to prevention in the first place

By **Corma Poelen**, *(FEANTSA Youth)*

FACTS

In the Netherlands there are about 9.000 ''home-less'' youngsters. Since 2010, youth homelessness has been defined as *'youngsters under 23 years of age with multiple problems who are factual homeless or residential homeless'* (VWS, 2011). Factual homeless youngsters are designated as sleeping rough, in short stay or emergency shelters or staying temporarily with family or friends. Residential homeless youngsters don't have their own living place and they are registered at an institution for community shelters.

RISK FACTORS

Exploratory research by Ballering and Bergen (2013) shows that a substantial number of the risk factors for becoming homeless are psychological factors. They point out post-traumatic stress disorder, behavioural problems, depression, psychoses and drug use as individual risk factors. Family related problems, for example complicated relations with parents, mistreatment, domestic violence and neglect are also important risk factors for becoming homeless. Furthermore, they identified being raised in a broken family with family members suffering from psychological and/or addiction problems as a considerable factor as well. Also meaningful are negative experiences at school and with friends. It almost always concerns a complex combination of risk factors leading youngsters to lose their connection with society (Altena, Oliemeulen & Wolf, 2010).

DEVASTATING EFFECTS

Several researchers, but also the homeless themselves, explained that the longer the period of homelessness persists, problems and risks multiply, and functional recovery becomes more difficult as time goes by (Slesnick, Dashora, Letcher, Erdem & Serovich, 2009). Homelessness also comes with poor mental health and reduced quality of life (Altena, Boersma & Wolf, 2014). Homeless youth suffer from severe mental health problems such as depression, anxiety problems, aggressive behaviour, paranoid thoughts and a mental disability more often than other youngsters (Krabbenborg, Boersma & Wolf, 2013; Planije, Land & Wolf, 2003; Barendregt, Schrijvers, Baars & Mheen, 2011). These mental health problems impede them from achieving their goals and make reintegration into the community more difficult.

PREVENTION

Therefore preventing, instead of managing the problem, should be our most important goal. Prevention of youth homelessness means paying attention to the signals before homeless occurs. For now, homelessness is often viewed as a problem that requires care intervention instead of viewing it as a problem with housing in the first place (Tuynman & Planije, 2014). Also Leilani Farha, special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing at the United Nations, states that ''homelessness occurs when housing is treated as a commodity rather than as a human right''.

However, at this moment existing prevention programs and interventions focus mostly on resolving the already existing problems. In the Netherlands a shift seems to be taking place in how the problem is viewed. Over the years many good and promising initiatives have been developed and implemented. There is still a lot to be improved and gained.

PREVENTION PROGRAMS

There are many different prevention programs in the Netherlands. Some directed at prevention, others directed at managing youth homelessness and preventing it from worsening. Not all of them are evidence based, nor used in every municipality.

For example, since it's known that school dropout happens very often prior to becoming homeless, in schools many prevention programs are implemented. Schools also have a so called ''care and advice team''. These teams have partnerships with services for pupils with special needs and services working with early school leavers. Because of the identified risk factors mentioned before, concerning family problems, every municipality has a Centre for Youth and Family. It's an easy approachable service centre for parents. These centres provide information, advice and low level parenting support. When risk factors are identified in the family or families in crisis, programmes like Families First are usable to prevent a family from breaking up or to prevent foster care placement of a child. Furthermore, in the Netherlands every professional has the possibility to work with a referring index, a nationwide system for signalling risk factors from school, workers, mental health etc. It gives information about which services are involved and promotes working together (www.movisie.nl).

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Having said that, there is also room for improvement. From my point of view, a psychologist with homeless youth or at risk youth, I have identified two major bottlenecks.

To be precise, the first bottleneck concerns the minimal research for effective care for homeless youth in the Netherlands and the gap between research and practice. In many regions mental health care for homeless youngsters is different from other regions. Some regions work in a coalition with several important partners but other regions work in a very different manner. For now, many homeless youngsters don't get the help they need (and say so themselves) (Altena, Boersma & Wolf, 2014).

Although a part of the population receives mental health care or social work assistance, nearly one quarter does not receive the mental health support they wish for (Wolf, Altena, Christians & Beijersbergen, 2010). As mentioned before, research points out that having mental health problems impede achieving and maintaining stable housing, a stable financial situation and a supportive network (Altena, Boersma & Wolf, 2014). Youngsters themselves tell us that stabilized mental health for one year or longer contributes to the possibility of achieving a stable living situation (Albeda, 2010). Therefore, if you want to give youngsters with mental health issues the best chances of functional recovery, it is very important to make sure the they receive effective help.

The second bottleneck concerns the gap in care when a youngster turns 18. In the Netherlands, youth care and institutionalization in youth care is only possible up until a child becomes 18 years old. Above 18 years a youngster is considered to be an ''adult'' and for example mental health care is not forcible or easily available anymore. For many young people the transition from child welfare support does not necessarily lead to self-sufficiency, and so there is a major risk of becoming homeless and/or developing related problems. Additionally, the costs of mental health care above 18 years are regulated by the health insurance companies. Many young homeless or youngsters at risk of homelessness don't have health insurance but they do have debts. This, and many other reasons that arise because of the gap between 18 minus and 18 plus years, can be a direct route into homelessness and needs to be resolved.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, for the homeless youth and the 'at risk of homelessness' youth in the Netherlands, some good prevention programmes have been developed. At different levels and areas, programmes are implemented and there is room for improvement. Research on effective mental health programmes is sparsely available and still not all youngsters receive the mental health care they need. While mental health problems are known to play a part in becoming homeless, they also impede functional recovery. Therefore, still there is a big risk of entering homelessness when entering adulthood and leaving youth care or youth institutions because of no fluent transition to independence or adult care.

On the Very Edge – Youth Homelessness in Croatia

By **Josipa Vucica**[1], *Association MoSt, Split, Croatia (FEANTSA Youth)*

THE YOUTH – RESOURCE OR COMMUNITY PROBLEM?

In the first decade of the 21st century, there has been an increase in the number of young homeless people all over the world. It might sound like an oxymoron considering that on the one hand, we define young people as the future and a resource, and on the other, as a group exposed to the risk of poverty. However, this is what the statistics show! In order to understand the problems of youth homelessness in Croatia better, it is important to know more about the position of young people in the state in general. In accordance with the Strategy against Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Republic of Croatia (2014-2020), young people are a vulnerable group at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

According to Eurostat data, the financial crisis which occurred in all European countries, and the slow development of the economy greatly influenced the increase in the youth unemployment rate. Young people do not have a favourable position on the job market in relation to other unemployed groups. They often depend on temporary and low paid jobs, suffer from the highest increase in unemployment rates and are therefore, exposed to a deterioration of living conditions. Young people who have not finished a high level of education and do not have work experience struggle to find their first job.

According to data for 2014, the Croatian Youth Network states that 21.8% of young people are 'NEET's - Not in Education, Employment, or Training. The data further reveals that a worrying number of young people with high levels of education completion and those who have finished secondary professional education make up 71% of the NEET population. The Croatian Youth Network also warns that one in five young people is at risk of poverty, with results indicating even young people who have professional qualifications will probably not be able to get a job. This means that young people can be 'sentenced' to long-term unemployment, poverty, social services etc. National strategies and active employment policy measures have not significantly reduced the youth unemployment rate and were not completely created in accordance with the needs of vulnerable youth groups.

On average young people in Croatia do not leave the parental home until they are between 30 and 34 years old. At the national level there are no residential programs for vulnerable groups which would help young people to start an independent life.

LOST IN STATISTICS – HOMELESS YOUTH IN CROATIA

The exact number of homeless persons in Croatia is not known, mostly due to the absence of a tracking and recording system. Available statistical data cannot answer the questions on the real state of homelessness. Research on homelessness and on possible effective policies and programs to be developed in accordance with the needs of this marginalized social group has not been implemented.

Young homeless people are not specially discussed. However, professionals and the Croatian Homeless Network have been warning that there is an increased number of young people who are left without a roof over their heads at some point. More and more young people who are victimised in their formative years and completely marginalized, look for accommodation in Croatian homeless shelters. Social workers have also been expressing their worries on this topic since they have been sending young adults and all families to the shelters for minors. The most common causes of youth homelessness are family conflicts and the family's financial situation. Young persons who end up on the street are the ones who do not have their parents' emotional and financial support and who are exposed to family violence, drug consumption (85%), young women with unwanted pregnancies (one in ten young women who are homeless), and LGBT community members (25% rejected by their family). A great number of young homeless people in the Republic of Croatia are young persons from Homes for Children (the state's child protection system) without suitable parental care and Educational Homes, as well as young people from juvenile institutions and prisons.

Statistical data from the Croatian Homeless Networks show that there were 50 young people aged between 15 and 29 in Croatian shelters in 2015. However, we need to take into consideration the number of young homeless persons who are not recorded in the system. There is a great number of young people who are couch surfers or who live in inadequate conditions, or for example in deserted business facilities, ships, camp sites, houses, basements, garages and similar places. Do we talk about this issue enough? Do we think about prevention? Do we plan solutions for those who are already on the street? If we don't, a proportion of these young people just end up being lost in the system (from educational to social, from social to legal, from legal back to social and so on). In other words, we move them from one institution to another and in this 'magic' circle we wait for a 'better' future were no one shall be hungry, homeless or without support!

POST – PROGRAM OF SUPPORT TO YOUTH AT RISK

Association MoSt has been implementing homeless care programs and programs for children and young people with behaviour problems for 17 years. Work experience and recognizing the needs of users and the local community encouraged us to create the POST-Program of support to young people who are leaving or have already left the alternative care system (foster families, homes for children without adequate parental care, correctional institutions,) or the legal system (rehabilitation centres, juvenile prisons). Unfortunately, we are aware of the fact that this vulnerable group of young people at their most

> A great number of young homeless persons in the Republic of Croatia are young persons from Homes for Children (the state's child protection system) without suitable parental care and Educational Homes, as well as young persons from juvenile institutions and prisons.

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important moment in life – their first steps towards independence, are often left without adequate support either from families or the institutions in which they have lived. We have seen that there are young persons who, after leaving different forms of care and treatment, find the only 'solution' in homeless shelters. This is the failure of the society they live in. POST was created for them and we have supplemented it and coordinated it to respond to their needs. It is necessary to make additional efforts within the institutional child and youth care system and in relation to the processes which refer to leaving the care system. Many recent international and Croatian researches support this thesis.

In order to understand the problems which young persons face after they leave care system, we need to emphasize that the general youth population in Croatia leaves the family home between the age of 30 to 34. We asked ourselves why we put the same requirements for one of the most vulnerable group of young people – young persons who often leave the system with only elementary school education and with the professions that shall not result in employment, who are often in NEET status, who have low self-esteem and often lack in communication and social skills, and most importantly who do not have family of social support network which would help them in starting an independent life. We offered different types of support for young people through this program: we included them in educational programs and requalification programs in order to make them competitive on the job market, we created workshops for communication and social skills, we included them in an advisory process, we helped them realize their rights in the social care system, we also helped them find the job and accommodation and finally, we supported them through their daily problems.

At their initiative, we organized English language classes and included them as volunteers in humanitarian actions and the programs of our association. The emphasis was always put on creating a trusting and respectful relationship with young people and on their active participation in the decision making process. Through the program we have tried to ensure a safe place where they can always ask for help when they need it.

POST is based on cooperation with all relevant individuals and institutions. With our joint strengths and work we can create a youth support network – with local and regional self-administration units, non-governmental organisations, social care and justice systems, employers, the Croatian Employment Institute, volunteers, educational institutions, etc. An important part of our work is to make the public aware of the situation and to advocate for the rights of this group of young people at the local, national and international level. What we have learnt during the project implementation is that the young persons who are leaving the alternative care or legal systems have a great potential and can contribute to the community they live in. It is up to us to recognize this potential and to guide them in order to make the process of their growing up and gaining independence easier. This is one of the ways in which we can prevent youth homelessness and protect young people from poverty and social exclusion.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO FOCUS ON FOR PREVENTION OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS?

- Clear, open, public and continuous talk about the number, causes and needs of the young people who are at risk of poverty and the young people who live in poverty.

- Concrete, continuous and focused support for the young people living in poverty (individuals and families) in all surroundings and at all levels.

- Develop and encourage a culture of solidarity and humanity in society.

- The Croatian Homeless Network and civil society organisations need to speak clearly, openly, publicly, convincingly and continuously about taboo topics – like the issue of young persons in homeless shelters.

- Prevent budget cuts to social services in order to help the prevent social exclusion of young people.

- Ensure a decent income for young people and the usage of temporary work and volunteering.

- It is up to the state to create strategies which are in accordance with the realistic life needs of their citizens, to change legal frameworks, bad practice in the education systems, social care systems, etc. if they create larger number of marginalized people.

And it is up to the state to make everything in their power to create a better future where young people will not be marginalized.

Preventing and Ending Youth Homelessness in Scotland

By **Allison Calder**, *Head of Services at Rock Trust, Edinburgh, Scotland (FEANTSA Youth)*

In Scotland local authorities have a legal duty to provide settled accommodation to certain people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The local authority will look at a number of things to decide if an individual qualifies. These are whether:

● they are eligible for assistance
● they are homeless or threatened with homelessness
● they are not intentionally homeless
● they have a local connection

If an individual qualifies as homeless, the local authority has a duty to provide settled accommodation. It does not have to provide accommodation from its own properties. It can house in various ways, for example, by referring to a housing association, or arranging accommodation.
In 2012 the Scottish Government abolished a test for priority need, this removed the requirement that, to be able to access settled accommodation, presenting households had to exhibit priority need.

In 2010, to prepare for the increase in demand for housing, the Scottish Government adopted a preventive approach and specifically a Housing Options Approach. Housing Options changes the local authorities' approach from assessing clients on the basis of what they are legally entitled to receive, towards finding the most helpful solution for the client in light of their circumstances. The Government provided funding for 5 Housing Options Hubs to be established across Scotland to bring local authorities together to share best practice, with regards to preventing homelessness.

Since 2012 Scotland has reduced the number of 16-25 year olds who are assessed as homeless by 32%. This is a significant reduction, with 8229 young people being assessed as homeless or potentially homeless in 2014-15.

There has been some cynicism that the reduction in those presenting as homeless has been achieved by 'gatekeeping', local authorities sending young people back home or to stay with family or friends, rather than carrying out an homeless assessment. After a critical report from the Scottish Housing Regulator on the Housing Options Approach, the Scottish Government has now published guidance on Housing Options.

The change of focus from crisis to prevention within Scotland has meant the introduction of innovative models of practice to support young people from both becoming homeless for the first time, and becoming caught in the cycle of homelessness. This has been instigated by NGOs and the Hubs have focused on integrated IT systems and training internal staff on a Housing Options Approach.

Different models of practice have been implemented by NGOs, or developed further, due to the shift in focus. Most preventative services are funded through grant funding, or some national Scottish Government funding. But the majority of local authorities still commission services which deal with the crisis of homelessness. Due to the sporadic nature of the funding there is not a consistent, joint up approach to prevention and young people receive different preventative services depending on which part of the country they live in.

Successful models have included housing advice in schools and youth work settings; mediation; conflict management, adolescence and relationships training for professional, parents and young people; tenancy award; mentoring.

HOUSING ADVICE AND SKILLS TRAINING

There are a number of NGOs who provide housing advice in schools and youth work settings. 'Move On' have been successfully delivering housing advice as part of a wider 'InLife' programme in two local authorities. The programme helps young people to gain qualifications, educates them in practical life skills and prevents homelessness; engages the hardest-to-reach young people and support them in to employment. The 'Rock Trust' have been delivering the 'Tenancy Award' to young people before they leave institutional care in two local authorities. The award is also available for young people who have been homeless, to ensure that they gain skills and avoid becoming homeless again.

"67% of young people presenting as homeless in 2014-15 cited a form of relationship breakdown as the reason for becoming homeless."

TRAINING FOR PROFESSIONALS, PARENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

67% of young people presenting as homeless in 2014-15 cited a form of relationship breakdown as the reason for becoming homeless. This contributing factor has been recognised in Scotland since 2002, when the Scottish Government published a report on ending homelessness in Scotland and highlighted the importance of social networks in doing so. Since 2002, and increasingly with the shift to prevention, service providers have explored ways in which to reduce relationships and family breakdown for young people as they transition into adulthood.

Training for professionals and parents have been delivered by 'Cyrenians' and the 'Rock Trust' nationally and cover areas such as conflict resolution, relationships and adolescence. The adolescence training is focused on the developmental stage of adolescence, behaviours and support strategies. Both organisations have further developed the programmes to be delivered directly to young people in schools and youth work settings. The 'City of Edinburgh Council' have developed a 'Teens Triple P' course which promotes positive parenting. The programme can help parents and carers to:

- cope positively with some of the common issues associated with raising a teenager
- build a stronger relationship with their teenager
- resolve conflict in the family
- manage problem behaviour
- help their teen stay safe.

MEDIATION

Mediation is the model of practice which has been most popular within local authority housing departments. It is a resource which lends itself to tangible outcomes which can be easily evidenced. Mediation is most common at the point of crisis when a young person presents to their local authority as homeless, the ideal outcome for a local authority is that the family mends the relationship and the young person is able to return home. Both 'Cyrenians' and the 'Rock Trust' have recognised the benefits of an early intervention mediation service which can be used by a family at any point, which prevents relationship break down and homelessness occurring at a later date.

MENTORING

Mentoring is a model of support which has been utilised for young people in Scotland for decades, increasingly it is being used for young people before or when they are leaving institutional care.

The 'Barnardo's Springboard Service' offers throughcare and aftercare support to young people aged from 15 to 20 years of age who are or have been looked after by the Highland Council. They work with young people to help them plan and prepare for the time when they move on to live independently and continue to offer advice, guidance and support when they are living on their own.

Youth homelessness in Serbia – a brief review of the current situation

By **Marko Tomašević**[1], *Director, Center for Development of Social Policies – Klikaktiv (FEANTSA Youth)*

The problem of homelessness is not adequately addressed in Serbia as the system does not recognize this issue and, at the moment, prevention is not being strategically approached. The long transitional period took its toll, with the number of homeless people increasing dramatically over the last two and a half decades[2]. Some data show that, if the ETHOS classification were to be rigidly applied, between 10% and 15% of population in Serbia would be considered as homeless (Bobić, 2014; Žarković & Timotijević, 2012). Unofficial data shows that, in Belgrade alone, there are between 3.000 and 5.000 people occasionally sleeping rough. Although this is not a small number, these people are not visible to the social protection system or the general public at all.

The fact that homelessness is not acknowledged in Serbian legislation also contributes significantly to the invisibility of youth homelessness. There is furthermore one sociological phenomenon that additionally masks the growing presence of youth homelessness – the relatively slow process of the transition to adulthood in Serbia. Namely, young people tend to stay with their parents or relatives for a long period of time. Along with this permissiveness of the primary family, young people are facing hard times in the process of inclusion in the employment market and, consequently, psychological and economical separation from their parents is significantly delayed. Approximately half of young people up to 30 years old still live with their parents (Stanojević, 2012). From these facts it can be concluded that there is relatively small number of young homeless people in Serbia since young people usual stay with their parents. This conclusion is, unfortunately, not evidence based[3] and one-dimensional, since this explanation does not include the minority of young people living in significantly different conditions, such as young Roma living in slums. In addition, the invisibility of youth homelessness is also contributed to by the fact that the youth in this situation are trying to avoid identification as 'homeless' and the stigma that follows that identity.[4]

There are several groups that are especially vulnerable and, presumably, at the greatest risk of youth homelessness. Among them are young people exiting institutions for social protecton of children and youth[5]. There is no sufficient data on what is happening to those exiting insitutions. According to data gathered by the Center for Socially Preventive Activities – Grig, there is no adequate aftercare for those young people, neither is there any following or monitoring after they leave institutional care. The only practice that is offered by social protection system is the perimission to remain a resident of the institution as long as they are studying and are below the age of 26. The question is not only if this practice is efficient in any way, but also if it is damaging. Staying in the institution for a longer period of time can additionally complicate the process of becoming independent and can lead to an even greater risk of homelessness, since these young people are staying dependent on residential care for longer periods of time and are losing valuable time to gain skills necessary for independent living. This practice reflects how obsolete the Serbian social protection system is - support for vulnerable young people is primarily institutionaly-oriented. This obsolete system response goes along with the previously mentioned cultural pattern where young people very often stay dependent on their parents or relatives untill the end of their young adulthood.

The small amount of existing data regarding what happens to young people leaving insititutions is worying. Around 25% of of them do not have any skills to enter the employment market with. The same research shows that only around 17% of those who have skills actually find employment after they leave institutional care. Research results also showed that 34% do not have any housing option after they leave an institution. Out of those, only 6% are registered as homeless, but there is no data on what happens to the other 28%. It is also interesing to note that 13% of young people illegally remain residents of the institutions for children and youth protection after the time they had to leave. Other worying data shows that around 37% of young people leaving juvenile corectional care do not return to their primary families, and what is happening to them is not known (Center for Socially Preventive Activities – Grig, 2013).

Another big group of young people at risk of homelessness are young people living in slums. Most of them belong to the Roma ethnic group. They are living in extremly hard conditions, often without running water and electricity, in improvised and insecure shelters, in illegal settlements, without any infrastructure, segregated from the majority of popu-

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2 Representatives of the only institution that is temporary sheltering adults and old people in Belgrade report that their capacities has been insufficient for very long period of time.

3 For example, research on homelessness in Serbia that followed national census did not include young people as demographic category. Data gathered on that research show that there is, for example, 34 homeless person age for 15 to 19 sleeping rough in Serbia (Bobi , 2014). The problem with this research is the fact that the definition of homelessness used in this research is pretty much rigid and does not acknowledge the fact that homeless people often transit from one category of homelessness to other, as was confirmed by the research done by Red cross Belgrade and Klikaktiv – Center for Development of Social Policies in 2013 (Tomasevi , 2013).

4 This is one of the reasons to begin discussing the change of terminology. People without adequate housing should not be identified as homeless, but as the people in situation of homelessness, since homelessness can be considered as a situation and not a part of personal identity.

5 Such institutions are institutions for residential care for children without parental care and juvenile correctional care.

lation[6]. According to some, again unofficial data, there are around 180.000 Roma people living in these conditions[7]. Almost every young person that is a part of these communities can be considered as being at risk of homelessness. Living in this extreme poverty, they are exposed to violence and crime and being at the greater risk of developing addictions and psychiatric problems. Most of them work on the streets, begging, scraping car windows on street crossings and collecting secondary raw materials from the garbage. According to most conservative assessments of theCentre for youth integration, there are around 3.000 young people from slums living and working on the streets of Belgrade.

Due to the lack of system support and the fact that the children and youth care system is primarily instututionally-oriented, the general impression is that most of the organizations focused on homeless youth and youth at risk are working in the legal vacuum and are merely putting out fires. In this situation, the need for preventative programmes is obvious. The Centre for Social Preventative Activities – Grig, has been conducting a programme of the learning skills needed for independent living for young people leaving institutions through youth clubs and individual mentoring. These programmes have been conducted for several years now and have been evaluated as sucessfull. The Centre for youth integration has 12 years of experience in working with children and youth living in slums. This experience led them to focus their prevention programmes mainly on pre-school children and their inclusion in the educational system. Along with this programme they are supporting families and whole communities of people living in slums in their process of integration into mainstream society. The Centre for the Development of Social Policies – Klikaktiv, is currently mapping homeless youth and youth in risk of homelessness through outreach work and involving them in prevention programmes, providing services related to early intervention and reintegration for those chronically homeless. Through psychological support, learning skills needed for independent living, individual mentoring support and individual advocacy, Klikaktiv preventative activities are focused on those young people who are spending most of their time on the streets and are at risk of homelessness or experiencing short-term homelessness.

In conclusion, there is a great deal of work in the area of prevention of youth homelessness ahead for organizations dealing with this issue. At this moment, efforts should be focused on raising the visibility of youth homelessness, gathering empirical evidence on this issue and implementing evidence based policies and practices based on real needs. Currently, because of the fact that the Serbian social protection system is obsolete, we cannot hope that programmes targeting the prevention of youth homelessness will be institutionally supported in any significant way. That unfortunate situation asks for a great deal of creativity and coordinated work between different organizations, service providers and academic institutions. Nevertheless, this creative work and cooperation will not sustain, and the situation will not change, unless the system gets changed first.

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6   According to ETHOS categorization, they are part of conceptual category insecure and inadequate housing
7   There are no reliable official data because most of the Roma were not included in National Census in 2011

Aftercare plans – a strong example from Ireland

By **Wayne Stanley**, *Focus Ireland*

In 2015 the protection from homelessness of young people leaving the care system in Ireland took a significant step forward. The cause of this was the passing of the Childcare (Amendment) Act 2015. This act ensures that all those leaving care will have an aftercare plan. While it is far from the definitive response for those at risk of homelessness when leaving care it can be the cornerstone from which to develop the protections needed.

This article presents, from Focus Ireland's perspective, an abridged version of the work of services, research and campaigns that led to the adoption of this legislation and also briefly outlines where we hope the change that it brings about will lead.

In many if not all jurisdictions in Europe homelessness can seem to be one of the most difficult issues for us to resolve. Progress is often hard won as it requires recognition that its root causes are failures in housing and social protection systems. While the discourse around homelessness represents it as a personal experience and in some spheres as a personal failing – as if the individual is in someone to blame themselves for being homeless.

One area of homelessness where this personal representation is perhaps less pronounced is children's and young people's experience of homelessness. However, one of the factors blocking progress in this area is the lack of awareness of the issue.

Since Focus Ireland was first established in 1985, the charity has engaged with young people experiencing homelessness. Some 16 months after Focus Ireland was set up, the founder Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy reported that 'Over a quarter (of our service users) were under 20 years of age'[1]. Seeking to understand the phenomena Focus Ireland engages in and with studies to quantify and seek solutions to this issue.[2]

As a result since the mid 1980's Focus Ireland and others have campaigned for radical changes in the services offered to children and young people. This work has seen many significant successes along the way such as the development of services that ensure the rapid provision of shelter to children who are out of home. This ensures that children do not end up on the street. This has lead to child homelessness outside of families being all but eradicated.

Focus Ireland continues to work with other organisations, individuals and academics to identify the issues that contribute to young people experiencing homelessness and bringing them to the attention of the public and policymakers. One such issue that has been prevalent since the establishment of Focus Ireland has been the number of young people in homeless services who have a history of being in state care.

To briefly give some context there are approximately 6,000 young people and children living in State care in Ireland at any one time. The vast majority are in foster care with the remainder in State residential care. For most of these young people, most particularly those in foster care the transition into adulthood is much the same as for young people who have remained in their biological families.

However, for those young people in residential state care things can be very different and a number of these young people will leave care and experience homelessness. Research 'Let out on their own, young people leaving care in Ireland' published by Focus Ireland in 2000 found that this may be as high as 1 in 3[3] and more recent research funded by Focus Ireland confirmed that the link between a history of care and homelessness remains[4].

One of the roots of the issue is that when a child is taken into State care, the state takes on the responsibilities of parents. For most parents, those responsibilities do not come to an end on the day of the 18th birthday. Many young people need support, or at least to have the security of knowing that support is there, as they make that transition into adulthood. Focus Ireland's position is that children who are taken into the care of the state deserve that same level of support.

However, once a young person turns 18, the State no longer has a legal obligation to support them. Focus Ireland has found that without support, some young people, particularly those coming out of residential care can struggle to cope. Of course many are able to make that transition to independent adulthood; but too many young people end up becoming marginalised, or even homeless.

To address this gap - through which too many young people fall - Focus Ireland has campaigned for more to be done to protect children and young people at all stages before, during and after their period in State care. Following the publication of 'Left out on their own' Focus Ireland also began to develop services for those young people with a history of care at risk or experiencing homelessness. In October 2000 we opened a Young Women's Project which provided four places for young women aged 18 to 20 who left State care; ensuring the continuation of the link between research, practice and advocacy.

In 2008 Focus Ireland launched a campaign for a statutory right to aftercare. This included a magazine that engagingly set out the case for the need for this legislative change[5]. The magazine was a collaborative effort with those in the health services who provided services for young people, the special rapporteur on child protection, the children's ombudsman, young people in care and Focus Ireland services.

> However, once a young person turns 18, the State no longer has a legal obligation to support them. Focus Ireland has found that without support, some young people, particularly those coming out of residential care can struggle to cope.

1   Focus Ireland (2011) A Place to Call Home twenty Five years of Focus Ireland, Dublin: A&A Farmer Focus Ireland,
2   McCarthy, P. and Conlon, E. (1988) A National Survey of Young People Out of Home in Ireland. Dublin: Streetwise National Coalition.
3   Kelleher, P., Kelleher, C. and Corbett, M. (2000) Left Out on Their Own: Young People Leaving Care in Ireland. Dublin: Focus Ireland/Oak Tree Press.
4   Mayock, P. Parker, S. Murphy, A. (2014) Young People, Homelessness and Housing Exclusion, Dublin: Focus Ireland.
5   https://www.focusireland.ie/files/publications/Bridging%20the%20gap.pdf

This campaign was well received and garnered a broad spectrum of both from civil and political support. A side effect of the awareness that the campaign raised was that when social welfare rates for young people were reduced in the austerity budget of 2009 young people leaving the case system were exempted from those cuts and retained the full rate of social protection.

However, the same crisis that caused those broad cuts also proved to be one of the barriers to the success of the campaign as there was departmental concern that a right to aftercare could have significant budgetary implications.

In the context it was clear that it was going to be difficult to secure the change that we were to require. However there was now a broad spectrum of civil society organisations that were willing to vocally support such a campaign.

Based on this a 'popular front' campaign 'Action on Aftercare' was agreed. This campaign looked more closely at exactly what legislative change was needed. Working with barristers who offered their time and expertise 'pro bono' a simple but substantive change was agreed.

The legislation governing aftercare provision was the Childcare Act 1991 and the relevant section 45 stated

> (1) (*a*) Where a child leaves the care of a health board, the board **may**, in accordance with *subsection (2)*, assist him for so long as the board is satisfied as to his need for assistance and, subject to *paragraph (b)*, he has not attained the age of 21 years.

The agreed campaign was succinct and impactful: that section 45 should be change from 'may' to 'shall'.

In 2009 the then government sought to introduce new legislation amending the 1991 act. Action on Aftercare worked with a number of political representatives to secure support for an amendment to be tabled to give effect to the request of the campaign. This was ruled out of order for technical reasons and the Minster set out that he believed that such a change was not necessary. However, he did acknowledge that there were problems with the provision of aftercare to those leaving the care system.

> We carried out an audit of such facilities throughout the country and it emerged that the provision of aftercare was remarkably inconsistent. A post code lottery more or less obtains in respect of whether people will obtain services.[6]

Sitting on the opposition benches listening was Senator Francis Fitzgerald who would go on to be the Minister to bring forward a reworked Child Care act in 2011. Although she did not see it to the end, as she was promoted to another Ministry, she was instrumental in ensuring that the important change made section 45 of the Child care Act were made.

Those changes as stated above provide that any young person leaving the care system will have a needs assessment and an aftercare plan prior to leaving care. It also allows for those young people who might disengage from services prior to the development of such a plan to come back at a later date and have such a plan developed.

Focus Ireland and the many organisations and individuals who have campaigned for such legislation rightly feel that this is an important achievement. We are also fully aware that more needs to be done. As organisations that support young people we have a duty to ensure that the needs identified are provided for.

In particular there continue to be concerns about the provision of housing supports for this group of young people. That the legislation does not have enough provision for those who may fall outside of the scope of the legislation, due to not having been in the care system long enough. Finally, while all of the above is important it is still not a guarantee of aftercare support, and the recent experience of the financial crisis and the implementation of austerity has been that the allocation of resources can be limited to where there is a legal demand to do so.

These kinds of issues require us to continue our work beyond the scope of the provision of legislation. To that end those organisation that support young people leaving care will continue to work with the relevant authorities to ensure that the provision of aftercare services, the development of aftercare policy and the allocation of funding to aftercare nationally is at the level that is required to meet the needs to young people. One of the first tasks is to work with the Child and family agency, TUSLA in the development of the plans that will see the implementation of the policy that will come from the legislative change outlined above.

We shall also continue to advocate for a legal right to aftercare.

As organisations that support young people we have a duty to ensure that the needs identified are provided for.

6   https://www.kildarestreet.com/sendebates/?gid=2010-03-31.367.0

Recommendations and suggestions for how to prevent homelessness amongst LGBTQ2S young people in Canada and across the globe

By **Dr. Alex Abramovich**[1], *Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto, Canada*

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and 2-Spirit[2] (LGBTQ2S) youth are disproportionately represented amongst homeless youth populations across the globe. Approximately 25-40% of youth experiencing homelessness in North America identify as LGBTQ2S (Abramovich, 2012; Ray, 2006; Cochran et al., 2002). However, it is difficult to know exactly how many LGBTQ2S youth are experiencing homelessness at any given point in time, for a variety of reasons. For example, support services, shelters, and street needs assessments often do not include questions about LGBTQ2S identity, and if they do, many queer and trans youth may not feel safe disclosing their gender or sexual identities, due to safety concerns. Hidden homelessness is also a significant concern for LGBTQ2S youth, especially those living in rural communities, making it highly unlikely that they would be included in statistics and key reports on youth homelessness.

Identity-based family conflict resulting from a young person coming out as LGBTQ2S is a major contributing factor to youth homelessness (Abramovich, 2012; Quintana, et al., 2010; Ray, 2006). LGBTQ2S youth are particularly vulnerable to mental health concerns, and face increased risk of physical & sexual exploitation, substance use & suicide (Denomme-Welch et al., 2008; Ray 2006). Transgender youth have needs that are distinct from those of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. For example, they may need transition related health care, including access to hormones or surgery, or help getting ID and legal name change sorted out. Shelter workers tend to struggle most with issues regarding access to services for trans and gender nonconforming youth.

Through my research, I have found that factors such as institutional erasure, homophobic and transphobic violence that is rarely dealt with, and discrimination make it difficult for LGBTQ2 youth experiencing homelessness to access shelters, resulting in queer and trans youth feeling safer on the streets than in shelters and support services.

Family rejection, inadequate social services, and discrimination in housing, employment, and education make it difficult for LGBTQ2S youth to secure safe and affirming places to live. Widespread homophobic and transphobic discrimination and violence in shelters and housing programs have resulted in an under-representation of LGBTQ2S youth accessing such programs. The need for LGBTQ2S specific services and housing options has been left unaddressed and unmet for far too long.

Even though it has been known for over two decades that LGBTQ2S youth are overrepresented amongst homeless youth and often feel unsafe in emergency shelters and housing programs; this issue has only recently entered important dialogue on youth homelessness, both nationally and internationally. It has taken many years to convince key decision makers that targeted responses and specialized housing options are necessary in order to meet the needs of this population of young people.

When I first started addressing the issue of LGBTQ2S youth homelessness approximately ten years ago, there was minimal discussion and interest related to this issue. Over the years, I have witnessed a significant shift regarding people's understanding of LGBTQ2S youth homelessness and people's willingness to discuss and address these problems. For example, Canada's first transitional housing program for LGBTQ2S youth recently opened in Toronto; an essential service that has been long awaited for by young people and advocates across the country.

We have also seen new policies and standards, and both Municipal and Provincial government have started to respond to these issues. In 2015, I worked with the Government of Alberta to develop a strategy to meet the needs of LGBTQ2S youth across the province of Alberta. This work was grounded in research, community led, integrated throughout the Alberta youth plan, and rural and urban in focus. In response to some data that was collected at the beginning of this project, and to encourage interagency collaboration and build partnerships amongst services, one of the first steps included developing a provincial LGBTQ2S working group. It is essential for communities and young people to be involved in the development of strategies and services that are meant to support them.

> "Widespread homophobic and transphobic discrimination and violence in shelters and housing programs have resulted in an under-representation of LGBQT2S youth accessing such programs."

1   ilona.abramovich@gmail.com
2   This term is culturally specific to people of Aboriginal ancestry and refers to Aboriginal people who identify with both a male and female spirit. This term is not exclusive to gender identity, and can also refer to sexual orientation, and cultural identity.

My final report to the Government of Alberta culminated in six key recommendations that were developed with the support of the Provincial LGBTQ2S Working Group, whom were engaged every step of the way. The recommendations align with and support the Alberta Youth Plan, and are reflective of current needs of the youth serving sector, including housing programs and shelters, across the province. These core recommendations are:

1. Support the delivery of LGBTQ2S specific housing options (*development of new housing options and/or refinement of existing housing options).

2. Support the delivery of population-based programs for LGBTQ2S youth that foster an intersectional approach (*development of new programs and/or programs within existing services).

3. Create provincial housing/shelter standards that focus on working with and meeting the needs of LGBTQ2S young people.

4. Develop integrated, provincial training solutions for expanded staff training for all aspects of LGBTQ2S cultural competency.

5. Develop a prevention plan that emphasizes strategies on early intervention, awareness raising, and programs for children, youth, and families.

6. Develop the capacity for research that frames new approaches and solutions to LGBTQ2S Youth Homelessness.

The recommendations emphasize the importance of working across government and sectors, as well as engaging with the communities and young people affected most by these issues, in building solutions. The core recommendations develop a standardized model of care, which will: (a) help meet the needs of LGBTQ2S youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Alberta; and (b) ensure that this population of young people are served more appropriately across the province. Most importantly, these recommendations will help design an effective systemic response to LGBTQ2S youth homelessness.

LGBTQ2S youth need to be prioritized because the common one size fits all approach does not actually work, because we know that one size does not fit all. If we are going to appropriately respond to youth homelessness, we need targeted responses for specific sub-populations of young people that are disproportionately represented amongst homeless youth.

Although it has taken many years to convince key decision makers to take action, we are starting to see innovative practice and policy changes, and this issue is finally starting to receive the attention that it so desperately requires. But there is still much work to be done, so, may we continue the important fight to end LGBTQ2S youth homelessness globally.

A FOCUSED RESPONSE TO PREVENT AND END LGBTQ2S YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Key Recommendations to Government of Alberta

1. Delivery of LGBTQ2S specific housing options

2. Population-based programs for LGBTQ2S youth that foster an intersectional approach

3. Provincial housing/shelter standards that focus on meeting the needs of LGBTQ2S youth

4. Provincial staff training solutions for all aspects of LGBTQ2S cultural competency

5. Develop a prevention plan that emphasizes strategies on early intervention, awareness raising, and programs for children, youth, and families

6. Research that frames new approaches and solutions to LGBTQ2S youth homelessness

ABRAMOVICH, 2015

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Preventing Youth Homelessness through Housing First?
Experiences and Perspectives in Vienna

By **Roswitha Harner** and **Stefan Janker** *(FEANTSA Youth)*

The support system for homeless people in Vienna has set itself the goal of establishing and strengthening integrated or "community based" services. This has mainly been discussed via the implementation of the Housing First model. Housing First can thus be seen as an opportunity to initialize and speed up a process of de-institutionalisation of the Viennese Homelessness Sector.

Homelessness in youth and young adulthood often comes along with a history of foster care. The youth welfare system in Vienna demonstrates that inclusive and community-based care is possible and that as a result of a political and professional movement which has led to the closing down of large institutional facilities, youngsters who do not live with their family can now be housed in foster families or in shared apartments. However the end of youth welfare's responsibility[1] remains a crucial biographical moment concerning the housing situation. It does sometimes – and too often – lead to being houseless or to living in institutions within the Viennese Homelessness Sector.

Consistent with an evaluation at the European level (Aldanas 2016), an evaluation of the Viennese Homelessness Sector (L&R 2012: S. 75) states that the transition of youth care to young adulthood needs better guidance. We consider the existing projects which work on that interface as good practice examples.[2] But bearing in mind the aim to de-institutionalize the Viennese Homelessness Sector as well as the fact that young people do have to leave institutions within the Viennese Homelessness Sector more often because of a violation of institutional rules (L&R 2012: S. 76), it is reasonable to go one step further and guide young people – e.g. by an Housing First service – to independent living without the precondition of (successfully) living in an institution.

HOUSING FIRST IN VIENNA

The Housing First Model has been implemented in Vienna since 2012, after which it was adapted to the local requirements and structural conditions of the social system in Vienna by experts in the field of homelessness. (FSW 2012a) The evaluation of the three years implementation phase shows its potentials and successes. (L&R 2015; Neunerhaus 2015)

The following five principles have been formulated as "Housing First – The Viennese Model" (FSW 2012a, FSW 2012b):

- Direct access to one's own permanent housing and tenancy agreement.
- Separation of housing management and personal assistance.
- Social inclusion.
- Self-determination and participation.
- Flexible Support for individual needs.

The target group was defined as "homeless persons (families, couples and individuals) who are in need of support and who see tenancy as a desirable goal in their lives." (FSW 2012a) People with special needs are included as well as people in temporary crisis. The broad definition within the "Viennese Model" does not formulate a specific focus relating to age.

The separation of housing management and personal assistance is seen as a key element, as it changes the relation between social worker and tenant. The conditions governing the social support are fundamentally different: enforcing sanctions, such as a ban from entering the house, are simply not in the social worker's repertoire, which allows them to engage in negotiation processes on an equal footing. That means that Housing First upholds key social work objectives. (Neunerhaus 2015)

Housing First is particularly feasible for supporting a broad target group, as it allows flexibility within the service and can be intensified through additional mobile support from other supporting systems (e.g. mobile services for disabled people, elderly people and mental health services). In Vienna it is explicitly intended to make use of existing support systems. The implementation of Housing First can thereby improve the interfaces between different support systems and provides an opportunity not only for the homelessness sector, but for the Viennese social system to achieve inclusion and trans-sectoral community-based care.

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1 At the age of 18, in some cases at the age of 21

2 The overnight shelters "Away" provides emergency accommodation especially for young homeless (16 to 21 years of age), with the possibility to prolong their services if a longer term housing solution is to be expected. The transitional shelter for youth "JUCA" has a cooperation with the department for youth in order to avoid rough sleeping.

SUFFICIENT ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING AS A PRECONDITION

Currently the Housing First Model reaches around 200 people, which is small compared to the total number of around 4.300 places and nearly 10.000 homeless people within the Viennese Homelessness Sector (MA 24 2015: 156).

Access to affordable housing is an issue for the Homelessness Sector as a whole. Transitional shelters struggle to ensure a transition to independent living – in particular since the criteria for social housing were changed in 2015 and became even stricter for people affected by homelessness.

Sufficient access to affordable housing is a precondition for the Homelessness Sector and especially for scaling up Housing First. The 2015 Viennese coalition agreement indicates political will to continue the strategy of de-institutionalization. The interface between social and housing departments seems extremely crucial for a successful amplification; keeping in mind that the City of Vienna owns one quarter of the Viennese apartments and has the right to allocate in total around 11.000 apartments per year.

HOUSING FIRST IN VIENNA: FOR YOUTH?

A policy paper on Young Homelessness – which was published by a working group of professionals in 2014 – formulates specific demands for the target group. Among other things they ask for is more floating support and Housing First services to allow young people to move into independent living. (AG Junge Wohnungslose 2014: 15)

More than three years of experience show that Housing First in Vienna is effectively supporting young individuals and families too but that the access to these services is insufficient. We can therefore agree with Stephen Gaetz (e.g. 2014), that Housing First works for youth, as it works for everybody. The question is rather, how to adapt and develop Housing First in the specific local and structural conditions to (better) meet the needs of young people. Or, to put it differently, what are interfaces that have to be strengthened to ensure sufficient access to affordable housing as well as inclusive and tailored support for young people at risk of housing exclusion?

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Young people and housing: an acute need with limited resources

By **Nicolas Bernard**, *professor at Saint-Louis University, Brussels*

Young people and housing is a highly complicated issue in two different senses. Firstly, from a substantive viewpoint, young people find themselves at a point in their lives when their housing needs are pressing (due to leaving the family home and starting their independent lives), while their financial means, on the other hand, are lower than average. Secondly, from a procedural viewpoint, there has been little research on this serious issue. Studies abound on the subjects of women and housing, the elderly and housing, migrants and housing, the homeless etc., yet these demographic groups are not, in the main, exclusive of young people (i.e. one could very well be a *young* woman, a *young* migrant or a *young* homeless person).

1. ANALYSIS

Lower than average incomes

The first important observation with regard to young people is their straitened financial circumstances. Not only is their income limited (not unreasonable at the beginning of one's career), it also tends to be unstable due to casualisation of the labour market for young people (internships, temporary contracts, part-time contracts, student jobs etc.). Furthermore, young people are the section of the population that spend the highest proportion of their budget on housing costs. What chance is there then for the young person with little or no qualifications?

It goes without saying that this weak financial position has significant repercussions on the young person's choices regarding housing, leading them all too frequently to favour accommodation of a poor standard that is at the limit of their budget, if not over-budget.

The precarious passage to an independent life

The potential to access affordable (and decent) housing plays a decisive role in the young person's decision to leave the family home to live independently. The road to independence also (or especially!) passes through housing. Yet the level of costs (whether buying or renting) is such that, often, the young person has no choice but to postpone moving into their own place, despite this being a determining factor in the development of identity. In the meantime, the young person is frustratedly waiting in their parents' home while gradually building up savings that one day he or she will mobilise.

Incidentally, it is worth noting that the difficulties experienced do not solely concern *accessing* housing. *Maintaining* young people within their own homes is not devoid of problems either, which can occasionally lead them to reintegrate into the family home for a period to build up savings again. As one might expect, this residential rebounding between independence and the family home is anything but optimal.

The inevitably evolving character of housing needs

Young people's housing needs are also extremely changeable by nature. In effect, it is during these first forays into an independent life that the young person experiences various important steps in life that have an impact on their living situation. In a nutshell, moving house sets the tempo for the beginnings of adult life. It begins with a student flat before stable employment necessitates a move to be closer to the place of work. Becoming part of a couple and living under one roof inevitably involves one or both parties moving house. The arrival of children results in the need to find a larger home. Finally, divorce (statistically more frequent in the first years of living together) necessarily requires one party to find a place to stay elsewhere. The other party is sometimes forced to move also, in order to find accommodation that is more suited to their now straitened financial resources. As such, we see significant changeability in the situation of young people's housing needs, which makes the necessary public response all the more complex.

The inexorable urban exodus of Brussels' middle classes

Regarding young people, one trend (related to the previous section) is specific to the Brussels Region and it is more than a little worrying. This region is, in effect, seeing the middle class fleeing to the two neighbouring regions. Young people are at the centre of this phenomenon. What is happening is that young people from Brussels, once their professional and relationship status has stabilised, are leaving for Flanders and Wallonia where, for a reasonable price, they can buy a larger home preferably with a garden. This results in Brussels losing out on significant finances because those leaving are first-rate taxpayers, with (relatively) high incomes. The end result is that the city becomes divided into two groups – the very rich and the very poor (broadly speaking). What's more, the lack of tax revenue weakens the region's budget, restricting the development of its policies (social and otherwise).

The specific situation of students

At the beginning of their adult life, the young person is often a student. Students have particular needs with regard to housing. They often share a house or flat enabling them to reduce living costs while also building up a social network. Unfortunately, the laws surrounding leases are too broad and are thus little adapted to this section of the population. Students would like a rental regime that fits their specific needs e.g. lower rental guarantee (given the lack of means at this age), ten month leases (as the summer holidays are usually spent with family or abroad) and leases that are renewable on an ongoing basis (as many years as the course being studied takes), simplified sub-letting (so that they can ensure the accommodation is occupied if they are away on Erasmus for example), authorised termination of the lease (in cases of academic failure within the year) etc.

2. THE PUBLIC RESPONSE

Given the above analysis, the authorities cannot afford to ignore the problem. In any case, the importance of keeping young people – so full of economic potential – in the region has been well understood. Often, it is through facilitating access to property that the authorities try to stop the exodus, given the unique power that homeownership status has over people in general. For example, the Brussels' housing fund (which gives mortgages at rates that are significantly lower than those of private banks) had for some time been raising the upper limit of income to benefit the under-35 age group. The region of Wallonia established a 'youth loan' several years ago giving the borrower (under 35 years of age) financial support of €50 per month for the first eight years of the mortgage term. However, both of these measures were cut and not replaced which inevitably leads one to question whether there is any real will to bring targeted support to young households.

Further considering access to property, Brussels should look to measures such as the 'portability' of registration tax that is in place in Flanders. This measure means that the above-mentioned tax is only payable once (paid theoretically in the event of each property transaction), and it thus lowers the purchase price for young households that have already bought property in Brussels and are tempted by exurbanisation.

With regard to social housing, it is regrettable that the Wallonia Region revoked the option previously given to young households (under 35 years old) to have an extra room in their accommodation to allow for the probable arrival of children. This option has however been maintained in Brussels. Given all this, why not give priority points to young people wishing to access public housing (two times cheaper than private housing)?

On a slightly different note, public authorities would gain from developing an appropriate legal regime for house-sharing if they want to encourage this innovative solution to the housing crisis (that also enhances the social fabric). This does not only mean adapting the rights and obligations related to leases (in the sense mentioned above) but also resolving certain problems that arise in terms of social welfare provision (loss of single person benefits and consequent demotion to cohabitant status, which has significantly fewer entitlements).

Similarly, it would be useful to define a legal framework that promoted intergenerational cohabitation. This involves an older person inviting a young person to live with them e.g. in rooms left empty by the departure of adult children. In this way, the older person gets a rental allowance from previously unproductive space and, at the same time (or especially), benefits from having a reassuring presence, someone likely to help out if needed (do minor repair works, the shopping etc.). For the young person, they benefit from housing at a reduced price and also from the presence of the older person (to receive a parcel during working hours, mind the children if needs be etc.). Clearly the arrangement is beneficial to both parties which is why it is a growing trend (that now needs to be supported).

There is still therefore much work to be done but steps have been made that can now be built upon.

Preventing and Ending Youth Homelessness in Canada

By **Dr. Stephen Gaetz**, *Director of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness* and
Melanie Redman, *Executive Director of A Way Home Canada*

If we see young people falling off the cliff, why would we wait to scoop up the broken bodies at the bottom? Why wouldn't we go to the top of the cliff and stop them from falling in the first place? We often pose these questions to audiences when we're talking about the need to prevent and end youth homelessness. In Canada we are building momentum to do just this, and we're not doing it alone. In October of 2015 we launched A Way Home with the support of a range of organizations in Canada, but also international partners such as FEANTSA, the UN and the U.S. federal government. A Way Home is a cross-sectoral national coalition whose members are aligning strategies and resources to affect real change on the issue of youth homelessness. The goal is to shift the focus from simply 'managing' the problem through emergency services, to actually preventing and ending youth homelessness

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

As a coalition, we work by utilizing the Collective Impact[1] framework. We all know what collaboration looks like, but Collective Impact is actually a little different. It involves a group of relevant actors from *different* sectors working together to address a major challenge by developing and working toward a common goal that fundamentally changes outcomes for a population. There are three preconditions for Collective Impact[2] that must be considered:

1. Influential leaders – leadership isn't only found in the youth-serving sector, leadership can be found in what we call 'unusual suspects'. Consider private sector champions such as landlords and business leaders. The faith-based community can also be a powerful ally.
2. A sense of urgency – it can be argued that youth homelessness has an inherent sense of urgency behind it. Even one night on the street can have profound negative impacts on the lives of young people.
3. Adequate resources – this critical work cannot happen 'off the side of the desk'. It requires dedicated resources to provide a 'backbone' of support to move the work forward. The cats won't herd themselves!

Collective Impact also requires a shift in how we generally work where the interests of the individual organization cannot be elevated above the collective interests. The goal is to inspire and enable the necessary change to make a major shift in how we address a significant problem. This requires some essential mindset shifts in thinking about who should actually be involved, how participants work together, and how progress actually happens[3]. Again, collaboration is NOT the same as Collective Impact. This visual[4] demonstrates the shift to the conditions of Collective Impact.
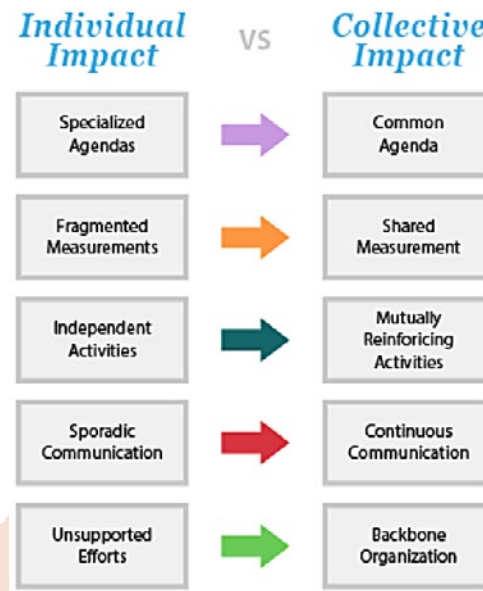
CONSTELLATION MODEL OF DISPERSED LEADERSHIP

In addition to the Collective Impact Framework, the Constellation Model offers a way to organize the work of A Way Home into clear areas of activity. Most importantly, it allows for dispersed leadership as it builds on the strengths of the members to lead and support these constellations. As discussed above, having dedicated resources to coordinate the efforts of the constellations is critical to fostering collective impact. A Way Home has a secretariat of staff that ensure the work of A Way Home is resourced and supported.

1 Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2011) Collective Impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Winter, 2011;
Hanleybrown, F., Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2012). Channeling change: Making collective impact work. Stanford Social Innovation Review Jan 26. 2012
2 Weaver, Liz (2014) The Promise and Peril of Collective Impact. *The Philanthropist* 11(1)
3 Kania, J. Hanley Brown, F., Splansky Juster, J. (2014) Essential Minset Shifts for Collective Impact" *Stanford Social Innovation Review* Fall 2014.
4 This image is from: Forster-Gill, Donna Jean (ND) "Collective Impact Overview: A Framework for Change" Manager, Vibrant Communities Canada, Cities Reducing Poverty
Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement

Below are the current constellations of activity. These constellations emerged from a process where we mapped our collective national efforts to our vision of what it will take to prevent and end youth homelessness in Canada.

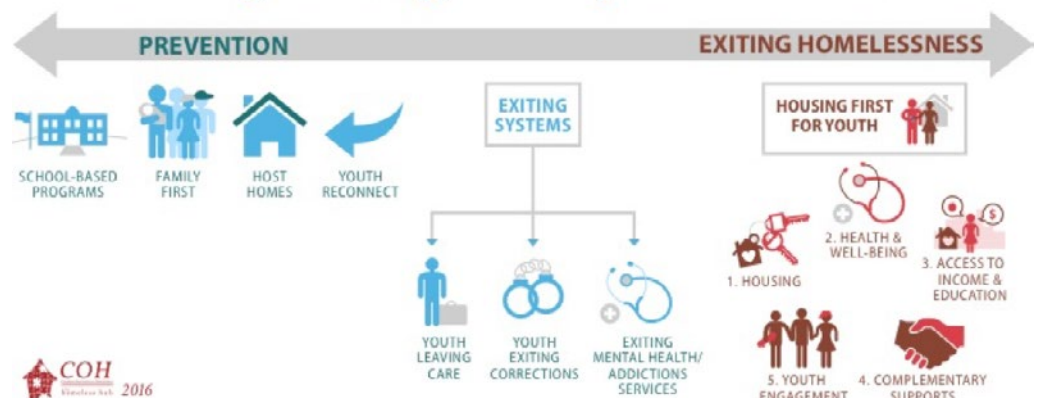### Key Constellations of Activity

One of our most robust constellations of activity is the Research Constellation. Led by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, we have co-created a national research agenda with researchers, practitioners, and people with lived experience. One of our top research priorities for 2015-2016 is the National Survey on Youth Homelessness. The survey was conducted in communities across Canada in October 2015 and is the largest sample ever in Canada on youth homelessness. The research tool is free and open-source and can be adapted to contexts globally. The results of this survey will be released in the fall of 2016 and will inform and guide policy and practice at every level to help us further make the case for investing in prevention.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PREVENTION?

While the language of prevention is being used in Canada to discuss responses to homelessness, there is little evidence that we are actually doing much to prevent the problem. At worst, we invest incredible resources in 'managing' the problem of homelessness through emergency services and supports. At best, we have started to shift the focus to Housing First, helping to house and stabilize chronically homeless populations. The focus of both levels of intervention, however, only addresses homelessness after it has

already happened – and often long after the damage from trauma, exploitation, declining physical and mental health resulting from life on the streets has accumulated and become acute.

A compelling case can be made that we will never really end homelessness unless we shift our focus to stopping the flow into homelessness in the first place. This shift to prevention requires the development of a solid framework that provides conceptual clarity and direction. Communities wanting to shift to a prevention approach need effective prevention program models and interventions that can be adapted and implemented at the local level. These interventions can be adapted and even developed or evolved in the EU context, as evidenced by the recent uptake of Housing First and Housing First for Youth. We often note that some of our best ideas for preventing and ending youth homelessness have come from outside of Canada.

Below is the range of prevention-focused interventions that are required to prevent and end youth homelessness.

It is our belief that we are now poised to make a significant impact on youth homelessness in Canada and elsewhere in the world. Our knowledge of what to do and how to do it is accumulating. It is worth pointing out that this conceptual shift has been aided by international engagement, and sharing of knowledge and experience about how to think about moving policy and practice in a way that will support the shift to preventing and ending youth homelessness. Often people resist looking at what is happening in other places, suggesting that contextual differences are a barrier to really enabling the sharing and adaptation of ideas. There is no doubt that the prevention framework we are putting forward (to be released in the fall of 2016) draws heavily from what we have learned from Australia (school-based initiatives, youth reconnect), Europe (host homes, the Foyer, working with families, child protection reform) and innovations in Canada and the United States (Housing First for Youth). It is through collaboration that we create the necessary conditions for change and enable the conceptual shift to how we address youth homelessness to take hold.

A Way Home launched our efforts last year with the support of our international partners. Our collective work can't stop there, but rather will deepen and produce the changes necessary for us to declare that we have ended youth homelessness as a mass social problem.

Preventing, Reducing, & Ending Youth Homelessness

HireUp: the Canadian social enterprise helping former homeless youth find employment

Submitted by **Paul Klein**, *CEO of Impakt[1] and Founder of HireUp[2].*

In the summer of 2014, my colleague Jesse Donaldson suggested that we meet with a few youth-serving organizations to learn more about how they were helping to end youth homelessness. By last November, we had launched HireUpYouth.ca the world's only national hiring portal to help employers hire youth who've experienced homelessness.

HireUp's story begins a few years earlier. In 2012, Impakt, began working with The Home Depot Canada Foundation to re-focus its mission on a social problem which was a high priority at a societal level and which the Foundation could help to solve. Our research revealed that despite the unacceptable personal and social costs associated with youth homelessness, this issue had not been a priority for funders in Canada. Based on this, the Foundation adopted ending youth homelessness in Canada as its focus and made a three-year, $10-million pledge commitment. The Foundation's funding was designated to improve places through renovation and repair projects and support programs that gave youth the resources they require to build brighter futures.

Despite the significant level of funding and a high degree of engagement from Canada's homeless sector, by 2014 we began to realize that without meaningful employment the likelihood of youth being able to maintain stable housing was far from certain.

"When we think about how to end homelessness – not just manage the crisis, but really drive down the numbers – we have to start thinking outside the box, and realize that the charitable sector will never be able to solve this alone," said Stephen Gaetz, Professor and Director of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. "Canadian businesses also need to lend their expertise to communities trying to solve this problem, and on an individual level, open up opportunities for people who experience homelessness to gain employment and experience."

It was also clear that increasing employment among youth would be challenging. The unemployment rate for Canadian youth is almost double that of the general population and many talented young people face difficulty finding employment. For youth who have experienced homelessness the situation is much worse. Finding meaningful work that offers room for career growth is often incredibly daunting as a result of stereotypes and the conditions that caused youth to experience homelessness in the first place.

Our starting point was to establish a hiring program for youth with Peak Products, a major supplier of The Home Depot Canada and a North American leader in home improvement. We connected Peak with 360°kids, a youth serving organization in Ontario's York Region that provides youth with lived experience of homelessness with supportive services including employment readiness and life skills. Peak's job requirements were mapped against employment training at 360°kids and a youth was hired by Peak. It was highly successful, both for Peak Products as well as for the youth. "It's a smart business decision," said John Gross, President of Peak." We're not solving a social problem; we're accessing an untapped resource. By engaging underemployed youth we're able to hire from a pool of dedicated, enthusiastic employees with a range of experiences, skills and knowledge."

While the initial hiring program with Peak had worked well we needed to know more about the barriers that homeless youth face in seeking employment, the role of business, and the role employment can play in ending youth homelessness. To gain more insight, The Home Depot Canada Foundation convened a group of youth, youth-serving organizations and businesses to discuss unemployment among youth experiencing homelessness.

The dialogue at the symposium was remarkable. We heard that youth experiencing homelessness face regular discrimination, that youth are not always encouraged to plan for or pursue career opportunities and that youth need to be given the opportunity to pursue education and training. We also learned that some employers were beginning to recognize the social and business value of hiring youth with barriers. "Give them the respect that they need – as you would any other candidate but understand what they may face and how you can help in the transition," stated one participant. "Any good employer – if this is a viable candidate – will work with employees to accommodate all sorts of barriers."

(The findings from this symposium were documented in a report authored by Impakt and The Home Depot Canada Foundation titled Coming Together: Tackling Unemployment Among Youth Experiencing Homelessness.)

Despite our intent to increase employment for youth, the idea for what became HireUp was accidental. As mentioned earlier, we wanted to understand more about how youth serving organizations were helping to end youth homelessness and met with a number of these groups in southern Ontario. After our third meeting a pattern emerged: each organization had programs to prepare youth for work but almost none of these youth were ever hired.

We wondered if existing job board technology could be repurposed to link employers with organizations that had employment programs and supports for youth. Through such a mechanism, employers across Canada could use the expertise of pre-qualified youth serving organizations to identify job-ready youth that were qualified for the vacant positions they were looking to fill.

"The unemployment rate for Canadian youth is almost double that of the general population and many talented young people face difficulty finding employment. For youth who have experienced homelessness the situation is much worse."

1 http://www.impaktcorp.com
2 https://hireupyouth.ca

This idea was the beginning of an exciting and nerve-racking year of building what has become HireUp. Here are five of the most important things we've learned – so far - from our experience:

● An opportunity and an opportunity cost: HireUp was made possible through the financial support of The Home Depot Canada Foundation and the in-kind contribution of Workopolis. However, the development cost was far more than we expected. Impakt itself invested almost $200,000 from the cash flow of our consulting services. Our business came close to bankruptcy because we hadn't recognized that HireUp was a new business and required its own start up capital.

● Role of Technology in Scaling: Initially our plan was modest: develop a pilot project in the Greater Toronto Area. However, by building a partnership with Workopolis, Canada's largest and most popular online job site, we able to leverage their job board technology and develop a national program in less than a year.

● Importance of Supply *and* Demand: Our goal for 2016 is to secure 10 national employers and to create 180 meaningful jobs for youth. However, HireUp will only be successful if there are enough employers who believe that youth who've been homeless can successfully employed and if there are enough youth who are prepared for work. So far, seven national employers have joined HireUp and job postings began in February.

● Measurement and Evaluation: There is very little data that correlates the impact of meaningful employment on stable housing and other social indicators. Because of HireUp's technology platform, we have the opportunity to collect and interpret new data that will inform policy and funding decisions by all levels of government in Canada. To do this, we've we partnered with The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, a leading non-profit, non-partisan research institute.

HireUp is not a charity. It has been designed to operate as a sustainable social enterprise that will reinvest profit to help charitable youth-serving organizations improve employment programs for youth. While charitable organizations play an important role in addressing social issues, HireUp shows that businesses can also be effective agents of social change.

Despite our early success, many questions remained unanswered. Will enough employers overcome the stigma associated with hiring youth who've experienced homelessness? Is HireUp a "flash in the pan" or the beginning of a long-term shift in social change related to this vulnerable population? Will HireUp be sustainable as a social enterprise? What is the role of governments? How can youth themselves be involved in owning and operating HireUp? How will HireUp address the needs of youth for whom employment isn't appropriate?

On a personal level, difficult as it was, developing HireUp has been rewarding to a degree that makes much of the other work we've done at Impakt seem trivial. It has also given our team the permission to be bolder, to take more risks and to work in new types of partnerships with other business and with civil society organizations.

"Kids who have spent time on the streets, homeless or at risk, often are overlooked as a source of talent. While one bad choice or circumstance can lead them down the wrong path, what HireUp does is help get them on the right one," said Michael Braithwaite, Executive Director, of 360°kids. "It's a great way of linking employer's needs with the skills and talents of youth looking for a new start."

Preventing Youth Homelessness: Perspectives on Policy and Practice

By **Darla Bardine**, *Executive Director, National Network for Youth[1], Washington, DC, USA*

INTRODUCTION

In a decade defined by social and technological connectedness, ordinary people are closer than ever to the devastating consequences of youth homelessness. However, we are unlikely to develop an effective response without considering *both* cause *and* effect. In addition to caring for runaway and homeless youth, local leaders and policymakers should actively target pathways to homelessness. Prevention describes any effort to avert homelessness before it occurs. In this sense, prevention embodies a critical tool in our defense against a widespread epidemic.

As a first step to preventing homelessness, leaders should work towards a set of standard definitions. Throughout this article, "homeless youth" will refer to any individual between 12 and 24 years of age who 1) lives on his or her own without a parent or guardian, and 2) lacks a stable or permanent address. Narrower definitions can result in exclusionary, arbitrary or otherwise insufficient policies. Moreover, inconsistent definitions have the capacity to impede collaboration on a systematic scale.

A conversation about preventing homelessness among youth must first begin with a shared understanding of the causes of and pathways to homelessness for youth. Only when we understand these pathways thoroughly, can effective policies and strategies be implemented to prevent homelessness from ever occurring.

PATHWAYS TO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Across the world, youth flee home in response to family conflict, abuse, neglect, persecution and poverty. Other youth are kicked out of their homes either due to rejection of their behaviors, pregnancy, or an inability to accept their child's sexual orientation or gender identity. Another group of young people exit systems such as child welfare, secure detention, behavioral and mental health systems to homelessness. Unfortunately, many of these individuals lack the skills, life experience or financial resources to effectively care for themselves. In the United States, youth experiencing homelessness share many of the following characteristics:

- **Abuse**: Research finds that 40 to 60 percent of homeless youth have endured physical abuse, and 17 to 35 percent have experienced sexual abuse.[2]

- **Welfare gone wrong**: Up to one-third of youth who age out of foster care experience homelessness.[3]

- **Racial disparities**: Unaccompanied homeless youth belong to every race and ethnicity.[4] However, studies indicate that African Americans from urban settings are overrepresented, as well as American Indians from rural areas.[5]

- **Economic stagnation**: Slow economic growth has discouraged youth employment, thereby increasing levels of homelessness. Since data collection began in 1948, employment among 18 to 24-year-olds has never been lower.[6]

- **Academic estrangement**: Only one in every two homeless youth graduate high school.[7]

- **Sexual orientation and gender identity**: Members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) community are overrepresented among runaway and homeless youth. Many of these individuals are rejected from home because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.[8]

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TARGETING PREVENTION

System Failure

Targeted prevention is feasible at the institutional level. In the United States, research indicates that young people who exit foster care, secure detention and behavioral and mental health care facilities are more likely to become homeless than youth who never encounter these systems. As a result, the youth in these systems could easily be targeted for social services and supports necessary to avoid homelessness.

In practice, a broad-based safety net can redefine the experience of youth who would otherwise become homelessness. Unfortunately, the absence of prevention-oriented systems can have an equally dramatic impact on young lives. Consider the following scenario:

> Charmaine and her three younger siblings have been in and out of the child welfare system since she was six years old. Her mother struggles with mental illness and substance abuse disorders. Upon turning 18, Charmaine become ineligible to receive housing, services and other assistance on behalf of the child welfare system. Unfortunately, she had nowhere to live and started temporarily staying with friends and acquaintances. Occasionally, she slept outside or in abandoned buildings. Charmaine has been homelessness since her time in foster care came to an end.

Like so many other youth, Charmaine's experience with homelessness was undeserved and entirely avoidable. Her story would have had a much different ending had the child welfare system:

- Afforded access to safe and stable housing while she searched for permanent arrangements.
- Provided educational and vocational support throughout her transition. Workforce training and life skills development help prepare youth to live independently and successfully.
- Facilitated healthy, long-term connections with peers and caring adults. Interpersonal relationships reinforce positive decisions and may avert future episodes of homelessness.

Charmaine's struggle with homelessness accounts for a characteristic example of good intentions gone awry. Unfortunately, child welfare is but one of many systems with an inflammatory effect on youth homelessness. Other prominent examples include juvenile justice, mental healthcare and the public school system. To better insulate youth from homelessness, each of these institutions should adhere to the following principals:

- Before exiting the system, young people should have guaranteed access to the housing and services necessary to prevent immediate reentry. Preparation should begin well in advance to ensure that local service providers can accommodate the individualized support needed, which can be services only to ensure ongoing success or housing with supportive services if the young person has no safe and stable place to live.

- Whenever necessary, youth should be referred to community-based organization(s) that can provide appropriate shelter and services. These programs and providers *must collaborate with one another to ensure to ensure the safe and stable transfer of care*. Too often, faulty communication allows youth to 'fall through the cracks' in times of need.

Family Crisis

In conjunction with institutional failures, youth routinely become homeless as the result of family crises. Widespread examples include abuse, poverty or rejection on account of sexual orientation, gender identity, religion or unplanned pregnancy. In most cases, however, youth do not choose to leave home immediately. This provides a window of opportunity during which supportive services can and should prevent homelessness. Consider the following example:

> Sam's Mom worked two jobs to support Sam and his older brother Jared. A year ago, her boyfriend moved in and began provoking arguments. Recently, the fights have become physical. Now that Jared has moved oversees, Sam is forced to deal with the violence on his own. His grades have begun to slip, and he is frequently absent from class.

In this scenario, Sam has yet to become homeless. Accordingly, there is still time to avert a runaway situation. Once again, this opportunity belongs to the following institutions:

- School systems- Teachers and other faculty can notice changes in a student's behavior, habits, alertness or attendance. Among others, these red flags indicate that an individual or family may require assistance. Ideally, schools should be able to refer youth to trained social workers. In turn, these professionals can provide the support that young people and their family need.

- Child welfare systems- Families in crisis are brought to the attention of child welfare workers every day. The majority of these youth never formally enter the system and – as a result – fail to receive appropriate support. For youth not formally screened into the system, CBOs should be alerted in time to provide alternative care.

- Peers and their families- In many cases, the friends of a young person notice the first signs of crisis. In time, other parents or guardians may observe the same red flags. When circumstances allow, these families may provide temporary shelter and emotional support to the youth in crisis.

Effective support services for families is critical to resolving a crisis in the family and to ensuring the family is able to remain intact and cope with crisis in the future. One of the most effective family interventions utilized by social workers is strengths-based family services. This approach focuses on counseling youth and their caretakers to address the problems that caused the youth to leave home. Strengths-based family services uses assessment processes that identify the family core strengths and finds ways to incorporate those strengths in resolving the problems the family is experiencing.[9] Families are recognized as resources to other family members, and the focus is on enhancing families' capacities to support the growth and development of all family members: adults, youths, and children.[10] The goal is to improve the youths' home-life situation so they can return to a supportive environment.[11]

CONCLUSION

Prevention, though it can seem less concrete than providing support and housing after someone becomes homeless, can actually be targeted to some key systems and locations within communities. At a community level, it is critical to clearly define the pathways to homelessness for youth in your community. These pathways help define the targets for homelessness prevention. For instance, local studies might reveal the overrepresentation of students from a particular neighborhood. In response, elected officials should allocate funding to expand prevention services in that area. This local information should also inform regional and/or national level policy development and the targeting of financial investment in prevention. With targeted prevention services funded to scale, youth can avoid the devastating experience and consequences of homelessness.

"Prevention, though it can seem less concrete than providing support and housing after someone becomes homeless, can actually be targeted to some key systems and locations within communities."

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Cover image by Reza Azam

"I am in favour of all this - of bringing organisations together to help desperate people. Art helps me, I paint self-portraits." The artist, Reza Azam, is supported by St Mungo's (http://www.mungos.org) in London, and his art is connected with the public via Homeless Diamonds (http://homelessdiamonds.org.uk) and Cafe Art (www.cafeart.org.uk) which recognises and celebrates art created by people affected by homelessness in positive and inspiring ways.

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