

RESEARCH REPORT



Environmental Scan on Youth Homelessness



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Environmental Scan on Youth Homelessness

Final Report

Submitted to
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation

by
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ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN ON YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Executive Summary

Environmental Scan on Youth Homelessness is a comprehensive examination of youth homelessness across Canada. It provides an overview of the homeless youth population, including their shelter situation; the primary housing and support issues related to homeless youth; and the types of effective housing and service interventions that have benefited this need group.

Unlike other Canadian studies of homelessness, *Environmental Scan on Youth Homelessness* focuses primarily on youth between 16 and 24 years of age. To date, most studies of homelessness have considered a particular city or region. This report is national in scope and provides detailed information about youth homelessness in every province, the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut.

The Scan was researched in two steps. The first step was a review of the existing Canadian literature on youth homelessness and the preparation of an annotated bibliography. The second step consisted of interviews with close to 60 key informants across the country, including representatives from all levels of government and front-line community agencies.

Throughout the country, homeless youth have the same general characteristics: exposure to physical violence, mental health problems, alcohol and drug abuse, sexual abuse and conflicts with the law. They are often isolated with no family ties and few friends. Many have been raised in foster homes, have a lack of education and skills, and suffer from poor physical health. While the majority of homeless youth are male, the number of young women who are homeless is growing.

Homelessness is a significant problem among Aboriginal youth. This group is over-represented in the homeless population, particularly in Vancouver, Edmonton, Prince Albert, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto and Ottawa.

Some key informants confirmed that gay and lesbian youth are also at risk of ending up on the street because their families often reject them. Like Aboriginal youth, they avoid using some of the shelters because they fear discrimination. In some cities, youth, in general, avoid adult shelters, feeling unsafe around adults with behavioural or mental health problems.

Many homeless youth survive on a day-to-day basis by couch surfing, or they may live in overcrowded or unsuitable housing. Other survival strategies include pooling resources to rent accommodation, staying at emergency shelters, or sleeping outside or in abandoned buildings. A significant number of homeless youth become involved in illegal activities such as selling drugs, shoplifting and prostitution.

The lifestyle of homeless youth puts their health at risk; and the longer a person is homeless, the worse his or her health becomes. In Quebec, Toronto and the prairies, HIV/AIDS as well as Hepatitis B and C are concerns, while in Montréal and Toronto, suicide is a serious issue. Other medical concerns of homeless youth include tuberculosis, problems with their feet, scabies, dental problems, sexually transmitted diseases and viral infections.

While an accurate count of homeless youth was difficult to determine, the Scan provides statistics gathered by a number of key informants in major centres as part of their local studies.

Causes of youth homelessness include family breakdown, a lack of affordable housing and increasing poverty. Many youth cannot live at home for a variety of reasons including family violence. One Toronto study indicated that more than 70% of youth on the streets leave home because of physical or sexual abuse.

A lack of affordable housing is seen as part of the problem in many parts of Canada. As example, The poor condition of the existing housing stock contributes to youth homelessness in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Saskatoon, Regina and Winnipeg.

Increasing poverty is a significant cause of youth homelessness, as is the poor economy in various parts of Canada. In rural communities in Atlantic Canada, increasing numbers of young people facing economic pressures are moving to urban centres such as Halifax and then westward to Montréal and Toronto. When they arrive in these cities, youth often find themselves without resources and can easily become homeless.

A lack of job readiness, education or experience also contributes to youth homelessness. The vast majority of homeless youth have not completed high school. In Ottawa and Toronto, that number ranges between 63% and 90%.

Gaps in child welfare and protection services for youth who are 16 years of age and older is another contributing factor in most regions. When young people leave the child protection system, they often live on the streets. Many youth who are 16 and 17 years old are not eligible for income assistance. In many provinces, the eligibility criteria for income assistance for youth who are under 18 make it difficult for them to collect benefits. In Quebec, youth under the age of 18 are eligible for income assistance only if they have a dependent child.

The Scan provides an overview of the initiatives to address youth homelessness that are happening at national, provincial or local levels. In December 1999, the federal government announced a \$753 million contribution between years 2000 and 2003 to help alleviate the problem of homelessness in Canada. A portion of these funds has resulted in programs and projects targeted to youth.

Environmental Scan on Youth Homelessness identifies a number of expanded and additional programs and services that could help alleviate youth homelessness. They include more affordable housing, and a range of additional housing options such as emergency shelters, transition housing and supported housing. There is growing interest in programs that offer youth a full range of housing choices linked with support programs, such as lifeskills and pre-employment training.

Other suggestions for supporting homeless youth include improved access to income assistance, access to the child welfare system for 16 year olds, more mental health services, treatment for addictions, alternative schooling options and initiatives to help youth find jobs.

Family mediation, conflict resolution, strategies to help youth remain in school, more recreation centres, and more support to families and children are also recommended as part of the continuum of supports for helping homeless youth.

Environmental Scan on Youth Homelessness is a startling snapshot of youth homelessness and its effects on communities across the country. By examining its characteristics and causes, as well as the interventions that are proving effective, the report offers an unvarnished yet hopeful look at one of Canada's major social problems.

ÉTUDE CONTEXTUELLE SUR LE PROBLÈME DES JEUNES SANS-ABRI

Résumé

L'*Étude contextuelle sur le problème des jeunes sans-abri* est un examen détaillé de l'itinérance chez les jeunes à l'échelon du pays. Elle présente un aperçu de la population des jeunes sans-abri, y compris de leur situation de logement; les principaux problèmes de logement et de services de soutien associés aux jeunes sans-abri; et les différentes mesures prises dans les domaines du logement et des services qui ont profité efficacement à ce groupe.

À l'encontre des autres études canadiennes réalisées sur l'itinérance, l'*Étude contextuelle sur le problème des jeunes sans-abri* porte surtout sur les personnes âgées de 16 à 24 ans. Jusqu'à présent, la plupart des études sur l'itinérance s'appliquaient à une ville ou à une région particulière. Le présent rapport a une portée nationale et présente des renseignements détaillés sur les jeunes sans-abri dans chaque province, dans les Territoires du Nord-Ouest, ainsi qu'au Yukon et au Nunavut.

La méthode de recherche pour l'étude comprenait deux étapes : premièrement, un examen de la documentation canadienne existante sur les jeunes sans-abri et la préparation d'une bibliographie annotée; deuxièmement, des entrevues auprès de presque 60 intervenants clés à l'échelon du pays, y compris des représentants de tous les paliers de gouvernement et d'organismes communautaires de première ligne.

À l'échelon du pays, les jeunes sans-abri éprouvent en général les mêmes difficultés : exposition à la violence physique, problèmes de santé mentale, abus de drogues et d'alcool, exploitation sexuelle et démêlés avec la justice. Sans liens avec leurs familles, ils sont souvent isolés et ont peu d'amis. Bon nombre ont été élevés dans des familles d'accueil, possèdent peu d'instruction ou de compétences et ont une santé médiocre. Bien que la majorité des jeunes sans-abri soient de sexe masculin, le nombre de jeunes femmes dans cette situation s'accroît.

L'itinérance représente un grave problème chez les jeunes Autochtones. Ce groupe est surreprésenté dans la population des sans-abri, particulièrement à Vancouver, à Edmonton, à Prince Albert, à Saskatoon, à Winnipeg, à Toronto et à Ottawa.

Certains des principaux intervenants ont confirmé que les jeunes homosexuels et lesbiennes risquent aussi de se joindre au groupe des sans-abri, parce qu'ils sont rejetés par leurs familles. Comme les jeunes Autochtones, ils évitent d'utiliser certains refuges par crainte de discrimination. Dans certaines villes, les jeunes fuient, en général, les refuges pour adultes, parce qu'ils se sentent en danger en présence de personnes qui ont des problèmes de comportement ou de santé mentale.

Nombre de jeunes sans-abri survivent au jour le jour, soit en habitant chez des parents et amis, ou dans des logements surpeuplés ou insalubres. Pour survivre les jeunes déploient d'autres stratégies : ils mettent, notamment, en commun leurs ressources pour louer un logement, utilisent des refuges d'urgence, ou dorment à l'extérieur ou dans des immeubles abandonnés. Par ailleurs, un grand nombre de jeunes sans-abri se livrent à des activités illicites, comme la vente de drogues, le vol à l'étalage et la prostitution.

Le style de vie des jeunes sans-abri met leur santé en danger; et plus longtemps ils maintiennent ce mode de vie, plus leur santé se détériore. Au Québec, à Toronto et dans les Prairies, le VIH/sida,

ainsi que l'hépatite B et C sont des sources de préoccupations, tandis que le suicide pose un sérieux problème à Montréal et à Toronto. Parmi les autres préoccupations médicales des sans-abri sont les suivantes : la tuberculose, les maux de pieds, la gale, les problèmes dentaires, les maladies transmises sexuellement et les infections virales.

Bien qu'il soit difficile de dénombrer de façon exacte les jeunes sans-abri, le présent document fournit des statistiques recueillies par un certain nombre d'intervenants clés qui ont effectué des études locales dans les principaux centres.

Les causes de l'itinérance parmi les jeunes incluent, notamment, la désintégration de la famille, le manque de logements abordables et le taux de pauvreté croissant. Beaucoup de jeunes ne peuvent pas vivre à la maison pour diverses raisons, dont la violence familiale. Une étude effectuée à Toronto a indiqué que plus de 70 % des jeunes de la rue quittent le foyer familial à cause d'abus physique ou sexuel.

On estime que le manque de logements abordables contribue au problème dans beaucoup de régions au Canada. Par exemple, le piètre état du parc de logements existants contribue au problème des jeunes sans-abri au Nouveau-Brunswick, à l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard, à Saskatoon, à Regina et à Winnipeg.

Le taux de pauvreté croissant est l'une des principales causes de l'itinérance chez les jeunes, tout comme la situation économique défavorable dans diverses régions du pays. Dans les collectivités rurales du Canada atlantique, un nombre grandissant de jeunes aux prises avec des difficultés économiques déménagent dans des centres urbains comme Halifax, puis se dirigent vers Montréal et Toronto. Lorsqu'ils arrivent dans ces villes, les jeunes se retrouvent souvent sans ressources et peuvent facilement se trouver sans-abri.

Le manque de préparation à l'emploi, de scolarité et d'expérience contribue aussi à l'itinérance chez les jeunes. La grande majorité des jeunes sans-abri n'ont pas terminé leurs études secondaires. À Ottawa et à Toronto, ce pourcentage varie de 63 à 90 %.

Dans la plupart des régions, les lacunes dans les services de l'aide sociale à l'enfance et de la protection de la jeunesse pour les personnes de 16 ans et plus jouent également un rôle déterminant. Lorsque les jeunes quittent le système de la protection de l'enfance, ils vivent souvent dans la rue. Nombre de jeunes âgés de 16 et de 17 ans sont inadmissibles à l'aide au revenu. En raison des critères d'admissibilité dans beaucoup de provinces, il est difficile pour les jeunes de moins de 18 ans de toucher des prestations. Au Québec, seuls les jeunes de moins de 18 ans avec un enfant à charge sont admissibles à l'aide au revenu.

La présente étude fournit un aperçu des initiatives mises en oeuvre pour régler le problème des jeunes itinérants, aux niveaux national, provincial et local. En décembre 1999, le gouvernement fédéral a annoncé qu'il contribuerait pour 753 millions de dollars, entre 2000 et 2003, en vue d'atténuer le problème de l'itinérance au Canada. Une partie de cette somme a permis d'élaborer des programmes et des projets visant les jeunes.

L'Étude contextuelle sur le problème des jeunes sans-abri met en lumière un certain nombre de programmes et de services étendus et additionnels, susceptibles de contribuer à réduire l'itinérance chez les jeunes. Ils comprennent des habitations plus abordables, ainsi qu'une gamme d'options de logement additionnelles, notamment des refuges d'urgence, des foyers de transition et des logements aidés. Il y a un intérêt grandissant pour les programmes qui offrent aux jeunes un éventail complet de choix en matière de logement lié à des programmes de soutien, comme des cours de dynamique de la vie et de formation préalable à l'emploi.

Parmi les autres mesures proposées en vue de soutenir les jeunes sans-abri sont les suivantes : accessibilité accrue à l'aide au revenu, accès aux organismes de protection de la jeunesse pour les jeunes de 16 ans, davantage de services de santé mentale, traitement pour la toxicomanie, options d'école innovatrice et initiatives pour aider les jeunes à trouver des emplois.

Font aussi partie du continuum de soutiens recommandés pour venir en aide aux jeunes sans-abri: la médiation familiale, le règlement des conflits, des stratégies visant à aider les jeunes à poursuivre leurs études, davantage de centres récréatifs, ainsi que d'appui pour les familles et les enfants.

L'Étude contextuelle sur le problème des jeunes sans-abri brosse un tableau étonnant de la situation des jeunes sans-abri et de ses effets sur les collectivités à l'échelon du pays. En examinant les caractéristiques et les causes, ainsi que les mesures efficaces mises en oeuvres, le rapport présente les faits bruts tout en donnant un peu d'espoir concernant l'un des principaux problèmes sociaux au Canada.



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Environmental Scan on Youth Homelessness

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This report is an environmental scan of youth homelessness in Canada. The purpose is to provide the following information:

- An overview of the homeless youth population in Canada, including their shelter situation;
- An overview of the primary distinct housing and support issues relating to homeless youth;
- Recent and upcoming Canadian initiatives, including publications, reports, conferences, projects, etc. on youth homelessness;
- Names of agencies and key resource people working in the field; and
- Types of effective housing interventions that have benefited homeless youth.

1.2 Methodology

In preparing this report, information was obtained in two ways. The first step involved a review of Canadian literature on youth homelessness and preparation of an annotated bibliography. A copy is attached as Appendix “A”. The second step involved interviews with close to 60 key informants across the country. These included telephone interviews with representatives from all levels of government as well as front-line community agencies. A complete list of key informants is found in Appendix “B”. In carrying out the interviews, questions were asked about:

- The extent and nature of youth homelessness;
- Characteristics of homeless youth;
- Trends in youth homelessness;
- Causes of youth homelessness;
- Issues specifically affecting homeless youth, including the distinct housing and support needs they might have;
- Recent and upcoming initiatives on youth homelessness, including publications, reports, conferences, projects etc.; and
- Examples of effective housing interventions that have helped or are helping homeless youth.

Section 2 of this report provides an overview of youth homelessness in Canada and includes a synthesis of findings obtained through the interviews with key informants in all jurisdictions surveyed. References are made to the annotated bibliography (Appendix A). The remainder of the report contains more detailed information gained from the key informants. References are also made to written materials and literature as appropriate.

1.3 Definition of youth homelessness

There are many different ways to define homelessness. This report uses a definition based on one provided by the United Nations which refers to people who are absolutely homeless and people who are relatively homeless. For the purpose of this report, these terms are defined as follows¹:

¹ BC Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security. 2000. *A Planning Guide for BC Communities*.

People who are absolutely homeless – includes people who are living outdoors (e.g. on the street, in parks, and under bridges) and in abandoned buildings. It also includes people who use emergency shelters or hostels.

People who are relatively homeless – includes people who are living in unsafe, inadequate or insecure housing, or who are paying too much of their income for rent. People who rent hotel or motel rooms by the month, or who are temporarily staying with friends or relatives (couch surfing) are also considered relatively homeless. People who are relatively homeless are also considered to be at risk of homeless or one step away from homelessness. They are also referred to as the “invisible” homeless.

Youth - For the most part, this report focuses on youth from 16 to 24 years of age. The definition of youth is somewhat problematic because of the different mandates of agencies that serve youth and because of different eligibility criteria for programs across the country. For example, some programs are targeted to youth under 16. Some adult shelters may accept youth who are 16 and over while others may limit eligibility to 19 year olds. The age of majority differs among provinces, as does the age limit for youth to remain in school. This report discusses youth in the context provided by the key informants.

1.4 Organization of report

The information in this report has been organized as follows:

Section 1 – sets out the purpose of the report, the methodology, and discusses what is meant by youth homelessness.

Section 2 – provides an overview of youth homelessness in Canada, based on the interviews and annotated bibliography.

Sections 3-8 - include information for the following regions, provinces and municipalities:

- Atlantic Canada - includes Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island;
- Quebec - includes Montreal and Quebec City;
- Ontario - includes Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton and Peel;
- The Prairies – includes information for the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, as well as for the cities of Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, and Winnipeg
- British Columbia – includes Vancouver; and
- The Territories – includes the Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut.

Most sections of this report include an overview of the homeless youth population, a discussion of causes and issues relating to homeless youth, and information on initiatives to address youth homelessness in the jurisdiction being described. Exceptions were made where the information did not warrant this presentation format and where it would have been unduly repetitive.

Appendix A – includes the annotated bibliography.

Appendix B – includes a list of the key informants for this report.

2. Overview of youth homelessness in Canada

2.1 Overview of the homeless youth population

Youth homelessness has emerged as an issue across Canada. However, the extent to which it is a concern varies from region to region. There is limited Canada-wide information on the number of homeless youth for a variety of reasons. First, there is little information in general on the size of the homeless population in Canada as a whole, let alone for a specific sub-group such as youth. Most studies focus on a particular city or region, and emphasize the characteristics, issues and needs of the homeless population. Most do not estimate the size of the homeless youth population.

In addition, while it may be possible to count all the individuals who use emergency youth shelters, the numbers would not include youth who use adult shelters, or youth who do not use shelters and sleep outside. Also, some communities do not have youth shelters. Even if agencies undertake a count of individuals sleeping outside, youth may be reluctant to give their true age. Most of the key informants and documentation reviewed support the premise that the majority of homeless youth are not visible on the street, but are couch surfing or living in overcrowded conditions, unsuitable housing, or housing that they cannot afford.

The nature of youth homelessness also varies across Canada. In some parts of the country where youth homelessness exists, for example, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, PEI and Nunavut, key informants advise that the issue is primarily one of relative homelessness. However, youth who are absolutely homeless have been identified in most urban centres, including Halifax, Montreal, Quebec City, several communities in Ontario, Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, several communities in BC, Yellowknife and Whitehorse. The seasonal nature of youth homelessness has also been noted. In some parts of Canada it is too cold for youth to sleep outside in winter, and the number of youth sleeping outside increases in the summer months.

Key informants from most parts of the country believe that youth homelessness is increasing. In Ontario, information from shelter providers indicates that the amount of time youth remain homeless is getting longer.

Canadian researchers have described various aspects of the homeless youth population in several parts of the country, including Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec City². Many of the issues raised in the literature are similar to what has been reported in the key informant interviews. For example, one study in Quebec City reports that homeless youth often experience physical violence, mental health issues, alcoholism, sexual abuse and problems with the judicial system. Youth are often isolated with no family ties and few friends. Many have been raised in foster homes.³ A BC study identifies the characteristics of street youth to include a lack of education and employment skills, a high incidence of transience, poor physical health, substance use, mental health issues, conflict with the law, violence and street relationships.⁴

² McCreary 1994; McCarthy 1995; Social Planning Council of Winnipeg 1990; Kufeldt and Burrows 1994; Caputo, Weiler and Kelly 1994; Fournier 1996; O'Grady 1998; Pollock 1998. (See attached annotated bibliography).

³ Bisson 1989. (See attached annotated bibliography).

⁴ Watari Research Association 1994. (See attached annotated bibliography).

Information from key informants indicates that while the majority of homeless youth are male, the number of young women who are homeless is growing. In Halifax, Ontario and the Prairies, increasing numbers of homeless women who are pregnant or have children have been identified. In Toronto, it is estimated that about half the young women on the streets become pregnant at some point.⁵ Increasing numbers of homeless youth have mental health issues, and there is an increase in the use of drugs and alcohol. In addition, problems associated with drugs have become more serious with an increase in intravenous drug use and crack cocaine. Increasing numbers of gay, lesbian and transgendered youth who are homeless have been noted in Ontario and the Prairies. Key informants in Halifax and Ontario have identified increasing numbers of immigrant youth who are homeless.

Youth homelessness is a significant issue for Aboriginal youth. Key informants advise that Aboriginal youth are significantly over-represented among the homeless in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, particularly in the urban centres of Edmonton, Prince Albert, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg. Key informants in Toronto, Ottawa and Vancouver also report that Aboriginal youth who are homeless are over-represented in their communities. The literature confirms this, with several authors citing over-representation of Aboriginal youth among the homeless young people.⁶ In Ottawa, research shows that 18% of the homeless male youth and 19% of homeless female youth are Aboriginal, whereas 1.5% of the population in Ottawa is identified as having an Aboriginal cultural background⁷. Some of the reasons given for the high proportion of Aboriginal youth who are homeless include: the legacy of displacement passed down from parents who grew up in residential schools, moves from reserves to the cities where Aboriginal people may be unaccustomed to city life and unaware of services available to them, discrimination, and the breakdown of adoptions of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal households.

According to key informants, homeless youth generally survive by couch surfing or they may live in overcrowded or unsuitable housing. Some youth may pool their resources and collectively rent a place to live. Others may use emergency shelters, where they exist, or sleep outside or in abandoned buildings. Many youth are forced to sell drugs or become involved in other illegal activity such as shoplifting to survive, particularly if they are unable to access income assistance. Homeless youth may also become involved in prostitution or exchange sex for shelter. Recruitment to the sex trade appears to be most aggressive in Halifax and Vancouver. One Vancouver study reports that more 14-15 year olds are involved in the sex trade.⁸

A significant number of youth have some involvement with the criminal justice system. For example, they may be involved in illegal activity as noted above. They are also more vulnerable to crime, such as sexual and physical assault, as well as theft of their belongings. Key informants note that some homeless youth end up in the corrections system and some youth who have been released from the corrections system end up homeless. This information is confirmed in the literature.⁹

⁵ City of Toronto. *Toronto Youth Profile, Volume 1, 1999*, p.23.

⁶ Caputo, Weiler and Kelly 1994 and McCreary 1994. (See attached annotated bibliography).

⁷ Farrell, Sue, Tim Aubrey, Fran Klodawsky, and Donna Pettey. *Describing the Homeless Population of Ottawa-Carleton – Fact Sheets of Selected Findings*. University of Ottawa.

⁸ Chand and Thompson. 1997. (See attached annotated bibliography).

⁹ Bisson 1989 and Watari Research Association 1994. (See attached annotated bibliography).

Key informants and the literature note the deteriorating health of homeless youth. In addition, the longer youth remain homeless the worse their health becomes. In Quebec and the Prairies HIV/AIDS is a concern, along with Hepatitis B and C. Fournier and Mercier identify suicide as a serious issue for homeless youth in Montreal¹⁰, and key informants in Toronto echo the same concerns. In Toronto, increasing numbers of homeless youth have HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and Hepatitis C. They also suffer from a variety of medical problems with their feet, poor nutrition, scabies, dental problems and sexually transmitted diseases. Homeless youth are also very prone to viral infections. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is prevalent among homeless youth in Toronto, the Prairies and Territories. Homeless youth also suffer from exposure to violence. Concern is growing that youth cannot survive on the streets for long. For example, a 1998 study of street youth in Montreal found that the mortality rates among them was 9 times higher for males and 31 times higher for females when compared to the general youth population of Quebec.¹¹

2.2 Causes of youth homelessness - housing and support issues

Key informants identified family breakdown as a major cause of youth homelessness across the country.¹² This finding is supported in several published reports contained in the literature.¹³ Many youth cannot live at home for a variety of reasons, including family violence, and physical and sexual abuse. The Mayor's Homelessness Task Force in Toronto reported that several studies have found that more than 70% of youth on the streets leave home because of physical or sexual abuse. In Peel, information from the emergency youth shelter recorded that in 1999/2000, the primary reason for needing shelter was serious family conflict. Some youth are forced to move out of the home, including gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth who may be rejected by family and friends. Other youth move out because they are not accepted by a parent's new spouse. In some cases it has been noted that youth move out because they do not want to follow the rules at home. However, this does not appear to be the situation for most homeless youth.

The lack of affordable housing has been noted as another major cause of homelessness in several parts of the country, particularly Atlantic Canada, Ontario, Saskatchewan, BC and the Territories. There is a tremendous shortage of housing in Nunavut where several families may be forced to share a house and an entire family may have to live in one of the bedrooms. In some cases, the lack of affordable or appropriate housing is a cause of homelessness. Other times, the lack of housing prevents youth from moving off the streets or out of the shelter system. The poor condition of the existing housing stock has been expressed as a serious concern in New Brunswick, PEI, Saskatoon, Regina and Winnipeg.

Increasing poverty has also been identified as a significant cause of homelessness. Entire families may become homeless when parents can no longer afford to pay rent. Low income households often pay more than 50% of their incomes for housing, which is often substandard. They are at-risk of becoming absolutely homeless, and many families must often choose between paying the rent and feeding the children. In some parts of the country, parents encourage their teenage children to move out because they can no longer afford to feed them.

¹⁰ Fournier et Mercier 1996. (See attached annotated bibliography).

¹¹ Hwang, Stephen. Homelessness and Health. *CMAJ* 2001, 164(2): 229-233. See also Regie Regionale de la Sante et des services sociaux de Montreal-Centre 1993. (See attached annotated bibliography).

¹² Caputo, Weiler and Anderson 1997 (See attached annotated bibliography).

¹³ Caputo 1997; Kufeldt 1994; Poirier 1999; Pollock 1998; Social Planning Council of Winnipeg 1990; Watari Research Association 1994. (See attached annotated bibliography).

The economic situation in parts of Canada is viewed as another cause of homelessness. For example, in Atlantic Canada, youth in rural communities are moving to urban centres to find work. They may go to Halifax, and then west to Montreal and Toronto. This is borne out by reports from Toronto that more than 50% of the homeless youth come from places outside of Toronto.¹⁴ Often, youth find that they are unable to find work because of a lack of job-readiness, education or experience. The vast majority of homeless youth have not completed high school. Studies in Ottawa and Toronto show that between 63% and 90% of homeless youth have not completed high school.¹⁵ Concerns have been raised across the country about the need for strategies to help at risk youth complete their education. In Nunavut, it was noted that living in overcrowded conditions is not conducive to learning. In Ontario, policies of zero tolerance (for violent behaviour) may result in youth being forced to leave school.

Serious gaps in child welfare/protection services have been identified as a factor contributing to youth homelessness, especially for 16 and 17 year olds. In particular, concerns have been raised in virtually all provinces where youth who are 16 and older are not able to access protection services. It is also noted that youth are often not equipped to live independently in the community when they leave the child protection system (e.g. 16-18 years old) and many “graduate” to the street. Although there is not a great deal of Canadian research on this topic, there is growing evidence of a connection between youth homelessness and the child protection system. For example, a 1992 study of 152 homeless youth in Vancouver found that over 40% had lived in a foster home or group home.¹⁶ This is consistent with a 1999 study of 360 street youth in Toronto that found 43% had some history in a foster home or group home.¹⁷

Eligibility for income assistance has been identified as a major concern for 16 and 17 year olds across the country. This group has particular difficulty obtaining benefits. For example, eligibility criteria may require that youth be in school, which may be difficult if they have no place to live. Youth may also be deterred from applying for benefits if the process will involve contacting their parents and if they must prove that they cannot live at home. In Alberta, youth are not eligible for income assistance until the age of 18, unless they are under the care of the child welfare system. Youth under the age of 18 in Quebec are not eligible for income assistance either, unless they have a dependent child.

Gaps in services have also been identified for youth with mental health issues, addictions and dual diagnoses. Key informants cited addictions as a significant factor affecting homeless youth across the country. The extent of addictions among youth in general and the increasing seriousness of the addictions over the past few years are of great concern. This issue is not limited to low income households. In Newfoundland it is noted that many middle class youth are also addicted and become involved in criminal activity to pay for their addictions. Families are often ill equipped to deal with these situations. Key informants in Montreal have identified an increase in intravenous drug use, particularly heroin. In Ottawa, there are reports of increasing intravenous drug use, crack, speed and ecstasy. Service providers have indicated that crack has

¹⁴ Report of the Mayor’s Homelessness Action Task Force. 1999. *Taking Responsibility for Homelessness, An Action Plan for Toronto*, p.57.

¹⁵ City of Toronto, *Toronto Youth Profile, Volume 1*, p. 24, 1999. Also Pollock 1998 (See attached annotated bibliography), and Farrell, Sue, Tim Aubry, Fran Klodawsky and Donna Pettey. *Describing the Homeless Population of Ottawa-Carleton – Fact Sheets of Selected Findings*. University of Ottawa.

¹⁶ McCarthy, Bill. 1995. *On the Streets in Vancouver*. (See attached annotated bibliography).

¹⁷ Gaetz, Stephen, Bill O’Grady, and Bryan Vaillancourt, *Making Money, The Shout Clinic Report on Homeless Youth and Employment*. Central Toronto Community Health Centres, 1999 p. 9.

hit Winnipeg with a vengeance in the past few years and has had a major impact on families, including child neglect. Increasing use of hard drugs linked to inexpensive crack cocaine is also an issue in Vancouver, and a high rate of alcohol and drug use has been noted in the Territories among homeless youth as well as those who are housed. In the Yukon, parental drinking and other substance use have also been identified as reasons why youth may wish to leave home.

2.3 Initiatives to address youth homelessness

a) Existing initiatives

In December 1999, the federal government announced it would contribute \$753 million between 2000 and 2003 to help alleviate and prevent homelessness in Canada. Of this funding:

- \$305 million was allocated to the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI);
- \$59 million was targeted to youth under Canada's Youth Employment Strategy;
- \$59 million was allocated to Aboriginal people under the Federal Government's Urban Aboriginal Strategy;
- \$43 million in additional funding was allocated for the Shelter Enhancement Program over four years and an expansion of the program was introduced to include shelters and second stage housing for youth. Assistance can be used to improve existing or create new projects; and
- \$268 million was made available to double the current annual budgets for the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) and related programs over four years to support the renovation and repair of existing affordable housing occupied by low income households. New program flexibility also allows for the conversion of non-residential buildings into new affordable housing for low income people.

The SCPI initiatives appear to be having a major impact on communities across the country in terms of initiating a process to collectively discuss homelessness. All of the communities studied in this report, and many others, are at some stage of developing a community plan to identify needs and develop strategies to address homelessness. Since December, 1999, 113 projects have been funded under this program.¹⁸ Several initiatives have been targeted to homeless youth to:

- Increase shelter capacity for youth;
- Provide staff for an emergency youth shelter to assist youth and refer them to other existing community services to help make the transition to more stable accommodation;
- Establish safe second stage housing for young women in the survival sex trade;
- Offer a place of refuge for youth;
- Provide outreach services;
- Hire a youth worker to provide housing assistance, information and linkages to youth aged 16-24; and
- Research youth homelessness.

Communities have commented on the positive aspect of their work under SCPI and one agency pointed out how SCPI funding served as a catalyst for attracting others to participate in homelessness initiatives.

¹⁸ National Secretariat on Homelessness. February 2001. *SCPI Projects Funded Since December 17, 1999*.

It should also be noted that under Canada's Youth Employment Strategy, 66 youth projects have been funded since December 1999.¹⁹ These projects are aimed at providing opportunities for homeless youth to gain work experience and develop life skills.

Under the Shelter Enhancement Program (SEP), 104 emergency shelters and second stage housing projects across the country have received assistance from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) since December 1999. Several of these projects involved renovating shelters for homeless youth.

As well, 42 new and existing projects targeted to people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness have received assistance under RRAP. Clients served generally include homeless people living in shelters, people living with mental health issues, substance misuse or other disabilities, and victims of family violence, federal ex-offenders, and the near homeless living in precarious housing situations. Some projects were targeted specifically to homeless youth. One of these involved the conversion of a former fire repair garage to a transitional shelter and employment facility for homeless youth.²⁰

Project Development Funding (PDF) loans from CMHC, mortgage insurance, and grants from Homegrown Solutions have also been used by groups across the country to develop a range of housing options for homeless youth.

A variety of other programs and services exist across the country to address youth homelessness, and these are discussed in sections 3-8 of this report.

b) What is needed

Key informants have identified a need for a continuum of housing and support services to address youth homelessness. At present, there are some significant gaps in this continuum.

Key informants from almost all parts of the country have identified a need for more affordable housing. This was noted as a most significant issue in New Brunswick, Ontario, Saskatchewan, BC and Nunavut. The need for a range of additional housing options has also been noted, including emergency shelters, transition housing, and supported housing.

There is growing interest in programs that offer youth a full range of housing options and support programs, including lifeskills and pre-employment training. These may be offered by one agency in different locations. For example, Phoenix Youth Programs in Halifax offers different types of housing programs, a learning and employment centre, and a follow-up program that provides ongoing support and crisis intervention. This approach allows the agency to develop an ongoing relationship with their clients that may last as long as 8 years (16-24).

Other models exist where youth may remain in housing that is provided while they participate in a program that provides lifeskills and pre-employment training (e.g. Centre Jacques Cartier in Quebec City, and Eva's Phoenix in Toronto). The Region of Peel Task Force on Homeless Youth is proposing an initiative that would include a continuum of housing options, including emergency short term shelter beds, transitional housing, and independent living. It is anticipated that a major focus of the facility would be to assist youth with lifeskills, employment

¹⁹ National Secretariat on Homelessness. February 2001. *Youth Projects Funded Since December 17, 1999*.

²⁰ Eva's Phoenix in Toronto.

opportunities, and the opportunity to address a variety of issues related to physical and mental health, substance use, physical and sexual abuse, and personal safety.

More programs and services to support homeless youth are also needed. These include increased access to income assistance, the ability for 16 year olds to access the child welfare system, more mental health services, treatment for addictions, alternative schooling options, pre-employment training (e.g. see Toronto initiatives), and more initiatives targeted to help youth participate in the economy (e.g. the NWT Community Mobilization Partnership and Job Development Strategy in the Northwest Territories).

Measures to prevent homelessness have also been identified as a necessary part of the housing and support continuum. These include family mediation, conflict resolutions, strategies to help youth remain in school, more recreation centres, and more support to families and children. This approach is used in PEI, where most of the existing programs are geared to working with families and adolescents in crisis to help prevent family breakdown, supporting pregnant and parenting youth, helping to give babies and children a healthy start, and helping at risk youth in the school system.

3. Atlantic Canada

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

This section includes information on youth homelessness in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and PEI. Youth homelessness has been identified as a growing issue in several parts of Atlantic Canada. However, there is no province-wide information on the numbers or characteristics of youth who are homeless or at-risk.

For the most part, homeless youth in Atlantic Canada are not very visible. Most youth are able to sleep with a roof over their heads by couch surfing or living in overcrowded or unsuitable conditions. However, increasing numbers of youth are living on the streets in Halifax. In other communities, the seasonal nature of youth homelessness has been noted as youth can be found sleeping outside in the summer. The youth population in Atlantic Canada is shrinking. Those who live in rural communities are facing economic pressures to find work, and increasing numbers are moving to urban centres such as Halifax, and then westward to Montreal and Toronto.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

Family breakdown and abuse was identified by key informants as one of the key causes of youth homelessness in Atlantic Canada. Many youth cannot live at home for a variety of reasons, including family violence, and physical or sexual abuse. In some cases conflicts within the family force youth to leave home – either because they choose to leave or parents do not permit the youth to live at home.

The lack of affordable housing in the Atlantic Provinces has been noted as a major issue for both parents and their children. There is also increasing poverty in Atlantic Canada. In some cases parents cannot afford to pay the rent and the entire family is homeless. Families are being squeezed as a result of inadequate levels of social assistance, and some parents encourage youth to move out because they cannot afford to support them. More and younger people are living in poverty.

Gaps in services have also been identified as one of the causes of youth homelessness. This includes insufficient services for youth with mental health issues, including a lack of housing for this group. There are also insufficient services or treatment centres to address a growing problem of addictions among youth. Difficulty accessing income support for 16-18 year olds has also been identified as an issue. In some provinces, the inability of youth to access child welfare services at the age of 16 has been identified as a concern, as well as the difficulties youth face in being able to live on their own when they leave the child welfare system.

A lack of attention to the prevention of homelessness has also been identified as an important issue. Agencies are seeing homeless youth who were in families that did not receive sufficient support earlier on. It is believed that families, who are at risk but not in crisis, do not get the preventive help they need, and the youth may end up homeless later on.

3.1 Nova Scotia

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Youth homelessness has not come to the fore as an issue in Nova Scotia except for in the Halifax area. However, within Halifax, community stakeholders have identified youth homelessness as one of the top priority issues. Information on the number of homeless youth is very limited. However, a youth drop-in centre in Halifax has reported that between April 1st and July 31st, 2000, 300 youth accessed their services. Of these youth, 165 were male and 135 were female. Approximately 44% of the males and 27% of the females were in need of emergency housing. In addition, a high percentage of the 300 youth were couch surfing.²¹

There is clear evidence that the number of homeless youth in Halifax is on the rise. This includes a growing number of youth who have no place to sleep and are living on the street. During the period between 1999 and 2001, the number of youth accessing services and facilities increased dramatically. Phoenix Youth Services experienced a 25% increase in demand for their walk-in services in March, 2000 compared to the previous year.

Based on information from key informants, most of the homeless youth are males, although there are increasing numbers of homeless females. Increasing numbers of homeless young women with children are also seeking services. The number of homeless youth in need of mental health supports is also growing, and key informants estimate that 75% of homeless youth have mental health issues. Service providers have also noted an increase in drug, alcohol and other substance use, as well as increasing violence among the homeless youth population both as perpetrators and victims. Agencies are also seeing increasing numbers of immigrant youth. The number of Aboriginal youth who are homeless is also growing, however, this population is not a dominant group. Agencies have also noted an increase in the level of despair among youth. In addition, the longer youth are on the streets the worse their health becomes.

There are a number of ways that homeless youth survive while on the streets. Many are couch surfing, which means they move from one friend's couch to another in order to find accommodation. Others live in crowded conditions. Some street youth live in garages and underground parking. Most youth do not go to adult shelters, although they are eligible after they reach age 16. Homeless youth are quickly targeted by predators, and are recruited to the sex trade

²¹ Community Action on Homelessness Steering Committee. *Halifax (Census Metropolitan Area) Community Action Plan on Homelessness*. September, 2000 p. 20.

“in no time flat”. Others sell drugs or engage in other criminal activity to survive.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

One of the specific issues affecting youth homelessness in the Halifax area is the economic situation in the province. The economy is growing stronger in Halifax, but is weak in the rural communities. Increasing numbers of youth are moving to Halifax to find work. However, these youth generally find that they do not have the necessary skills for employment and they cannot find housing that they can afford. Rental costs are increasing because of dramatic growth in the area. There is concern that youth homelessness will rise as a result of declining vacancy rates, which will make it more difficult for youth to find a place to live. In addition, there are no emergency shelters for youth in Halifax. Youth who are 16 and over may use the adult shelters. However, they rarely do.

The child welfare system has also been identified as an issue for youth 16 years of age and older. Sixteen year olds, who are not already accessing child welfare services, are not eligible for assistance. In addition, when youth leave the child welfare system, they may have no family or social networks to provide support. They may have mental health or addictions problem, and may still be suffering from issues of abuse. Most of them are not ready or equipped to live on their own, and many become homeless. In addition, it is very difficult for 16-18 year olds to access income assistance.

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

Existing services for youth are offered primarily by Phoenix Youth Services which was established in 1984. These services include:

- Phoenix Centre for Youth - provides street front, walk-in service offering counseling, referral to community resources, health care, showers, laundry facilities, food and advocacy for homeless and at-risk youth.
- Learning and employment centre for homeless and at risk youth ages 16-24 – helps prepare youth to participate in the workforce.
- Phoenix House – a 10-bed residential facility for males and females ages 16-24. The length of stay depends on the needs of the youth and is open-ended until the age of 24.
- Supervised Apartment Program – Three homes are rented. Each home includes three youth and a live-in support person.
- Follow Up Program – offers ongoing continuity of support and crisis intervention.

Phoenix Youth Services believes in the importance of being able to offer a continuum of housing and support. This approach allows the agency to develop an ongoing relationship with their clients. They can work with a youth for 8 years (16-24), which makes it possible to offer effective interventions and achieve great success with their clients.

It is recognized in Halifax that the level of need for services has outgrown the current system of what is being provided. Need has been identified for:

- A youth shelter that would offer in-house support and services.
- More housing options for 16-24 year old youth. This could include more low end of market housing, an expansion of the supervised apartment program for youth, and housing with more support (e.g. group homes) targeted to youth at risk either as a result of their families,

substance use or mental health issues. There is also a need for housing that offers support with lifeskills and education programs.

- Programs and services to prevent homelessness. These could include family mediation, programs aimed at helping youth to remain in school, parenting outreach, conflict resolution, support for individuals with mental and physical health issues, addressing child abuse, and treatment for addictions.

3.2 New Brunswick

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Youth homelessness is an issue in New Brunswick. Most of these youth are relatively homeless, and it is believed that many youth are at risk. The primary issue in this province is the lack of affordable housing. Many homeless youth have mental health issues and issues related to addictions.

Homeless youth generally survive by couch surfing, staying with relatives, moving into flophouses or boarding homes, or remaining in an at-risk situation at home. In the summer, some youth sleep outside. Some youth may use adult emergency shelters. Others may trade sex for a place to sleep. Youth may obtain one meal a day at community kitchens. Some stay on the buses all day to keep warm. Some youth earn money by selling drugs or prostitution.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

One of the major issues identified by key informants in New Brunswick is the lack of affordable housing. This affects the entire province as few new subsidized housing units have been built in the last 10 years. There is no supportive housing in the province, and there are no designated shelters for youth except for Chrysalis House, an 8-bed residence for young women (16-19 years of age) in Fredericton. The quality of the housing stock has also been identified as an issue.

Poverty is a major issue in New Brunswick, as it is elsewhere in the country. The poor are unable to afford decent and adequate housing and often pay 50%-60% of their monthly income for housing that is often substandard. There is increasing demand for subsidized units, and waiting lists for these units have increased as a result. The poor are often on the edge of homelessness, and live month-to-month wondering if they will be able to pay rent and feed their children. Entire families become homeless when parents can no longer afford to pay the rent.

The issue of child welfare has also been raised, as youth are not able to access the system once they are 16. These youth may apply for income support, however, most do not know that they may be eligible, and they do not apply. Youth who are already in care may continue to receive services until they are 18.

The lack of prevention services to support families that may be in borderline trouble has also been noted as an issue (e.g. early childhood education and the ability to participate in recreation programs). A lack of services for youth with mental health issues and addictions has also been identified. In Saint John, interviews with just over a dozen homeless youth (carried out as part of the process to develop a community plan under SCPI) revealed that many of them were homeless because of sexual or physical abuse they experienced by family members.

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

The New Brunswick government is currently developing a provincial youth policy. This policy will identify gaps in services, and issues regarding access to and coordination of services. To date, the need has been recognized for more affordable housing and for programs to help youth remain in school. The school system is looking at developing programs for youth at risk. By law, youth are required to stay in school until the age of 18. In the past few years there has been a move for alternative schooling, and this appears to be helping.

3.3 Newfoundland – St. John's region

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Youth homelessness has been identified as an issue of concern in the St. John's area of Newfoundland for the past few years. For the most part, homelessness is not visible. Youth usually have a roof over their heads, but not a home. A shelter network works fairly well to prevent youth from being forced on to the streets. The proportion of male and female youth who are homeless is fairly equal, although there are more males. Many of the youth suffer from mental health and addiction issues, come from the foster care system, have behavioural issues, and have difficulty fitting into the education system. A large number of homeless youth end up in the criminal justice system. There are very few Aboriginal youth among the homeless population in the St. John's area.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

The most significant issue noted by key informants has been the extent of addictions among youth and the increasing seriousness of the addictions over the past few years. Many middle class youth are addicted and become involved in stealing or other criminal activity to pay for their addictions. There is also a higher incidence of youth no longer able to live in the family home due to family violence, physical or sexual abuse. In addition, families have a more limited capacity to manage, particularly in situations where youth are involved in addictions and crime. Youth have more serious and often, multiple problems.

A lack of affordable housing has also been identified as an issue in the Saint John's area of Newfoundland.

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

New child welfare legislation was introduced in January 2000 to help fill the gap in services that used to exist for 16-18 year olds. Now, 16 and 17 year olds can obtain residential services under the child welfare system in cases of abuse or if the parent is unwilling or unable to care for the youth at home. Youth can access a youth shelter while an assessment is being conducted.

There are two youth shelters in the St. John's region. Naomi Centre provides 8 beds for women between the ages of 16 and 30. Youth may stay for up to 3 months, and there is a support worker. In 2000, 4 beds for male youth were specifically set aside within an existing facility run by the Salvation Army. A part-time support worker is also available to work with the youth.

Choices for Youth provides programs to youth with the highest needs. This agency works to help youth access education and employment programs. They also help youth find and maintain

suitable housing, and offer assistance with lifeskills issues.

Several agencies in the Saint John's region have identified a need for supportive housing for youth and have established the Youth Residential Alternative Committee. Members of the committee are working together to determine what kind of supportive housing is needed in the region and to review examples of effective models from across the country.

3.4 Prince Edward Island

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

There is very limited data on the extent of youth homelessness in PEI. However, relative homelessness among youth has been identified as an issue. The biggest concern is the inadequacy of the housing stock. For example, in the East Prince region of PEI it is roughly estimated that approximately 70% of pregnant and parenting youth live in inadequate or severely inadequate housing. This means there are concerns with the housing in terms of safety, the state of repair, hot water, heating, lack of privacy, drafts, and mould. Couch surfing and transience among youth is also an issue. There is evidence that youth are also starting to make use of food banks, but again, there is little hard data. There is no indication of any absolute homelessness among youth in PEI.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

There are several issues affecting youth homelessness and transience in PEI. One of the major causes of youth homelessness is believed to be the state of the economy and the inability of youth to find employment. Many youth are forced to move away from their communities to find work. However, many are unable to achieve this because they do not have sufficient knowledge or skills. It is also believed that the focus by the federal and provincial governments to reduce the deficit is another cause of youth homelessness as not enough priority has been placed on housing programs and policies, or housing as social policy.

Under the child welfare legislation in PEI, children may remain in care until they are 16 years old, or for another two years if they have an education or work plan. Sixteen and 17 year olds may be eligible for income support if they apply as a “minor living apart” from their parents. The region is small enough that in most cases, those who apply can be accommodated in some form of residence, usually room and board accommodation.

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

In PEI, a number of initiatives are aimed at early intervention to help support families and reduce family breakdown. Some of these services are available on a regional basis only, and not province-wide. Although they were not specifically designed with homeless youth in mind, it is believed that they do help to prevent youth homelessness. The following are some examples of these initiatives:

- The Family Ties and Family Focus programs work with families and adolescents in crisis to try to prevent family breakdown and make it possible for the youth to remain at home. Outreach services through the child welfare system also try to help keep families together.
- Five organizations across PEI provide assistance and support to pregnant and parenting youth. They help these youth complete school and provide the support they need for their children. One of the goals is to help break the cycle of poverty.

- The Healthy Start initiative offers assistance in each Health Region of PEI to babies and children (up to 6 years of age) to help give the parents and children a healthy start.
- Building Capacity – this initiative provides resources to schools to work with youth at risk of needing some professional services.
- Family Counselling services are offered through Community Mental Health centres in all regions of the province and through private agencies.

In addition, the government of PEI is developing mental health programs for children and addiction education programs. They are also working to integrate services through multidisciplinary teams. To date, there is much multi-disciplinary work being implemented in the school system to help youth in difficulty before problems arise.

4. Quebec

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Interviews with Quebec key informants attest to a strong awareness of initiatives and organisations in the province and of collaborative efforts between the community and municipal sectors. (NB After repeated attempts, we were not able to get an interview with a provincial key informant.) The *Reseau Solidarité Itinérance* that represents community organisations throughout the province, the networks in Montreal and Quebec City and the *Auberges du Cœur*, representing 25 youth shelters in Quebec have played considerable roles in facilitating communication between organisations dealing with homelessness across the province.

Most key informants believe there has been an increase in youth homelessness in the last few years, that homeless youth are younger and that there is a greater proportion of females in the younger age group. This last phenomenon is in part attributed to the greater likelihood of women, as they get older, to go to the women's service and shelter network, which is better adapted to their needs.

It is felt that problems are becoming more serious and complex. Health is poor, related to drugs and the use of syringes for heroin. There has been an increase in drug use with an ensuing recourse to illegal activities to get money to buy drugs. One person noted the presence of organised crime in some of these activities. HIV/AIDS is a problem, along with Hepatitis B and C. Furthermore, these become very complex when accompanied by drug abuse and depression. The study undertaken by Elise Roy and a team from *Santé Québec*²² demonstrated that suicide is a serious issue for homeless youth in Montreal. Psychological problems are noted and many youth are under great psychological stress. This is in a context where there is a severe lack of psychological support and services for adolescents.

Specific subgroups of young homeless persons were not prevalent. For example, neither immigrant nor aboriginal youth appear to be numerous. It is believed that the latter group keeps its ties with the Native milieu through organisations such as the Native Friendship Centre in Montreal.

Children of young homeless women are very quickly taken away by Youth Protection services or the young women with children become part of the network of women's shelters. One key informant underlined that young men were also fathers, and many had joint custody and were

²² Direction de la santé publique 1998. (See attached annotated bibliography).

involved with their children.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

The failure of two major systems was identified as causes of youth homelessness: child welfare and education. In the first, the link between institutionalisation and the lack of preparation for independent living were noted by key informants, confirming what was revealed in the literature review. The system has been criticised for not preparing youth in care for independent living and the case of a young man who committed suicide when he was notified of the termination of support by Youth Protection Services on his eighteenth birthday was recently denounced by the Coroner.²³ The young man, who was in school, was refused social assistance and was told to apply for student loans and bursaries in the following year, with no planning for how he was to support himself in the interim. Even though he had been assured of the support of the foster family with whom he had lived for the last nine years, the notice of termination of support distressed him to the point of suicide. Other issues have surfaced recently about the Child Welfare system including conditions of residential facilities in one region that have led to a case being brought to Quebec Superior court by the *Commission des Droits de la Personne et des Droits de la Jeunesse*. A study by the Commission found that the practices in this region violated the rights of the children to “liberty, dignity and security”. In addition, while youth fall under the mandate of Youth Protection Services until the age of 18, this support is terminated if the young person is in post-secondary education before that age – they are then directed to student loans and bursaries for financial support.

The educational system was also cited as being a factor in failing youth. Education is mandatory until the age of 16. Informants felt that once this obligation ends youth who may be considered “difficult” are not encouraged to continue. Many youth are unprepared for employment or for further education at that point. Social assistance is not available until the age of 18 in Quebec, unless one has a dependent child. Youth of 16 and 17 therefore were felt to be especially vulnerable if social and family networks were not able to support them.

Poverty, not only of the homeless youth but also of their families was a causal factor for homelessness according to all. One person commented on an increased number of youth who were studying in CEGEPs (colleges) but were in very fragile economic circumstances without a network on which to fall back. A delay in a student loan or bursary payment could propel them to using homelessness services. Finally the reduction in social welfare payments, including one that went into effect in February²⁴, was felt to have severe consequences for youth over 18.

Many homeless youth survive through illicit activities, such as drug dealing or prostitution. Informants felt that there was an increased presence of organised crime in these activities, particularly in Montreal. One person mentioned the recruitment of street youth into organised gangs.

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

The Quebec Ministries of Health and Social Services and Youth Protection have undertaken an action plan of \$27.5M to address youth social distress, of which \$12.5M is new funding. The

²³ La Presse, *L’angoisse du 18^e anniversaire, Le coroner Duchesne recommande à la DPJ de ne pas abandonner les jeunes adultes*, mercredi le 13 décembre 2000.

²⁴ For those who are considered capable of work, each refusal to participate represents a \$75 reduction in monthly assistance up to a maximum of \$150.

areas targeted included social adaptation, suicide prevention, alcoholism and addictions well as homelessness. The latter has been allocated \$2M, primarily for the work of community organisations.

Solidarité Jeunesse a recently announced program by the *Ministère de la Solidarité sociale* is a response to the low levels of education and training of many youth who apply for social assistance. The initiative will integrate social assistance, youth employment centres and community organisations to help youth get training and employment. Community groups have criticised this measure as a disguised form of workfare and many are refusing participation in the program.

Upcoming events that were mentioned included possible conference on crime prevention, youth gangs in April 2001 in Sherbrooke, one on young male prostitution at the end of April 2001 (organised by SeroZero), and one on youth prostitution in the fall. According to key informants, once the preparatory planning work being undertaken in the context of the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative, new community-based projects will be proposed.

4.1 Montreal

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Although not focussing specifically on youth, the best profile of the homeless population was felt to be that undertaken by Louise Fournier for Santé Québec²⁵. Data from shelters and services centres such as soup kitchens were gathered for a period of a year. A second part of the study is to be the psychological and health profile of homeless persons. However, youth shelters have refused to participate in this second stage because the methodology was felt to be potentially disruptive for youth, so data on this population will not be forthcoming.

The Santé Québec revealed that 4.6% or 380 users of shelters in Montreal in 1996-97 were under 18²⁶ and that 34.3% or 2,855 persons were between 18 and 29. The proportion of youth using services such as day centres and soup kitchens was similar although the numbers were higher; 3.6% (720 persons) under 18 and 27.3% (5,450 persons) for those 18 to 29.

Key informants noted changes in the situation of Montreal homeless youth to be similar to those noted above; increasingly young persons (although the very young, under 14 years are rare), a deterioration of physical and mental health, the lack of paediatric psychiatrists and an increase in intravenous drug use, especially heroin.

Youth survive by pooling their money and collectively renting apartments. With the low vacancy rates, especially in some central neighbourhoods in Montreal, what is often available to youth is marginal and in very bad condition. A key informant felt that the lack of social/affordable housing might impede progression to independent living for those coming out of transitional housing for homeless youth. Another informant noted the mobility of young homeless persons; they come to Montreal from other cities and move on, in part to avoid police action (e.g. fines for squeegeeing, sleeping in public places, etc.).

²⁵ Fournier, Louise et al, 1998. *Dénombrement de la clientèle itinérante dans les centres d'hébergement, les soupes populaires et les centres de jour des villes de Montréal et de Québec 1996-97*, Santé Québec, 20 novembre.

²⁶ Shelters must inform Youth Protection services of any person staying in a shelter after three days.

b) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

Initiatives dealing with youth homelessness by the City of Montreal currently focus on communication, collaboration and support of networking. The City of Montreal has included street youth in the context of a special committee of the Mayor that is concerned with social problems. (Other issues include drug use, security, prostitution and homelessness.) Other initiatives include a pilot project of dialogue between homeless youth, community workers and elected officials²⁷ and a study examining the phenomenon.²⁸

Many of the issues on housing and support are currently being evaluated in the context of the SCPI planning process, but projects are expected to be proposed once this process was completed.

Some key informants had great difficulty naming any single projects since they felt that all were important to assure a diversity of responses to needs. Projects that were identified include:

- *MAP* a project of the Réseau Habitation Femmes project that is receiving funding from all levels of government is for young single mothers. It includes housing as well as social and professional integration, with an underlying philosophy of empowerment.
- *Les Petites Avenues* – work and employment preparation.
- *L'X*, a street youth (14 to 18 year old) initiated and managed centre that offers music, a collective kitchen and bicycle repair shop. The municipal, provincial and federal governments gave initial support; the project is now completely autonomous.
- *Refuge des jeunes* that offers housing with support.

4.2 Quebec City

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Data from the Santé Québec study reveals that 11.7% or 248 of shelter users in Quebec City in 1996-97 were under 18 years and 25.7% or 544 were between 18 and 29. In soup kitchens 7% (523 persons) were under 18 and 25.4% (1, 897 persons) were between 18 and 29, whereas 9.5% (162 persons) those using day centres were under 18 and 44.9% (766 persons) were between 18 and 29.

Survival strategies in Quebec City were similar to those in Montreal. Networks of friends were important and a group of friends will rent an apartment. Key informants noted an increase in use of PCPs and it was felt that there was a great need for a detox centre for youth. As in Montreal, issues of poverty and fragility of family networks were noted. One person mentioned that the reforms undertaken by the Quebec government in the social services sector had been accompanied by budget cuts and had precipitated early retirement of many workers. The relationships that had existed with these government workers were very important in the work of community organisations. Many of these were lost with the retirements and have taken years to rebuild.

²⁷ Parazelli, Michel 2000 *Projet Pilote: Expérimentation du dispositif de négociation de groupe à groupe impliquant des jeunes de la rue, des intervenants communautaires et des élus municipaux (1997-1999) Rapport d'Évaluation* Institut national de la recherche scientifique, Université du Québec.

²⁸ Parazelli, Michel 2000 *Le sens des pratiques urbaines des jeunes de la rue à Montréal, Document Synthèse*, Ville de Montréal.

b) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

As in Montreal, much of the work of the municipality is in the support of existing networks and the work in the context of the SCPI planning process is expected to be followed by proposals for new projects.

Initiatives that were cited as being exemplary include:

- Centre Jacques Cartier offers housing and social, educational and professional reinsertion. Services to young adults (16-30) include housing with 27 units, training that includes preparation of a life plan and support in achieving this, project start up support and monitoring and community activities such as a Café, agricultural workshops, and a woodworking shop.
- École de la Rue from Maison Dauphin – work through education.
- Gîte Le Nomade – a new shelter for youth.
- Clinique de Cirque – workshops offered during the summer by the Cirque du Monde and Cirque du Soleil for street youth.

5. Ontario

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Youth homelessness has been identified as a concern in several municipalities across Ontario, and at least a dozen municipalities are developing initiatives to address this issue. This section of the report highlights the issue of youth homelessness in Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton and Peel. Key informants in each of these municipalities identified youth homelessness as a major concern.

Most of the homeless youth in Ontario are males, although there are almost as many homeless females. Growing numbers of homeless youth have mental health issues, and addictions are becoming more serious both in terms of increased drug use and the types of drugs being used (e.g. intravenous drugs). Homeless youth also suffer from poor physical health. The population also includes gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth. A significant number of homeless young women are pregnant. Many homeless youth in Toronto and Ottawa come from other cities in Canada. The homeless youth population also includes youth released from correctional institutions.

The number of homeless youth is increasing, and they are becoming more visible as greater numbers are living on the streets. The length of time youth are homeless has also been increasing. Although this report focuses on homeless youth who are not with their families, there is growing concern about the number of families with youth who are homeless and living in shelters or welfare motels.

Many youth survive by couch surfing and using the shelter system. Those who do not use shelters generally sleep in abandoned buildings. Sometimes, one youth will find a place to live, and all their friends will move in (until they all get evicted). Food may be obtained from food banks, drop-in centres, and soup kitchens. Some youth are involved in the sex trade, or may exchange sex for shelter. They may also become involved in the drug trade or other illegal activities.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

Key informants in Ontario have identified several causes of homelessness and issues that affect homeless youth.

Family breakdown and abuse are believed to be the primary reasons for youth homelessness. The City of Toronto Mayor's Homelessness Task Force indicates that several studies have found that more than 70% of youth on the streets leave home because of physical or sexual abuse.²⁹ Gay, lesbian and transgendered youth may also be forced to leave home if they are rejected by families and friends. Pregnant young women may also be forced to move out the family home. Some youth also move out because they are not accepted by a parent's new spouse.

Many families are being squeezed as a result of cutbacks to social services and the level of assistance. Cutbacks to income assistance in 1996 is one cause of increasing poverty, and shelters are seeing increasing numbers of youth who are there because their families can't afford to feed them. Cuts to income assistance have also made it more difficult to access affordable housing.

Another key issue regarding income assistance is that since the Social Assistance Reform Act of 1997, it is more difficult for 16 and 17 year olds to access welfare. These youth are required to be in school (which can be difficult if they have no place to live), and they must have a trustee to receive the allowance on their behalf. In many cases, youth are uncomfortable going through the intake process, which involves proving that their parents won't take care of them. If the parent says the youth can come home, the youth is not eligible for assistance. It is also difficult for sponsored immigrant youth to obtain assistance because their sponsor is supposed to provide for them.

The lack of affordable housing as well as discrimination by landlords who don't want to rent to youth has also been identified as an issue. Vacancy rates are very low. For example Toronto experienced a vacancy rate of .6% in 2000 and Ottawa experienced the tightest vacancy rates in Canada at .2%. Rents have been increasing, and no new government assisted rental housing units have been built. Competition for housing is fierce (particularly in Ottawa), and youth are among the last people that landlords choose as tenants. It is also difficult for youth to gather together enough money for the first and last months rent needed to secure a rental unit. Waiting lists for subsidized housing can be several years long. The result is that youth are staying longer in shelters, since there is no place to go.

The child welfare system has also been noted as an issue in Ontario. Youth who are 16 and older are not eligible to access services. Youth who are already part of the system may be able to continue receiving services until they are 18 as long as they remain in school, or if they have a mental illness. However, 16 year olds who have been in care (lived in a group home or foster care) are required to move out if they are not in school. These youth are not ready to live independently in the community. They often have no family or social networks to provide support. They may have mental health or addictions problem, and may still be suffering from issues of abuse. A 1999 study of 360 street youth in Toronto found that 43% had some history in a foster home or group home.³⁰ It is also noted that it is increasingly difficult for families or

²⁹ Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness, *Taking Responsibility for Homelessness – An Action Plan for Toronto*, 1999, p. 56.

³⁰ Gaetz, Stephen, Bill O'Grady, and Bryan Vaillancourt, *Making Money, The Shout Clinic Report on Homeless Youth and Employment*. Central Toronto Community Health Centres, 1999 p. 9.

youth to obtain assistance under the child welfare system.

Another issue facing homeless youth is the difficulty they face in finding regular work because of a lack of job-readiness, education or experience. The vast majority of homeless youth have not completed high school (63%-90%) in Ottawa and Toronto. It has been suggested that policies of zero tolerance for violent behaviour may result in youth being forced to leave school. It is also against the law for youth to earn money by squeegeeing, as a result of *The Safe Streets Act*, which makes it illegal to interfere with traffic.

The growing use of drugs, increasing mental health issues, and lack of lifeskills among homeless youth have also been identified as key issues. Even if youth do find a place to live, there is a great likelihood that they will get evicted. Reforms to the Mental Health Act are underway, and it is hoped that the new legislation will make it easier to ensure that individuals with mental health issues access services.

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

The Ontario government created the Provincial Homelessness Initiatives Fund (PHIF) in November, 1998. This fund provides 100% funding to municipalities to support the development of innovative new approaches to address homelessness in their communities. Its goals are to:

- Help get people off the street
- Help get people out of the hostel system and into permanent housing, and
- Help people at risk of losing permanent housing.

The fund provides over \$10 million annually to 47 municipalities to allow them to operate programs aimed directly at homelessness. The money is being used for a wide range of direct supports to homeless people, including rent banks, street outreach, housing registries, and landlord-tenant mediation. Some of the initiatives are targeted to homeless youth as shown below:³¹

- Funding was provided for a youth outreach worker to work with teens in the Regional Detention Centre who are being released into the community (Hamilton);
- Assistance is provided to individuals, especially youth, for the initial costs of obtaining housing (Lennox and Addington);
- A community support worker provides support for youth relocating from an emergency shelter into the community (London);
- Start-up costs were provided for a youth emergency shelter (London);
- Funds were allocated to allow a youth shelter/drop-in to open on weekends and evenings (Simcoe);
- Funding was provided for a housing advocate worker to work with homeless Native youth (Toronto);
- “One stop housing” services are provided for youth to assist with accessing housing, recruiting landlords willing to rent to youth, and providing housing-related supports (Toronto);
- A one-year pilot project was funded that provides emergency accommodation and life skills

³¹ *Summary Description of Types of Projects Funded Under the Provincial Homelessness Initiatives Fund.* Provided by the Ontario Provincial Municipal Liaison Project, Ministry of Community and Social Services (No date).

- programs for homeless youth (Waterloo);
- Seed money was provided to assist with fundraising to buy a house for homeless teens (Wellington);
- An outreach and drop-in program for homeless and at-risk youth is being funded (York); and
- An outreach program assists street youth access shelter and emergency services (Sudbury).

5.1 Toronto

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Youth homelessness is a large and growing problem in the City of Toronto. According to the Toronto Report Card on Homeless 2001, youth (age 15-24) are a large group of shelter users. The proportion of youth has increased from 20% of all admissions in 1998 to 23% as of September 2000. It is estimated that 6,000 youth stayed in Toronto's emergency shelters in 1999.³² In addition, many youth are at risk of homelessness, including single parent families headed by youth, and young people living in overcrowded or illegal apartments, or living in housing that they cannot afford.

There has also been a dramatic increase in the number of children staying in shelters, which may have implications for youth homelessness in the future. The number of children jumped by 130% - from about 2,700 in 1988 to 6,200 in 1999. More than half of these children were school aged, between 5 and 14 years old.³³

Key informants estimate that about 60% of the homeless youth are males. Increasing numbers of homeless youth are living together as couples. A significant number have serious mental health issues, although the percentage is not as high as the adult population. A large number also have Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Increasing numbers have HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and hepatitis C. They suffer from a variety of medical problems, including problems with their feet, dental problems, poor nutrition, scabies and sexually transmitted diseases. They are very prone to viral infections. Many homeless youth are addicted to alcohol and drugs, including intravenous drugs.

It is estimated that about half of the young women on the streets become pregnant at some point. There is anecdotal evidence that more than 300 births a year are to homeless young women in Toronto. More than 10% of these babies do not survive. Many end up in the care of child protection agencies.

There are increasing numbers of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth, and immigrant and Aboriginal youth. More than 50% of youth come from outside Toronto.³⁴ They may be looking for work, or they may have moved to Toronto from small towns because of services. Several surveys of homeless youth in Toronto have found that a high percentage have not completed high school. For example, a survey of homeless youth conducted by the Shout Clinic in 1997 found that 63% had not completed Grade 12.³⁵ Another survey of squeegee kids in Toronto found that most were homeless and wanted to work, but 88% had not completed high

³² City of Toronto. *The Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2001*, p.3.

³³ City of Toronto, *The Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2001*, p.5.

³⁴ Report of the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force. 1999. *Taking Responsibility for Homelessness, An Action Plan for Toronto*, p. 57.

³⁵ City of Toronto, *Toronto Youth Profile, Volume 1*, p. 24, 1999. Another survey of street youth carried out by the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto in 1998 found that 73% of them had not completed high school.

school.³⁶

Some homeless youth survive by couch surfing and staying with friends for short periods of time. Others may use the shelter system and may move from one shelter to the next. Youth are staying in shelters for longer periods because they are not easily absorbed into the existing housing. Increasing numbers of homeless youth are not using the shelter system. They sleep in parks, under bridges, in bus shelters, abandoned buildings and doorways. In some cases, this may be because most shelters do not accommodate couples or pets. Increasing numbers of youth are using Out of the Cold programs³⁷. Youth often use the drop-in centres.

Legislative changes that have made it more difficult for 16 and 17 year olds to access income assistance have forced many youth to turn to illegal sources of income, such as petty drug running. They are often forced into prostitution or exchanging sex for shelter. It is believed that homeless youth generally do not live long if they remain on the streets. They get sick often, have a good chance of experiencing violence, and have a high suicide rate.

b) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

The following are some recent initiatives targeted to address the needs of homeless youth in Toronto:

- New Housing for Native Youth – Native Child and Family Services of Toronto was funded to develop transitional housing for 10 Aboriginal youth ages 16-24.
- Youth Outreach Toronto program – provides services to youth in hostels, drop-in centres, malls, on the street and in parks. Staff act as case managers to assist youth in linking with appropriate services in the community (e.g. employment, skills development, education, and training).
- YouthLink Inner City Drop-in and Evergreen Centre Drop-in - provide an array of services to assist the street youth population, including outreach services.
- Toronto Youth Job Corps – is a five month holistic pre-employment preparation program. The model provides a five week experience in a community project painting the facilities of non-profit organizations. Youth also participate in life skills workshops, computer skills development, career planning and assessment. Youth are then placed with employers with a subsidy and both youth and the employer receive ongoing support. Youth are paid throughout their participation in the program.
- Squeegee Working Youth Mobilization program (SWYM) – targets the unmet and complex needs of street-involved youth, to provide them with an alternative to the squeegee trade. The main feature of this 10-week program is that it uses a harm reduction model. The program assists with basic needs (such as housing, food and health care), is a first step in helping youth stabilize their lives, and includes activities to increase employability. The second stage of the program connects the youth to employment skills development programs, jobs, and further education. There are several different programs, including building and repairing bicycles, woodworking, and a digital high tech module. Youth are paid throughout their participation in the program. In 2000, 140 youth took part in the program. Of these, 61% completed it. In addition, a number of youth who did not formally graduate went on to full

³⁶ Pollock 1998. P.5. (See attached annotated bibliography).

³⁷ City of Toronto, *The Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2001*. Out of the Cold is a volunteer-operated interfaith initiative that provides overnight accommodation and meals for homeless people in winter.

time employment, other training opportunities, or drug and alcohol treatment.³⁸

- Eva's Phoenix – is a transitional shelter and employment facility for youth. Eva's Phoenix works with 50 youth at one time in a combined employment and life skills program. Basic needs for food and shelter are met while the youth participate in employment programs. Homeless youth were trained by construction crews to help build the facility. Youth can remain at Eva's Phoenix for up to one year. There are 10 houses each accommodating 5 youth in shared accommodation.
- KYTES and SKETCH – are two programs serving street youth that are focussed on the arts. Both provide stabilization support towards employment readiness. KYTES combines life skills, education, and theatre over a six month period. The youth write and act in a drama for and by youth. The themes are usually related to homelessness and their causes. SKETCH is a visual arts program. Youth are encouraged to express themselves through a variety of mediums.
- All-Aboard-Youth Ventures – runs a restaurant called “River”. The food is very trendy and up scale. Patrons may not know that it is not a regular restaurant. A qualified chef trains the youth in all aspects of food preparation, and youth are hired on as long as they need to gain the skills that will make them competitive in the field.
- Eva's Satellite – is a 40-bed alternate shelter for 16-24 year olds targeted to youth who would not normally use the shelter system.
- Young Parents, No Fixed Address – this working group of agencies was established to address the urgent problems of Toronto's growing number of vulnerable young families. This group has funding for a demonstration project to provide overnight respite care for young parents without family support.
- The Shout Clinic – is a health clinic in Toronto that provides services for street youth up to the age of 25 years old.

To address the needs of homeless youth, it is important to recognize that they are a diverse group. Some are couples, some have children, some need support, and some don't. It has been suggested that the following programs and services be considered in developing an overall strategy:

- Social assistance eligibility for 16 and 17 year olds;
- A full range of housing alternatives including housing that provides support services such as counseling, information on tenants' rights and responsibilities, lifeskills training, and help with substance use and mental health issues;
- Access to alternative education programs;
- Pre-employment training for homeless youth (currently being addressed by a variety of programs including SWYM);
- Expansion of the City's role in encouraging the private sector to hire youth who are job-ready graduates of training programs;
- Access to mental health assessment and related services;
- Support to teenage parents before and after the birth of their children; and
- Access to increased spaces for residential treatment for substance use.

It was noted that the emphasis should be on prevention and helping youth to move off the streets. In addition, it has been recommended that a strategy to address youth homelessness should include the types of services noted below. Many of these are currently being provided in Toronto.³⁹

³⁸ City of Toronto, *The Toronto Report Card on Homelessness 2001*p. 36.

³⁹ Pollock 1998. (See attached annotated bibliography).

- Youth shelters – can be a first step to help youth stabilize and begin to address the issues that drove them to the streets.
- A full range of street outreach and prevention programs – help youth connect to other resources such as drop-ins and shelters. Outreach can also divert newly homeless youth off the streets, help youth on the streets to survive, connect longer term youth to other services, and help formerly homeless youth to maintain their housing. There is also a need for specialized outreach targeted to specific populations such as youth involved in the sex trade.
- Drop-in centres – help youth stabilize and stay off the streets once they find housing. Can help connect youth to a range of supports including income, housing and employment.
- Pre-employment strategies for chronically homeless youth – must address the causes of the individual’s homelessness and help youth to stabilize.
- Transitional or second stage housing – can help youth develop a range of skills necessary to find and keep housing and employment.
- Child welfare initiatives - are needed to ensure that the necessary resources are in place to strengthen the capacity of families to support youth and help prevent homelessness. 16 year olds leaving care must have the resources to live in communities and not “graduate to the streets”.
- Education - it is important to find ways to help youth remain in school. Schools need to identify and intervene with “at risk” youth in order to prevent homelessness and support programs and services essential to the education of homeless youth.

5.2 Ottawa

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Youth homelessness has been identified as a top priority in Ottawa. Key informants estimate that more than 500 youth were served in emergency shelters in 2000. In addition, the Youth Services Bureau assessed 3000 youth to be at risk of homelessness or to be unsuitably housed. A significant number of homeless youth have mental health issues. The population also includes gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth, and a significant number of pregnant and parenting youth. Many youth have addiction issues, and there are increasing numbers of immigrant youth.

Interviews with male youth (16-19 years old) and female youth (14-20 years old) in a shelter provided the following information:⁴⁰

Males	Females
Past experience of homelessness Average number of times homeless=4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9% 1 time • 80% 2-5 times • 11% 6 or more times 	Past experience of homelessness Average number of times homeless=4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19% 1 time • 50% 2-5 times • 31% 6 or more times

⁴⁰ Farrell, Sue, Tim Aubry, Fran Klodawsky and Donna Pettey. *Describing the Homeless Population of Ottawa-Carleton – Fact Sheets of Selected Findings*. University of Ottawa.

Males	Females
Length of time homeless Average number of days homeless =65 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 52% homeless less than 1 month • 25% homeless 1-3 months • 7% homeless 3-12 months • 2% homeless more than 1 year 	Length of time homeless Average number of days homeless =54 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 86% homeless less than 1 month • 5% homeless 1-3 months • 6% homeless 3-12 months • 3% homeless more than 1 year
Cultural background 93% Canadian citizens 18% Aboriginal 82% born in Canada	Cultural background 86% Canadian citizens 19% Aboriginal 78% born in Canada
Income and/or Employment (Could report more than one sources) 48% social assistance 23% money from family 5% no income 59% occasional employment income	Income and/or Employment (Could report more than one sources) 36% social assistance 3% money from family 44% no income 11% occasional employment income
Education 90% have not graduated from high school 8% are currently enrolled in school 14% have completed grade 8 or less	Education 86% have not graduated from high school 14% are currently enrolled in school 11% have completed grade 8 or less
Key reasons for currently being homeless 23% reported “transient lifestyle” 18% eviction 11% parental abuse 7% kicked out by parents 7% relationship problems	Key reasons for currently being homeless 11% reported “transient lifestyle” 14% eviction 25% parental abuse 13% new to the city 7% from psychiatric treatment
Substance use issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36% reported problems due to current or past alcohol use • 57% reported problems due to current or past drug use 	Substance use issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31% reported problems due to current or past alcohol use • 47% reported problems due to current or past drug use
Drugs used most often (Based on 82% reporting drug use) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 71% marijuana • 5% cocaine • 7% acid • 2% crack 	Drugs used most often (Based on 56% reporting drug use) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 44% marijuana • 3% cocaine • 6% acid • 3% amphetamine
Mental health issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27% reported experiencing mental health problems in the past year • 18% reported being given a psychiatric diagnosis in the past year • 56% identified with a diagnosable mental health problem (based on a self-report screening tool) 	Mental health issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 44% reported experiencing mental health problems in the past year • 28% reported being given a psychiatric diagnosis in the past year • 61% identified with a diagnosable mental health problem (based on a self-report screening tool)

Key informants advise that the number of homeless youth in Ottawa is increasing. There has also been a dramatic increase in the length of time youth are staying in shelters. For example, the Youth Services Bureau reports that the average length of stay increased from 8 days in 1999 to 18 days in 2000. Young people are spending more time on the streets, and their health is deteriorating. Youth are often ill. The shelters are also seeing an increase in the number of young women with mental health issues.

Drug use in Ottawa is prevalent, and there has been a change in the types of drugs being used. Youth used to use mostly alcohol and marijuana. However, there is increasing intravenous drug use, crack, speed, and ecstasy. There are not enough addiction treatment facilities. There is only 1 centre for youth under 19 in Ottawa, and it has a long waiting list.

Youth who do not use the shelters may couch surf, or sometimes, one person finds a place to live and all the friends move in. Other youth, particularly those who have pets, sleep outside. Food is obtained from food banks, drop-in centres and soup kitchens. Some homeless youth are involved in the sex trade, but there is very little information on the number of homeless youth involved.

b) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

There are two emergency shelters available for youth in Ottawa. The Salvation Army Young Men's Shelter, Booth Centre provides 24 beds for 16-19 year old males. The Youth Services Bureau provides 12 shelter beds for women ages 12-20. They also provide 5 beds in a cooperative living transition residence where youth may remain for three months. The focus here is on lifeskills and building a safety net in the community. In addition, the Youth Services Bureau provides 43 units of non-profit housing for youth.

Service providers in Ottawa have identified a need for a continuum of housing and support services that includes more permanent and supportive housing options. Support was also expressed for transition housing where youth could benefit from lifeskills training and other support services. However, concern was expressed that youth need to be able to remain in transition houses long enough to achieve stability and it was noted that there could be a bottleneck unless more permanent housing options are available for youth after the period of transition. The need has also been identified for more mental health support and addictions treatment for youth.

In February, 2001 over \$8 million (from the federal, provincial and municipal governments) was announced for 44 groups in Ottawa for projects that aim to address homelessness. The following initiatives are targeted to homeless youth:

- Youth Services Bureau – to renovate property to create 13 transitional apartments to house 22 homeless youth (fall 2001 is the target date for completion); maintain a housing registry and develop a network of 8 host homes to provide either respite or long-term housing for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and questioning youth; and to coordinate all partners to plan and develop solutions that address the housing shortage for youth aged 16-20.
- Canadian Mental Health Association – to provide outreach services to youth and adults with mental illness who are at risk of becoming homeless.
- Housing Help – to provide support services to help youth search for, secure and keep permanent housing.
- Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa – to help homeless youth access recreation programs.
- Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services Centre and Somerset West Community Health Centre - In collaboration with family shelters, to provide educational, recreational and support activities to children and youth living in shelters and to support youth as they move to permanent housing.

5.3 Hamilton

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Youth homelessness has been identified as a growing issue in Hamilton. It has become much more visible since 1995. There are 20 emergency shelter beds for youth and in 2000, the beds were always full. Almost 15,000 youth used the drop-in centres for youth. Homeless youth include those with mental health issues, addictions, pregnant females, youth released from correctional institutions, immigrants and Aboriginal youth. Many youth, particularly males, have Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) issues and problems in school. Their health is poor, and yet youth are generally afraid of going to the doctor.

The number of homeless youth in Hamilton is increasing. They are also becoming increasingly visible, on the streets and in shopping malls. Addictions issues are also becoming worse. Increasing numbers of youth have mental health issues or learning disabilities. Most youth do not have specific diagnoses because they are still too young.

Youth may access meals served by the shelters, which can serve dinner to 80 people in one evening. Drop-in centres also provide meals. Youth generally use the shelters, however, there are not enough beds. Youth who can't access a shelter bed generally go from friend to friend. If one person finds a place, everyone moves in. Some youth sleep outside. Some have arrangements with extended families for a few weeks. It is very difficult for youth to keep track of their clothing and medication, and most find it difficult to attend school. Many youth burn their bridges along the way. The length of time youth are homeless varies. A small group is continually homeless. They may move from shelter to shelter or in and out of jail. Both males and females engage in prostitution to earn money.

b) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

There are two facilities for homeless youth in Hamilton. Both of these are owned and operated by the Good Shepherd Centre. Brennan House is a 14-bed co-ed residence, established in 1991, for homeless youth between the ages of 16 and 20. A 15th bed is available for emergencies. The goal of Brennan House is to prepare its residents for independent living in the community. Services include 24 hour a day staff and volunteer support, assignment to a staff counsellor, counselling, life and social skills training, and ongoing support after leaving Brennan House. The average length of stay is 8 months. The longest a person has stayed is 2.5 years.

Notre Dame House is the only emergency shelter targeted to homeless youth in Hamilton. It provides 20 beds, 11 for males and 9 for females. There is a maximum stay of 6 weeks. Notre Dame House is believed to be an effective model for an emergency shelter because it provides "one-stop shopping" for youth. In the past, youth were referred to numerous community agencies at various locations throughout the city. This is no longer necessary. Notre Dame House has invited community organizations to provide their services within the structure of the House, which makes it possible for youth to access a variety of services in one location.

Case managers at Notre Dame House work with youth to help the youth determine a plan and set goals that will enable the youth to leave the street life and move to an appropriate and safe environment. Case managers will assist youth in obtaining necessary identification and documents and will help youth with referrals for counselling, rehabilitation, education or medical services. They also assist in monitoring medications, help youth apply for income assistance (if

eligible) or encourage them to seek employment or job training programs. Case managers may also assist youth in reconciling conflict within the home, if it is possible for the youth to return to their family.

Notre Dame House also provides laundry and shower facilities, two hot meals every day to both residents and drop-in youth, and a school program for 25 students at any one time.

The Living Rock is another service in Hamilton that provides support to street involved youth. The basic services are meals and a drop in centre. In 1999, 4,700 meals were served and the centre was visited by 35 youth/day on average (the centre was open part time). Additional supports include job readiness preparation, volunteer work and community placements required to qualify for Social Assistance, as well as training that will result in a reference for an employer. Life skills, personal hygiene and anger management are also provided. Assistance is provided to help participants find and maintain housing. Living Rock strongly supports a peer support approach to developing these skills with youth. It also connects church and other community groups with homeless youth through a sponsorship program. The sponsorship provides material support to street involved youth. The centre has been running for 14 years, and began initially on a volunteer basis. They have recently applied for and received funding to support the development of sponsorships, training of peer counsellors, collaboration with John Howard Society to provide a youth positive reception to people who are discharged from the detention centre, and the evaluation of their services.

Key informants in Hamilton identified a need for semi-independent living or supportive housing for youth. Concerns have also been expressed about increasing poverty among youth and school policies that make it difficult for homeless youth to attend school.

5.4 Peel

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Service agencies in Peel have identified youth homelessness as a major concern. The Region's 12-bed emergency youth shelter is generally full, and a total of 395 youth were served in 1999/2000. For half of these youth, the primary reason for needing shelter was serious family conflict. Mental health issues and addictions have been noted as issues facing the homeless youth and there are significant numbers of pregnant females. As many as 250 youth were turned away from the youth shelter in 1999/2000, and it is believed that youth homelessness is growing in Peel.

b) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

A variety of agencies in Peel are involved in providing services to youth. These include (but are not limited to):

- Peel Children's Aid Society - provides services to families with children under age 16;
- Canadian Mental Health Association – One of its programs, Youth Net provides an alternative mental health promotion/early intervention program run “by youth, for youth”;
- Nexus Youth Services - non-for profit youth counselling agency for 12-24 year olds;
- John Howard Society - helps young offenders that are expected to be released from custody and require shelter;
- Heart Touching Heart Ministries - provides a youth drop-in centre for marginalized youth

aged 13-19;

- William Osler Health Centre, Child and Adolescent Clinic – provides psychiatric services for children and youth up to 18 years who are experiencing significant impairments in emotional, behavioural, social and academic functioning that may be due to an underlying disorder;
- YMCA – Youth Substance Abuse Program – serves youth 14-24 experiencing issues with substance abuse;
- Our Place Peel – operates a 12-bed emergency shelter and a residential program for up to six socially and economically disadvantaged youth aged 16-21; and
- Rapport Youth and Family Counselling of Peel Inc. – Provides a range of individual and family counselling for youth 12 to 20 years old.

Gaps in services have been identified as follows:

- There is a lack of services for some youth, including youth with dual diagnoses, youth not in care, youth who are not connected to any system, and youth who are actively suicidal.
- Agencies are not able to serve non-compliant youth.
- There are gaps in services for youth in different age brackets, e.g. 16-18 and 12-16.
- There is a need for better networking among agencies.
- Intake processes may be a barrier to youth needing services.
- More outreach services are needed.
- Agencies need to be able to maintain contact with clients for ongoing follow-up.
- Many agencies are unable to offer treatment or hard services including food, clothing, shelter or crisis intervention.
- There are not enough resources in the community.

The Region of Peel established a Task Force on Homeless Youth in February 2000 to develop strategies to address the issue of homeless youth. The most significant need identified by the Task Force was for an increased range of housing and shelter options, and the Task Force has developed a proposal for a project called Peel Youth Village.

It is proposed that the Peel Youth Village will include a continuum of housing options including:

- Emergency short-term shelter beds to get youth off the street and connect them with agencies and services;
- Transitional housing for longer stays, with appropriate support for young people to stabilize their lives, develop improved lifeskills, and address issues that reduce their ability to access and maintain suitable housing
- Independent living for young people who are able to live independently most of the time, accessing support only occasionally as they move on with education or employment.

It is anticipated that a major focus of the facility will be to assist youth with lifeskills, skill development, opportunities for personal and artistic expression, and employment opportunities. In addition, opportunities will be provided for youth to address a variety of issues related to physical and mental health, substance use, physical and sexual abuse, and personal safety.

6. The Prairies

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Across the Prairie Provinces, more youth are homeless now than a decade ago, and they tend to be more visible, panhandling in the downtown cores and occasionally squeegeeing in certain areas. Couch surfing is a common trend among homeless youth who move from friend to friend, occasionally staying in a shelter or with relatives. Many 16 to 18 year olds are caught in a financial gap between the provision of services by child welfare authorities (which often ends at age 16), and social assistance, which in some provinces cannot be accessed until age 18.

Workers are seeing more youth using drugs and more youth with mental health problems. At times drugs are used to mask the symptoms of mental health problems (from depression to schizophrenia to the affects of fetal alcohol syndrome). The availability and relative affordability of crack cocaine has changed the nature of addictions over the past decade. However other drugs such as ecstasy, heroin, marijuana, and combinations of prescription drugs are also used. A few youth sniff glue or petrol.

Aboriginal youth are over-represented among the homeless in all three provinces, particularly in urban centres in the north (Edmonton, Prince Albert, Saskatoon and Winnipeg). Youth and their parents may both have been victims of physical or sexual abuse and/or their families may have been dislocated by the residential school system. Some have moved from reserves to the city, where they are unaccustomed to city life and unaware of services available to them. Aboriginal youth are more likely to avoid shelters because of discrimination from shelter workers or other youth and instead they “camp-out” with family or friends. They are more likely to maintain contact with their immediate and extended families than are Caucasian youth. Many have experienced the child welfare system.

Some gay and lesbian youth end up on the street, rejected by their families because of their sexual orientation. They too fear discrimination in some shelters. Youth in general tend to avoid the adult shelters, feeling unsafe in the proximity of adults with mental health problems or large warehouse settings.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

The extent of youth homelessness varies from city to city but the causes remain essentially the same—histories of physical, sexual or emotional abuse, conflicts with parents and unstable homes where substance abuse is common and parents may not have sufficient parenting skills. Many youth have had experience with the child welfare system, either in foster care or group homes.

Survival sex is a strategy used by some youth, particularly young women, to access accommodation, often with a series of men. Prostitution is also common, especially with those who have become drug users. Health problems such as malnutrition, STDs, including HIV/AIDS, and hepatitis C are on the rise and these are exacerbated by work in the sex trade. Many young women on the street become pregnant, often losing their children to child welfare services or struggling to bring them up on their own.

Youth on the street may be involved in crime, particularly those who are heavily addicted to drugs or involved in prostitution. On the street, they too are more vulnerable to crime-- sexual

and physical assault as well as theft of their belongings.⁴¹

6.1 Alberta

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Homeless counts have been undertaken in both Calgary and Edmonton in the recent period, confirming that there are homeless youth in both cities, although estimates of the number of homeless youth are generally higher than the snapshot counts. Trends include a large and increasing proportion of youth with mental illness and addiction issues.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

In Alberta, services for youth are differentiated according to whether or not a youth is under the care of Alberta Child and Family Services (youth with status). As of June 2000, 1700 youth (up to the age of 20) were in care in the Calgary Rocky View region, the majority of whom were living in Calgary or Edmonton, some of them on the street. 44% were over the age of 14. 40% of these youth were Aboriginal although in Edmonton only 6% and in Calgary only 4% of the general population is Aboriginal.

Care is usually terminated at the age of 18 (although it can be extended until age 20). There is concern among many social service workers that this population is in danger of “graduating to the streets” since there is little available in the way of transitional housing or support services. Only 110 of the 1700 from Calgary Rocky View were receiving extension care past the age of 18.

In most Alberta families, it is commonplace for youth to live at home and/or receive family supports well into the 20s. For youth “in care”, where the Alberta government acts as “parent”, supports are usually provided up until the age of 18. Alberta can provide extension care up to 20 but it rarely does and some youth chose to leave care at 16. This is seen by youth as a contradiction, as these youth “at risk” often have higher needs, less education, fewer positive role models, and/or have fewer life skills than youth of similar age.⁴²

In 1993, the province ceased the provision of financial assistance to youth under the age of 18 unless they were under the care of Child and Family Services (CFS). Youth who leave home at 16, and seek welfare are told that the already over-burdened Child and Family Services must assess them. In order to be placed under the care of CFS, youth must be considered to be “at risk” and often homelessness is not considered in this category. (The only exception to this is the Child in Need funding, which provides \$193 per month for an adult or social service agency who is willing to care for a youth. This may assist a grandparent or relative who is willing to provide accommodation but it is not a common scenario.) In any case, youth at this age usually do not want to enter a group or foster home situation or to be under the care of the province. If they cannot find a job, they are likely to end up on the street.

Thus, for youth 16 to 18 with “no status”, no financial aid is available and even services are limited. As one service provider said, “15, 16, and 17 year olds are deprived of their basic needs”. Even to access food banks, a person must be 18 or else be referred by an agency. Health care and

⁴¹ Clark, Michelle and Merrill Cooper, August 2000 *Homeless Youth: Falling Between the Cracks – An Investigation of Youth Homelessness in Calgary*. For the Youth Alternative Housing Committee.

⁴² Alberta Youth Secretariat 2000 *Priority Issues for Youth*. Alberta Government. p. 5.

drug benefits are also difficult to access since 16 to 18 year olds are not eligible for their own health cards. Shelter beds are usually differentiated according to the Child Welfare status of the youth. For “non-status” youth, the number of beds in the shelter system is limited, as is the number of group home beds and even some youth programs.

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

The Youth Secretariat, housed in the Alberta Ministry of Children’s Services, was formed in 1999 to identify and help address issues impacting youth 13-21 seen to be at risk. The Secretariat held six youth forums in urban centres around the province in the fall of 2000. Transitional services for youth leaving Child Welfare and financial aid for non-status youth 16 to 18 were identified as priority areas. At the Edmonton forum, homelessness was identified as a major problem by the youth who attended. Homelessness among rural youth was also discussed--rural youth stay with friends, or live in garages or outbuildings on farms and are a largely invisible population.

New provincial legislation covering the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution (PCIP) program has been somewhat controversial. Under the program, youth up to the age of 18 suspected of engaging in prostitution may be apprehended by the police and taken to a safe house for up to 5 days. Here they will be provided with food and shelter, assessed and offered an array of counseling and follow up services including transitional housing. From April 1 to Sept. 30, 2000, 68 youth were apprehended under the program, 13 on more than one occasion.

The police and many social service agencies feel that the program is working well; that many young women who were very hard to reach have now accessed services and are remaining off the streets. They also see it as very effective in reaching young women who are new to the streets and not yet connected with pimps or gangs. The program also stresses that youth involved in the sex trade are victims and that this is not a “lifestyle choice”.

Other workers fear that pimps are forcing younger women to go underground. Kept off the street and using cell phones and pagers to connect with pimps and johns, they cannot access street outreach services or health care. Some social service providers see the forced confinement of youth in PCIP safe houses as a violation of their human rights. The initial legislation has now been amended to require that youth be informed of their right to request legal counsel and to obtain a hearing within 24 hours. Monitoring and evaluation of the program will be critical, as Ontario and British Columbia are considering the implementation of similar legislation.

6.1.1 Edmonton

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

The March, 2000 count of homeless persons in Edmonton identified 1125 homeless people, 40% of whom were Aboriginal, many from rural areas. 115 of the homeless were youth.⁴³

The Youth Emergency Shelter, which served 640 youth from July 1999 to June 2000, noted an increase in the number of youth with mental health problems as well as those with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. The majority of the youth they see use drugs or alcohol and over 50% have been involved with the justice system. Nearly 75% have been physically, sexually or emotionally abused. Since there are few transitional or long-term housing options for youth, they tend to stay

⁴³ Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing. November 2000. *Edmonton Community Plan on Homelessness 2000-2003*. p. 63.

in the shelters for longer periods.

b) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

There are a variety of services for homeless youth in the downtown core of Edmonton. Many gravitate to the vicinity of the Boyle Street Coop which offers among other programs: an alternative school, counseling services for Aboriginal youth, a youth mental health worker, a clinic and a drop-in centre. The Bissell Centre also provides a number of programs including a Fetal Alcohol Prevention Program and emergency day-care. Inner City Youth Housing, which is a joint venture between a number of inner city agencies, operates six houses, with 27 emergency and long-term beds for youth between 12 and 18. In Edmonton, there are currently a total of 88 emergency beds for youth (including 20 for children under 12 under the provincial child welfare authority) and 56 transitional beds.

The report of the Edmonton Joint Planning Committee on Housing documents the need for subsidized housing. Given the market costs of construction; there is an affordability gap even for rooming houses. The vacancy rate in 1998 was 1.9%.

The "Edmonton Community Plan on Homelessness 2000-2003" identified the need for at least 5000 additional units of affordable housing as well as a continuum of emergency, transitional and long-term supportive housing. The plan proposes 25 units of emergency accommodation for youth, as well as 20 units of transitional housing for youth, 10 for Aboriginal youth and 10 for pregnant youth (5 for Aboriginal youth).

6.1.2 Calgary

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

The City of Calgary and the Calgary Homeless Foundation have initiated or supported a number of consultations and studies on homeless youth (see References). The Calgary Homelessness Foundation estimates that approximately 600 youth are homeless. On May 17, 2000, the City carried out a one-night count of people using shelters and on the downtown streets. 1,296 individuals were counted including 265 (20%) youth between the ages of 13 and 24.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

Youth who reach the age of 18 may be eligible to receive \$402 in social assistance (although the criteria are stringent). However the minimum rate for a room is \$300 and the average rate is \$350. There is a two-year wait for subsidized housing and a vacancy rate on the private market of less than 1%.

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

Calgary has only 23 beds (both transitional and emergency) for street youth without Child Welfare status and there is also a shortage of foster care space for those with status. As in Edmonton, there is a need for a variety of transitional housing models to bridge the gap between shelters and independent living for non-status youth under 18 as well as youth over the age of 18. Specific housing models are also needed for youth with mental health problems, those involved with the law, and youth who have been involved in prostitution.

Wood's Homes offers a variety of services including the Exit drop-in centre, a 15-bed shelter for

youth with and without status, and a protective safe house under the PCIP program. Exit operates from a storefront in the downtown area, providing food, laundry facilities, phones, referrals to medical and dental services, employment and training placement, and counsellors. A mobile van operates in the evenings and provides referrals, condoms, and bad date sheets.

The Youth Alternative Committee of the Calgary Homeless Foundation has supported Hope Homes in the provision of a room and board program for non-status youth who want to continue their schooling. There are also a few beds for youth who are at risk of prostitution as well as pregnant and parenting teens. But apart from these programs there are no long-term non-specialized housing programs for youth under 24. Several staff stressed the need for more transitional housing with live-in staff, to provide a more home-like atmosphere. As well, more outreach services, prevention programs and family mediation programs are needed to support youth who are still at home. Increased financial support to youth 16 and up, and a range of subsidized housing were also recommended.

In Calgary, service providers identified the need for drug and alcohol treatment centres for youth, particularly residential centres. The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) has 10 community based home placements in Calgary for youth coming from out of town but these do not serve homeless youth.

The City of Calgary has a community neighbourhood services division, which works with Aboriginal youth on issues of concern to them. There are approximately 25,000 Aboriginal people in Calgary, about 4% of the population. Half are under the age of 24. The youth involved in the city initiative identify racism and discrimination as their number one issue, with bullying in schools, homeless and poverty following closely as priority issues. They suggest that an Aboriginal youth centre which is safe and alcohol free should be established.

One Calgary study surveyed 104 homeless youth to find out their perspectives and asked them to describe the kind of service they would choose.

Younger participants spoke of a residence for youth of both sexes without child welfare status, to which youth could self-refer. The residence should be centrally located, on transit routes. Length of stay should be unlimited and the environment should be strongly anti-racist and anti-homophobic. These people wanted a structured but non-institutional setting, accommodating youth of similar ages, with paid staff counselors. It was emphasized that staff should either have “lived in our shoes” or been exposed to “street-involved” lifestyles. ...The older focus group participants sought subsidized rental units in an apartment complex.⁴⁴

6.2 Saskatchewan

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

One study in Saskatoon identified between 200-350 street youth and runaways and estimates for Regina indicate similar numbers.⁴⁵ There are approximately 400 emergency beds available in the province, but none specifically for homeless youth, and often all of the available beds are full.

⁴⁴ Clarke and Cooper, *op.cit.* 2000. p 34.

⁴⁵ Saskatchewan Housing Corporation. March 15, 2000. *The Face of Homelessness in Saskatchewan*. Sask. Housing Corp.

Aboriginal people make up 12 to 14 % of the provincial population, forming the majority in the north where one-third of the housing stock is said to be in need of repair. 83% have incomes less than \$20,000 and the unemployment rate (24%) is nearly five times the provincial average, putting Aboriginal people at greater risk of homelessness.⁴⁶ The majority of street youth in Saskatoon are Aboriginal and 60% are females.⁴⁷

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

Lack of affordable housing and over-crowding, particularly in the northern part of the province, has been an on-going problem. In September 1999, there were 486 people on the waiting list for subsidized housing in the northern area above Prince Albert, 600 in Saskatoon and 300 in Regina. Homelessness in the north often takes the form of “camping out” at relatives and friends and traveling between reserve areas and urban centres.

Drug abuse does not seem to be as great a problem as it is in other prairie provinces. While there is some cocaine use in Saskatchewan, the use of marijuana and prescription drugs was said to be more common. There is little gang activity in the province, which may be a factor in the type and degree of drug use.

In Saskatchewan it is possible to receive social assistance at 16 through an approved room and board program (approved by social services).

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

In Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Regina and Prince Albert have formed Planning Committees on Homelessness; however, these groups are still in the process of completing their plans and quantifying the extent of homelessness in each city.

6.2.1 Saskatoon

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

A study in Saskatoon identified between 200-350 street youth and runaways and estimates for Regina indicate similar numbers.⁴⁸ In Saskatoon, the vacancy rate is extremely low and the housing that is available is often in poor condition. Landlords often discriminate against Aboriginal youth, especially Aboriginal youth on social assistance.

b) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

EGADZ is a drop-in for youth in Saskatoon, offering a wide variety of services. While they do not see a large number of youth who are absolutely homeless, there are many with "no fixed address" who survive by couch surfing or through survival sex. Others end up incarcerated because they have nowhere to go. The vast majority of their youth (80-85%) are Aboriginal, many of who are raising their younger siblings as well as trying to cope themselves. Many young women have children and most raise their children on their own.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Steering Committee on Street Youth, 1999. The Community Response to Street Youth and Runaways in Saskatoon.

⁴⁸ Saskatchewan Housing Corporation. March 15, 2000.

In addition to the drop-in, the centre offers day support for youth not in school or those who are jeopardy of loosing their school placements, a pre-employment training program (which pays \$730 per month) work placements, a teen-parenting program, showers, laundry and clothing donations. They reach youth through a street outreach program, which also connects with youth in the court system. For those in need of addiction treatment, EGADZ will provide transportation to the program, (since treatment programs are located in various parts of the province) maintain contact with the youth during the program and pick them up at the end. Most youth prefer a holistic approach to treatment, which they can obtain in some of the Aboriginal treatment centres. In 1999, 77 EGADZ youth were supported to attend treatment.

A continuum of services is needed including preventative programs in the schools, parenting programs in the high schools, recreation centres, additional shelter beds for youth, transitional housing, affordable housing, and addiction treatment centres for youth. The report by the Steering Committee on Street Youth emphasizes the need to recognize the historical, cultural and social histories of street youth

6.2.2 Regina

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Regina also suffers from a lack of good-quality affordable housing. There is no specific youth shelter in the city and many youth couch surf. Those who access the shelters use either the Salvation Army or the YWCA.

Rainbow Youth Services offers a variety of programs for 12 to 25 year olds, the majority of whom are Aboriginal. Through their drop-in, recreation facilities, supper club, employment training, young parent group, and outreach, they see approximately 80 youth per day and have regular contact with about 150 youth per month. One of their groups operates on a peer- helping model. The group will decide on a topic they want to investigate, for example gangs, child prostitution or health issues. They then research the topic and develop a presentation, which may be in the form of theatre or another medium. Some of the groups have presented their findings in schools and traveled to different parts of the province to educate other youth.

b) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

Rainbow sees a strong connection between child abuse or violence at home and violence in dating relationships. They stressed the need for more preventative work in this area.

Almost 98% of their teens either use drugs and alcohol or witness substance abuse. Some day-treatment facilities are available but often it is costly to enter a residential program and either social services or a Band must pay. Ranch Erhlo, in Regina, is one of the few residential treatment centres that address solvent abuse.

6.3 Manitoba

6.3.1 Winnipeg

The Winnipeg Housing and Homeless Initiative (WHHI) was created by the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government in May 2000 and it is through this agency that Supporting Community Partnership Initiative (SCPI) funds will flow. The approach of WHHI is to work with communities, particularly inner-city communities, to address local issues of housing and homelessness. The focus is on community-based organizations, bringing in social service

agencies, non-profit organizations and the private sector.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

Housing supply is not as great a problem as in other urban areas, but rather the deteriorating condition of the housing stock means that what is available on the rental market is often substandard. Many inner city neighbourhoods have vacant lots and boarded up houses. Infill housing has been proposed in these areas and community economic development models using “youth builders” and community construction are encouraged. A provincial initiative “Neighbourhoods Alive” is aimed at the revitalization of neighbourhoods through community participation and housing upgrading, while the municipality has allocated a \$7 million dollar Housing Investment Reserve Fund for three areas of the city with poor quality housing stock.

Service providers said that crack has hit Winnipeg with a vengeance in the past few years and it has affected families who were previously doing well. The drug trade has contributed to the deterioration of some neighbourhoods and child neglect, crime and prostitution have been on the increase. Gangs are involved in controlling much of the sex trade as well as the drug market.

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

There are a variety of services for homeless youth in Winnipeg including alternative schools, street outreach programs, drop-ins, and transitional housing. An addiction treatment centre for youth has recently been opened in Portage-la-Prairie, a city about 90 km. from Winnipeg. Transitional Education and Resources for Females (TERF), a program for women who are making the transition from prostitution back into the community, incorporates academic and cultural studies as well as communication skills and counseling. Aboriginal services such as Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad offer some emergency and transitional beds for youth and there are shelters and drop-ins for Aboriginal women.

Rosbrook House offers a drop-in to youth aged 6 to 24, many of whom are at risk of homelessness because home may not always be a safe place. It is open every night of the year, from 8 a.m. to midnight weekdays and 24 hours on weekends and holidays. Youth can spend the night when home is not safe or if they are between relatives or friends. In addition, the centre offers recreation, food, alternative elementary, junior and senior high school programs, employment programs, an after-school program with supper and a young mother’s program. In the evenings, youth up to the age of 17 are offered a drive home to ensure that they get there safely and that there is someone home. The majority of users are from the Aboriginal population although immigrant and Caucasian youth also frequent the centre.

The “Youth Builders” program offers youth who have experienced homelessness a year-long training program, which includes a school component as well as training in construction skills. The first such project involved the renovation of a house to create nine units of space for street youth attending the Gordon Bell High School. The current program will renovate four houses for a transitional housing project in the West Broadway area.

Service providers emphasized the need for a more co-ordinated continuum of care with more support for youth. Although youth 16 to 18 can access social assistance under the Independent Living program, there are few support services available for this age group. There is also a shortage of foster homes for youth in care and many Child and Family Service staff have very large caseloads, and are only able to offer limited support to their clients. Social service staff suggested that much more transitional housing is needed as well as more emergency beds for

youth.

7. British Columbia

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

While there are no provincial estimates of the homeless youth population in BC, there is a perception that youth homelessness is on the rise and is becoming more visible. Youth tend to congregate in urban centres such as the Lower Mainland, Victoria and the Okanagan, particularly youth from native reserves around the province. Some youth are more street entrenched, involved in drugs and the sex trade and may move from centre to centre in the sex trade circuit. In Vancouver, they are more likely to be located in the Downtown Eastside. Others are drifting from place to place looking for seasonal jobs. In some places like Kelowna the number of homeless youth increases in summer months. Climate precludes street or literal homelessness in many places in central and northern BC. In these locations, homelessness takes the form of moving or “surfing” from house to house.

Youth survive by becoming involved in the sex trade, ‘spotting’ for sex trade workers and/or selling drugs or carrying out other illegal activities such as shoplifting or theft. Young women often become involved in survival sex, or the exchange of sex for accommodation or food. Couch surfing is common, as there are few sources of emergency or other housing suitable for youth under age 19 years. Youth in Kelowna use the same survival strategies, although venues for sleeping may include camping in orchards and parks.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

Family breakdown is viewed as the predominant factor contributing to youth homelessness, particularly for youth under 19 years of age. High incidences of physical, emotional and sexual abuse are evidence of this. Drug addiction and mental health issues are other factors contributing to homelessness, and there are gaps in the continuum of services for youth at risk. The re-alignment of income assistance benefits with a labor market attachment focus also makes it more difficult to obtain and maintain benefits. The lack of an effective social safety net for families and youth is an important factor as well.

There is concern that the sex trade is becoming more organized, which is evident by more active recruiting and a stronger presence on the street. Youth, particularly young women, are less likely to be able to escape involvement, and the length of time from entering street life to entrenchment is shortening. Providers also feel that the dangers of sexual exploitation are now much greater, due to increased drug use and violence on the streets. Workers in Kelowna are seeing more sexually exploited youth and they note the rise in big city problems like youth homelessness and sexual exploitation are coincident with the completion of the Coquihalla highway in the mid-1980s. Several communities are working to address the sexual exploitation of youth, including Burnaby and Kelowna, as is the provincial government.

Another issue affecting youth who are homeless or at risk is the lack of affordable rental housing, particularly in Vancouver and Victoria where housing costs are high and vacancy rates traditionally low. Even if housing is available, youth experience discrimination from landlords. In addition, the social housing portfolio in BC has generally not targeted youth as a special needs population. Child welfare policies and practices also affect youth that are homeless. Many homeless youth have been involved with the child protection system and had negative

experiences with it and are in fact running away from it. Youth in care who reach age 19 are generally unprepared for independent living, many end up on income assistance, and those who have been involved with the child protection system are at greater risk for homelessness.

Among the gaps identified by informants are culturally relevant services, youth detox, emergency and short-term housing, safe houses, long-term housing, and housing workers to help clients find housing. One respondent noted that the social service sector experiences high worker turnover due to low pay and stressful employment situations.

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

In BC, child welfare is the responsibility of the Ministry for Children and Families (MCF). Youth, defined as age 16 to under 19 years, are eligible to be placed 'in care' and live in a foster or group home, but in practice the child protection response is focused on those under age 16. The Youth Agreement implemented in 1999 provides an alternative to bringing some youth age 16 to 19 into care. They are intended for youth living apart from their families, who are at some degree of risk, but who do not require the full child protection response. The youth enters into the agreement directly with the Ministry (as opposed to the agreement being signed by the parent/guardian). Assistance may include residential, education or other support services and/or financial support. Youth agreements are part of a general MCF recognition that youth need to be treated differently than children. Approximately 125 agreements are in operation at the current time, BC wide. MCF has embarked on a three-year evaluation.

In July of 2000 the BC legislature passed the *Secure Care Act*. Implementation is scheduled to occur in Sept. 2001. This Act creates new options in addressing the needs of youth who are at extreme risk of harm or death due to their own or others behaviors. The *Act* allows for the detention of a limited number of youth who meet specific definitions of 'at extreme risk of harm or death'. An independent Secure Care Board will make the decisions regarding which youth fit the criteria. The proposal has generated much controversy.

The provincial government, including the Ministry for Children and Families and other ministries, are in the process of developing a provincial youth housing strategy and action plan. The goal is to create one consistent plan and for ministries to work together in implementation. The first step, a literature review, is currently underway. Several provincial government departments participate in the Assistant Deputy Ministers' Committee on Prostitution and Sexually Exploited Youth. This committee is currently developing an inter-ministry strategy to address this issue.

In addition, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) is assisting communities and groups around the province with the development of youth homelessness projects under the HRDC Youth Employment Strategy.

Supported housing is generally viewed as a good model for meeting the long-term housing needs of youth, but informants noted that there is a concern with peer influence. To address this issue, the provincial government is currently testing the efficacy of the Supported Independent Living Program (SILP) for youth in Burnaby, Vancouver and Richmond. It consists of 20 units in scattered site apartments with support for youth living with a mental illness.

7.1 Vancouver

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

A recent snapshot⁴⁹ of homeless youth in the Downtown South and West End areas of Vancouver estimated that an average of 205 youth age 25 and under experienced some form of homelessness over the course of two and a half weeks in May 2000. The definition used was “on street some or all of the time”. The snapshot estimated that an average of 25 youth could be found sleeping on the street each night and an additional 25 sleeping in shelter beds. Males comprise 65 percent of street youth age 25 and under and there are proportionately more females among youth under age 19. Forty percent of the youth were age 18 or under. Aboriginal youth represent 15 percent and in the summer months, Quebecois youth comprise 25 percent of homeless youth in that area.

The McCreary Centre Society (a research organization) undertook a study in 1993 of the health status and risk behaviour patterns of Vancouver street youth between 12 and 18 years.⁵⁰ It found:

- One third of street youth surveyed are from Greater Vancouver, and a similar proportion from elsewhere in Canada;
- 40% had been on the street for less than one year, one quarter for more than 3 years;
- 36% of street youth identify themselves as Aboriginal, yet the comparable percentage for youth in school is only 4%;
- 71% of females on the street reported a history of physical and sexual abuse, compared to 13% of females in school.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

In Vancouver, there is concern that youth entering street life are becoming entrenched more rapidly due to the heightened sophistication of pimps who actively recruit young people. There is a general view that there are more young girls aged 12 to 15 years on the street. The increasing use of hard drugs linked to inexpensive crack cocaine is also a concern as it is contributing to a more violent atmosphere, and more youth are dying.

Providers note a distinct difference in the severity of the lifestyle and issues facing youth in the Downtown Eastside and those in Downtown South areas of Vancouver. Youth in the Downtown Eastside are seen as more street entrenched and more likely to be involved in dangerous activities such as the sex trade and drugs. It is felt that once a youth reaches the Downtown Eastside, it becomes much more difficult for them to exit street life. Youth in the Downtown South are characterized as somewhat less entrenched, although very vulnerable and at risk.

In existing youth serving residential facilities, there is a concern with mixing older and younger youth, even for example, sixteen year olds with eighteen year olds, for fear of negative peer influence. Also, several second stage and supportive housing projects for youth have faced hurdles in offering needed support programming due to a lack of sufficient support funding.

⁴⁹ Verdant. June 2000. *Homeless Street Youth in Downtown South: A Snapshot Study*. Prepared for City of Vancouver, Social Planning Dept. This did not include youth living in the Downtown Eastside. This estimate is not accepted as accurate by all providers.

⁵⁰ The McCreary Centre Society. *Adolescent Health Survey: Street Youth in Vancouver*. 1994. They are currently updating this study. It is to be released in March 2001 and includes eight BC communities, including Vancouver.

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

There is a developing service network for homeless youth in Vancouver but very little in the way of emergency, short term or independent housing capacity. For example, many youth agencies in Downtown South offer meals, support, employment assistance, drop-in services and outreach. There is one youth shelter in all of Greater Vancouver serving youth age 16 and over that provides 18 co-ed beds. Safe houses are small houses with a maximum stay of one month for youth under age 19 (in care and not in care) who are seeking refuge from street life or the sex trade. There are 24 youth safe house beds in Greater Vancouver, serving various age ranges from age 13 to 18. Both forms of emergency accommodation are often at capacity and must turn youth away. There are 17 supportive housing units and 74 permanent housing units for youth in Greater Vancouver. Despite the availability of services, some youth avoid services for fear of apprehension by child welfare authorities. Youth-oriented services are generally scarce in suburban municipalities.

The draft *Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver*⁵¹ identified gaps in services for homeless youth including a lack of emergency shelter/safe house beds, substance misuse treatment services and facilities including detox, second stage housing with support services as well as social services aimed at supporting and strengthening families.

Several initiatives targeting youth were allocated funds to address urgent needs through the HRDC Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative in January 2001. These are:

- Covenant House - expansion of Covenant House youth shelter.
- Prostitution Alternative Counselling Education (PACE) - second stage housing for young women in survival sex trade.
- Urban Native Youth Association - short-term minimal barrier emergency shelter for youth.
- Urban Native Youth Association and the Chehalis Band - research on intervention strategies for urban homeless and at risk aboriginal youth.
- McCreary Centre Society - environmental scan, literature review and interviews with homeless youth.

The City of Vancouver has enacted a panhandling by-law that does not explicitly target youth “squeegeeing”, but rather panhandling near banks, bus stops and liquor stores. The bylaw is currently under review due to Charter concerns and may be replaced with amendments to the traffic bylaw.

Respondents cite youth driven initiatives as best meeting the needs of youth that are homeless. Dusk to Dawn in Vancouver is a ‘place to hang out’ consisting of a drop in centre and outreach service for youth who are not required to use services. It was created by youth with help from city staff and youth are involved in day-to-day work with clients.

Several people mentioned “Mom” a Vancouver woman who provides free sandwiches and support to street youth everyday in the Downtown South. They felt she is instrumental in making the streets a safer place for youth, and she is also credited with helping some youth leave street life.

A *Youth and Housing Forum* sponsored by the Youth and Society Research Group at the University of Victoria is planned for April 30, 2001 in Victoria. The number of participants is

⁵¹ Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness. March 2001.

targeted at 175, with one third of the seats intended for youth. The purpose of the forum is to highlight issues concerning youth and housing in the Victoria area. For information contact Marg Street Reitsma at 250-721-6468.

8. The Territories

This section of the environmental scan includes information on the Northwest Territories, the Yukon, and Nunavut.

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Youth homelessness is an issue of concern in the Territories. However, it is not very visible. Most of the homeless youth are considered relatively homeless. They generally have a place to sleep, but their shelter may not meet basic health and safety standards, it may be unsafe, and it is usually temporary. Even though the climate is generally too cold for youth to sleep outside, there are youth who are absolutely homeless in Yellowknife and Whitehorse.

There is very limited information on homeless youth in the territories in terms of numbers and characteristics. However, it is anticipated that more research will be undertaken as a result of the Supporting Community Partnership Initiatives (SCPI) program. For example, the Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness plans to work with the Northern Research Institute of Yukon College to identify the number of youth at risk of homelessness, gender issues, ethnicity, schooling, alcohol and drug use, and what is needed to achieve stable employment. There is a high rate of alcoholism and drug use among youth in the territories. This is prevalent among homeless youth as well as those who are housed. Many youth also suffer from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. In both Whitehorse and Yellowknife, a high rate of teen pregnancies has been noted.

b) Causes of homelessness – housing and support issues

Several causes of youth homelessness have been identified in the territories. These include:

- An insufficient supply of housing (including housing that is affordable and suitable);
- Family breakdown, including a breakdown in the relationship between parents and their children; and
- The state of the economy in the Yukon.

The following issues have also been identified. Youth in the territories are generally unable to obtain income support if they are under the age of 18. Although they may be eligible, the key informants were not aware of any youth under 18 who had received income assistance. Youth are often urged to reconnect with their families, and this is generally not acceptable to youth who have experienced abuse.

Support services for youth are generally limited, particularly for 16 and 17 year olds. There is limited support for youth who leave the foster care system. Many of these youth, who have lived in highly supervised settings, are not equipped to live independently as an adult once they turn 18. They need assistance with lifeskills training, meal preparation, and job searches. In Nunavut, most of the communities are too small to offer support services. In the Northwest Territories, individuals requiring support generally come to Yellowknife. There are no homeless shelters for youth in the territories, although they may use adult shelters once they are 19 years old. The Territories are equipped with services to address addictions, however, it has been noted that it is

difficult for youth to access these services. It was suggested that there is a need for more outreach to help youth access existing services.

In Nunavut and the Northwest Territories there is a tremendous shortage of affordable housing. In addition, it is particularly difficult for youth to access the existing supply of subsidized housing as priority is generally given to families. Youth are often disadvantaged in obtaining private market housing because landlords generally prefer not to rent to them. In Yellowknife, some landlords will rent to youth, but they generally require a large security deposit. Youth know where the cheaper housing is (\$800/m for a 1 bedroom is cheap in Yellowknife.) Sometimes 3-5 youth will team up and rent a trailer for \$1200/month.

Living in overcrowded conditions often makes it difficult for youth to complete school. The housing environment is not conducive to learning and youth are often asked to baby-sit. In addition, youth are exposed to alcohol and other substance use at a young age. They often turn to this to escape from their lack of privacy and inter-generation clashes.

8.1 Northwest Territories and Yellowknife

a) Overview of the homeless population

In Yellowknife, a significant number of youth are relatively homeless. They generally move from one friend's home to another. In some cases, the youth may live rent-free. Other times the friends' parents may ask the youth to pay rent. Youth may live this way for a number of years. A small number of youth are absolutely homeless. They do not live with their families and may have nowhere else to go. These youth may sleep in stairwells, bank machines or abandoned buildings. Some stay in coffee shops that are open 24 hours a day - although they are not permitted to sleep there. In the smaller communities outside of Yellowknife, homelessness is largely as a result of significant overcrowding, and youth will also move from friend to friend. There is no information about whether youth homelessness is increasing in the Northwest Territories, however, there is growing awareness about the issue.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

In Yellowknife, youth may be homeless because it is safer for them to live away from home. They may be experiencing abuse (physical or sexual) or youth may not want to be at home if their parents are using substances. Other youth may be homeless because they don't want to follow their parents' rules (e.g. school and curfews). Parents may ask their children to move out. Some youth only go home for the basic necessities (food and to sleep), but they have no other contact with their families. In single parent families, youth may be encouraged to move out if the parent acquires a new girl or boyfriend. For youth who do leave their families, there are few housing options and it is difficult for youth to qualify for the good paying jobs.

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

The Homelessness Coalition is working to develop a 5 year community plan to address homelessness. One of their goals is to provide a seamless continuum of housing and support services for marginalized individuals and families. The Coalition has identified a need to find ways to get people back into the mainstream economy. They have also identified a need for transitional housing where 2-4 homeless youth and adults could live together in a supportive environment that encourages them to go to school or work.

The Side Door, a youth centre in Yellowknife has been open for the last 5 years. It is the only centre of this type in the community. Youth of various ages including those who are homeless and those who aren't are able to come to the centre. After school programs are available for 9-13 year olds. Tutoring, games, and computer software are also available. The centre is also open as a drop-in for older youth a few nights during the week. There are no beds, but youth may sleep on the couches if they wish. The centre works to build relationships with the youth. They may help youth deal with issues including pregnancy and disease, and help them sort out problems with their parents.

The following two initiatives are expected to assist homeless youth:

- Homes Youth Practicing Employment (HYPE) - The Side Door has received a building to provide a 24-hour facility for youth. The building needs to be renovated. 10 homeless youth will be hired to assist with the renovations. They will work side by side with contractors who will help them learn the trade and develop construction skills. It is hoped that this program will help youth become more employment ready. There is a need for programs such as this that can help youth acquire the necessary skills so that they can care for themselves.
- NWT Community Mobilization Partnership and Job Development Strategy - Several partners are involved in this initiative. The goal is to work together to build the employment capacity of the "untapped workforce" in the NWT, including those who are challenged or marginalized, limited by their academic skills or experience, and require different teaching strategies to learn basic safety certifications and job orientation tasks. The partners have agreed to work together with the service and resource industry sectors to provide marginalized northerners and Aboriginal people entry-level jobs with specialized on the job training and monitoring. It is anticipated that the pilot project will assess and accept up to 30 trainees. The target group will be 14-30 year olds.

8.2 Yukon and Whitehorse

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Whitehorse is the capital and major city in the Yukon. It is home to over 70% of the Yukon's population of just over 30,000 people. Many youth move to Whitehorse for employment and to complete high school.⁵² The Whitehorse Community Plan on Homelessness has identified youth as one of the most vulnerable and at-risk populations. Many youth lack adult support, are living in unstable conditions, and have limited resources. In most cases, they are still somewhat connected to community services. They may be trying to stay in school, find work and take care of younger siblings. These youth are relatively homeless and are at risk of becoming absolutely homeless.

A smaller group of youth are absolutely homeless. They are not linked to any community services and live on the fringes of society in Whitehorse. They camp in the bush during the summer months, couch-surf, and find accommodation in highly unsuitable and vulnerable situations. These youth do not attend school or have jobs. They tend to get involved in drugs and petty crime.

⁵² While some communities have schools where youth may complete their Grade 12 education, in other communities, schools offer only up to a Grade 10 education.

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

The economic downturn in the Yukon has been identified as one of the major factors contributing to an increase in the numbers of youth at risk of homelessness. The economy has “bottomed out” largely because of the downturn in the mining industry in the Yukon. Not only was mining the biggest source of employment until about 10-15 years ago, it also offered well-paying jobs, with positive spin-off effects on business and employment. Since then, however, unemployment has increased and individuals seeking work have had to turn to lower paying jobs in the service industry. In 1999 the average rate of unemployment in the Yukon was 13.1%, compared to 6.9% for Canada. The Yukon had the second highest rate of unemployment rate in the country. Families have been facing increasing economic pressures, and this has led to increasing rates of spousal abuse and family breakdown. Increasing numbers of parents and their children have been unable to maintain a common household, and increasing numbers of youth have been moving away from their families.

The lack of affordable housing has also been identified as one of the causes of youth homelessness. A great deal of the existing housing stock is very old, and there is an insufficient supply of good quality and affordable housing.

Substance use by youth is considered as a matter of great concern. Parental drinking and other substance use, fighting and violence have also been noted as reasons youth may wish to leave home, even if temporarily.

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

There are currently two drop-in centres for youth in Whitehorse. The Blue Feather is targeted primarily to youth who are most at risk. The Whitehorse Youth Drop-in Centre is in a temporary location, but is in the process of obtaining funding to move to a more permanent location and adopt a broader program mandate.

The Whitehorse Planning Group on Homelessness identified an urgent need for the following services in Whitehorse:

- Ensure targeted programming to meet the needs of youth at-risk. Such services are likely to include lifeskills training, job internship opportunities, stay in school initiatives and support to find solutions to the unstable living arrangements.
- Provide street outreach services for the highest risk youth to deliver direct life planning skills, build trust and re-connect these youth to more stable lives. Part of this work includes securing safe and stable accommodation.

It is expected that proposals related to these needs will be developed through SCPI.

8.3 Nunavut

a) Overview of the homeless youth population

Youth homelessness in Nunavut is mostly hidden. Youth cannot sleep on the streets because it is too cold most of the year. However, many youth do not have a place to call their own as a result of overcrowding. There is a tremendous housing shortage throughout Nunavut. Several families may share a three-bedroom house, and an entire family may be forced to live in one of the bedrooms. Families may sleep in shifts, and youth often sleep on the cold porch of a friend or

relative. Many youth do not want to remain at home because of the lack of privacy or because of social problems that arise as a result of the overcrowding. Most of the people who experience homelessness in Nunavut are Inuit.⁵³

b) Causes of youth homelessness – housing and support issues

The main cause of homelessness identified in Nunavut is the lack of social housing. Approximately 75% of the population lives in social housing, and this rate is higher in the smaller communities. However, almost no new social housing has been built since 1993, and the supply of housing has not kept up with the rapid population growth. There is also very little private rental housing available. In Iqaluit, there are apartments, but these are expensive (\$1300/month for a 1 bedroom unit and \$1600 for a 2 bedroom unit). Units are also hard to find, as there is a low vacancy rate. The lack of housing and overcrowding situation has created increasing social tensions in families. There is a high rate of sexual abuse and a great deal of drug and alcohol use. It is also difficult for youth to find jobs. There is not much of an economy in Nunavut, and it is difficult for most people to find work. What little employment exists is generally supported by the government, either directly or indirectly. The schools also provide employment.

c) Initiatives to address youth homelessness

In Nunavut, the government is starting to address homeless issues. In addition, they are planning to open a mental health residential facility for men. There is strong recognition of the need for more social housing to take the pressure off families.

⁵³ It should be noted that there are about 28,000 people living in Nunavut, 85% of whom are Inuit. People who move to Nunavut as a result of being offered employment are usually provided with housing as part of the employment package.

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Bisson, Louise. *Les Maisons d'Hébergement pour jeunes : État de la situation.* Conseil permanent de la jeunesse, Gouvernement du Québec, Québec, mars 1989

Two kinds of youth homelessness are noted - structural and conjectural. The first is made up of youth coming out of the institutional network, including group homes, youth protection system, prison and psychiatric hospitals. Conjectural homelessness is linked to socio-economic conditions confronting youth – precarious employment, unemployment and social assistance, minimal “employability” with low levels of schooling and little experience. Homeless youth are often from broken families, and experience physical violence, mental health problems, alcoholism, sexual abuse and problems with the judicial system. Youth are often isolated with no family ties. Many have been raised in foster homes and have few friendships.

The profile of young women is different. They have a tendency to use hard drugs especially prescription drugs rather than alcohol, have problems with relationships, bad health, and few are on the streets at night. If they can't find a shelter they will spend the night with someone they met or prostitute themselves.

Alcoholism and multiple addictions are the major issues experienced by young homeless persons. There is a very high incidence of mental health problems. Many suffer from depression, personality disorders and psychosis. However, many have never been treated or hospitalised for this – symptoms are often difficult to see because of alcohol and drug use.

Data collected from a network of youth shelters across Quebec (the Regroupement des maisons d'hébergement jeunesse du Québec) is presented. In 1987-88 the members of the Regroupement received 1,538 youth, about two-thirds over 18 years. The study presents data on previous residence (48% of minors came from their families, 32% from foster homes), family conflict was a major problem for 75% of minors and 58% of those over 18.

Brannigan, Augustine, and Tullio Caputo. 1993. *Studying Runaways and Street Youth in Canada. Conceptual and Research Design Issues.* No. 1993-05. Ottawa: Ministry of Solicitor General Canada.

A pilot study to develop a detailed research design to count and describe the street and runaway youth population, and to understand the process of becoming a runaway or street youth, challenges of life on the street and factors related to successfully leaving street life. Begins with an extensive review of the contemporary literature on street youth and runaways focusing on conceptual and methodological issues. Develops a conceptual model and methodology to address these issues, and describes the experience of conducting the Calgary pilot study. It concludes with lessons learned from the pilot study. Section 8 provides a description of services for youth in Calgary. This is Phase 1 of the Runaways and Street Youth Project undertaken by the federal government's Interdepartmental Working Group on Youth-at-Risk.

Caputo, Tullio, Richard Weiler and Jim Anderson. 1997. *The Street Lifestyle Study.* Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

A report presenting the results of a research study to identify antecedents to street involvement, prevention strategies, factors that keep young people on the street and barriers to leaving the

street. Intervention strategies for assisting young people to exit the street were also examined. Seventy former street youth between 14 and 24 years of age living in all regions of Canada were interviewed for the study. Researchers also conducted interviews with service providers. The study found that antecedent risk factors are: intolerable family situations including psychological, physical, emotional or sexual abuse, poor self-image, delinquent peers, involvement with police and negative school experiences. It also found that critical events such as involvement with the law may trigger the desire to leave the street. Most importantly, factors related to exiting the street are decent housing, employment and services. Access to supportive individuals, increased self-esteem, and working with a supportive social organization were also critical factors. It concludes that opportunities exist for positive intervention at various points, including prior to entering the street lifestyle, during and as young people are exiting the street. The authors find that since street youth are not open to changing their lifestyle until they are ready, agencies must keep offering help and not give up. The authors recommend that schools take an active role in developing comprehensive intervention strategies for youth to help alleviate the alienation described by many street youth.

Caputo, T. R. Weiler, and K. Kelly. 1994. *Phase II of the Runaways and Street Youth Project: General Introduction and Overview*. Ottawa: Solicitor General Canada.

This report is Phase 2 of the Runaways and Street Youth Project which consists of two in depth case studies of how the service system in two different communities, Ottawa and Saskatoon, responds to runaways and street youths. The work was commissioned by the federal government's Interdepartmental Working Group on Youth-at-Risk. This report provides a brief summary of the findings and recommendations of Phase 1, and an overview of the case studies in Ottawa and Saskatoon. The Saskatoon case study finds that a large proportion of street youth are Aboriginal and have not broken contact with their families. It also finds that the service system is not geared to deal with youth (although there are some exceptions), there is a lack of culturally sensitive services, the service system is fragmented and there are few exits from the social service or criminal justice system. It also finds that the service system recognizes its shortcomings and new ways of providing services to young people are possible. The Ottawa case study finds that the issues of street youth are being addressed in a coordinated way in that city. Street youth with limited education face particular difficulties in the job market, mental health services are required, street youth are susceptible to the revolving door syndrome, mainstream services have strict eligibility requirements making access difficult for youth and street youth need long term personal support systems. The model developed in Phase 1 is found to be useful for describing the runaway and street youth population.

See also

Caputo, T. Weiler, R. and K. Kelly. 1994. *Phase II of the Runaways and Street Youth Project: The Ottawa Case Study*. Final Report No. 1994-11. Ottawa: Solicitor General Canada.

Caputo, T. Weiler, R. and K. Kelly. 1994. *Phase II of the Runaways and Street Youth Project. The Saskatoon Case Study*. Final Report. No. 1994-12. Ottawa: Solicitor General Canada.

Chand, Manjit and Lisa Thompson. 1997 *You Have Heard This Before*. Street-Involved Youth and the Service Gaps. Commissioned for the Interministerial Street Children's Committee.

Reports on the results of a research project to identify gaps in service for street involved youth age 12 to 19 years in Vancouver. The method consisted of interviews with key staff of agencies providing youth services and a review of relevant reports and studies. Describes current trends in the number and type of youth on the street, and provides a snapshot of the characteristics of youth living on the street. Trends identified include: a consistently high number of street youth, no available beds for youth at night, the age of intravenous drug users is dropping, more 14-15 year olds are involved in the sex trade, there are long waiting lists for mental health and alcohol and drug treatment programs, and there is a large influx of youth from other regions of Canada. The report discusses service gaps such as: limited short and long term housing options, lack of drug and alcohol treatment centres for youth, absence of 24 hour services, poor coordination of services and the need for integrated case management. Top priority recommendations include: transition houses, safe houses for youth, including youth with mental health needs and youth who need sobering beds, residential youth drug and alcohol treatment beds, 24 hour access to services, integrated case management and services for youth in all regions of BC.

Community Task Force on Homeless Street Youth. No date. *Support services to Homeless Youth in Ottawa-Carleton. A Needs Assessment and Plan for Action.*

This report presents the results of a needs assessment for homeless/street youth in Ottawa-Carleton. It also presents a plan of action to begin to address unmet needs. It was prepared at the direction of the Social-Services Committee of the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton. This was accomplished by interviewing 65 homeless/street youth over a period of 2 weeks in July 1992. It is estimated that there were 200 to 250 homeless youth in Ottawa at that time. Most youth interviewed identified acute family conflict, abuse or substance abuse as the reason for leaving home. Many experience victimization of the street, use a number of services, become involved in substance abuse, self-mutilation, suffer from poor physical health and identified safety and survival as the biggest issue facing them on the street. Youth identified the following gaps in services: shelter and housing, specifically for females and youth under 16 years, drop in centres, and flexible educational opportunities. The task force makes seven recommendations including establishment of a drop in centre for youth, an ongoing planning network, and improving crisis intervention services for youth.

DeMatteo, Dale et al. 1999. "Toronto Street Youth and HIV/AIDS Prevalence, Demographics and Risks." *Journal of Adolescent Health*. Vol 25, pp.358-366.

This study of Toronto street involved youth age 14 to 25 years was designed to identify HIV prevalence, HIV risk behaviours and demographic factors that may contribute to HIV infection. This was a cross-sectional convenience study of 695 youth. It found that 2.2% of the sample tested positive for HIV. The rate of infection was higher among 20-25 year olds. Unprotected sex, IV drug use, prostitution and incarceration were linked with HIV infection. Concludes that Canadian street youth are at high risk of HIV infection.

Direction de la santé publique. *Avis du directeur de la santé publique sur la mortalité chez les jeunes de la rue à Montréal. Le «défi de l'accès» pour les jeunes de la rue. Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal-Centre, Montréal, 1998.*

This report follows a two-year cohort study that had been released a few months before. The study had focussed on HIV and behaviour amongst street youth. A group of young persons (14-25) who had been without a place to sleep at least once or had regularly made use of street youth resources were followed over a period of two years (questionnaire every six months). A total of 517 youth were recruited (72% male, average age 20 years). Of these, 1.4% were HIV positive.

By August 31, 1998, 479 youth had completed at least one follow-up questionnaire. Among these 13 had died (11 male and 2 females – causes included suicide and drug overdose). This is a mortality rate thirteen times higher than Quebec youth of the same age. The second questionnaire asked about suicidal thoughts – 63% had had these and 35% had attempted suicide. The fifth questionnaire indicated that 21% were lightly depressed, 27% moderately and 9.2% severely. The authors suggest that the combination of depression, suicidal thoughts and drugs are explosive.

An assessment of services being offered finds that essential services (food, shelter, clothing, information for survival) are precariously funded. While the services are well adapted to the youth, they are in limited quantity and at times discontinuous because of limited financing. For example, outreach services are often least available when the youth need them – on weekends or holidays. There is also a need for staff working in these services to be better trained in suicidal behaviour (i.e. in prevention and post attempt). Finally there need for better co-ordination with other services. The second level of services includes help and assistance for unforeseen events – e.g. an infection necessitating a medical visit, need for stable revenue, or bad reaction to a drug. The authors note that administrative requirements often make access to these services difficult and the services are often not well adapted to specific needs of runaways and street youth – especially in terms of drug addiction and suicide prevention. The third level of services are critical needs – e.g. emergency, medical or psychological services, drug emergencies, detox and suicide prevention. Administrative requirements make access difficult, for example detox through methadone is not readily available to youth. There also is incoherence and at times a lack of a “humanist” approach to marginalised youth.

Best practices are identified. General recommendations and a number of specific strategies are proposed. These include consolidation of outreach, training in suicide prevention and drug addiction, a multidisciplinary team for street youth, better support to families, and better training to assist youth in difficulty

Fitzgerald, Michael. 1999. *To live and to learn: Homeless youth, literacy, education and career*. Halifax: Phoenix Youth programs.

Presents the results of the Phoenix Literacy Project which was intended to address the learning and upgrading needs of high risk and homeless youth in Halifax. Contains a description of Phoenix Youth Programs, a literature review, and results of focus group discussions and interviews with key informants. Concludes with recommendations related to enhancing literacy and educational resources within Phoenix Youth Programs.

Fournier, Louise et Céline Mercier (Sous la direction de). *Sans Domicile Fixe Au-delà du stéréotype*. Montréal : Méridien, 1996.

Chapter 13, *Les adolescents* (Louise Fournier et al.) is a review of North American and European literature on youth homelessness. The definition of youth that is used is 12 to age of majority. Youth homelessness is strongly associated with running away and seems to be increasing in the last fifteen years but no scientific data or numbers was found to support this perception. The authors note that there is a lack of consensus on the definition of homeless. These differ from one study to another. The heterogeneity of homeless youth has lead to attempts to subdivide into groups. There is agreement on two large groups – runaways and throwaways. The first group are those who leave voluntarily and can go back. The second group have been encouraged or forced to leave and are involuntarily homeless. The proportions of these two groups are not constant from study to study. Other dimensions are added by other authors, for example the motive or

context of departure from the family. Other subgroups include the “doubly homeless” or “system kids” – children abandoned a first time to the youth protection system and who then leave this system for the street. A newer category of homeless youth is those who are homeless along with other members of their family.

Socio-demographic data reveal that the lower the age group, the higher the proportion of girls. Studies find that residential instability often starts early, happens often, and can go on for a fairly long period (e.g. over six months). Homeless youth can be subdivided into three groups: those who are homeless for first time and have been so for less than year; the episodically homeless who have been homeless for several periods of time but these don't add up to one year; and the chronic homeless who have spent over a year of their lives in a homeless state. Studies find that survival strategies include sleeping in abandoned areas, outside, in shelters, and in cars. Reasons for homelessness are varied and include the family situation, poverty, violence, school difficulties, lack of work. Studies reveal physical and mental health problems and include HIV, depression, post-traumatic stress, and frequent suicidal thoughts and attempts. Drugs and alcohol are prevalent, as is criminal behaviour such as shoplifting, drug dealing, and prostitution. Homeless youth have difficulties in getting help due to lack of information and fear of non-confidentiality.

The final section deals with interventions. Studies confirm the need for multiple interventions because of the diversity of the population. A global approach seems to work best and outreach is important since many youth will not go to the services. Young homeless persons are more mistrustful of services offered to them – there is a difficulty in gaining their trust and minors are often afraid of being reported. The chapter ends with descriptions of a number of initiatives.

Hagan, John and Bill McCarthy. 1997. *Mean Streets: Youth Crime and Homelessness*. Cambridge, NW. Cambridge University Press.

“*Mean Streets* is a field study of young people age 15 to 24 years who have left home and school and are living on the streets of Toronto and Vancouver. The book includes personal narratives of some of the more than 400 young people who participated in the summer long study. The study examines why youth take to the streets, their struggle to survive on the street, their victimization and involvement with crime, their association with other street youth, their contacts with police, and their efforts to leave the street. The authors compare street youth with samples of in-home and in school children. Major theories of youth crime are analysed and reappraised in the context of a new social capital theory of crime.”

Kariel, Pat. 1993. *Stepping Out of Street Life: New Directions*. Calgary: Greenways Press.

A case study of The Back Door, a Calgary centre for street youth that aims to help them leave the street. The author interviewed youth that use the Back Door, professionals who work there and at other agencies, and analysed other information to compile the material for the book. The book begins with the personal stories of several youth. It then describes typical family life of street youth, life on the streets, The Back Door program, preventive approaches to keeping youth off the street and offers recommendations.

Kufeldt, Kathleen and Barbara Burrows (eds). 1994. *Issues Affecting Public Policies and Services for Homeless Youth. Executive Summary*. Submitted to National Welfare Grants.

An exploratory study to examine the possible effects of current public policies and human service programs on homelessness among youth in Calgary by means of a literature review and

interviews with homeless youth, parents and service providers. The study also makes recommendations related to prevention and improved services for homeless youth. It finds that youth and family factors, community factors, social service factors and social policy factors contribute to the risk of homelessness. Youth interviewed ranged from 12 to 24 years, were living in a variety of settings including 'in transition', off the street, in correctional institutions and on the street. Over half had run from home many times and came from a variety of family backgrounds including parents who were married, divorced or separated. More than half the youth interviewed cited fighting with parents as a reason for leaving, and 37% reported having had child welfare status at some point in their lives. A large proportion (70%) reported having problems at school. Youth respondents who had successfully left the street identified services and other factors as helpful, such as family support, peer support, religion and others. Calgary was found to have a large number and variety of prevention and early intervention services, and services to meet immediate needs of homeless youth. Thirty-eight recommendations are made in the areas of child welfare, income security, housing, education, mental health and justice.

Lamontagne, Yves, Yvette Garceau-Durant, Suzanne Blais, Robert Élie avec la collaboration de Isabelle Lasvergnas. *La Jeunesse Québécoise et le Phénomène des Sans-Abri*. Presses de l'Université du Québec, Québec 1987

The authors note an increase in young homeless persons and suggest that among the issues to be examined are structural inequality and social origins as causal factors or whether the increase is related to a sub culture, problems such as drug use, mental health or economic crisis. Factors such as family, school and job market as principle points of social insertion also are undergoing a crisis and youth, no matter what social origin, can feel rejected. A literature review links homelessness to factors such as health, mental health, low income, little schooling, social disengagement originating in inadequate family socialisation, institutional dependence (shelters, hospitals, prisons, army), and deinstitutionalisation.

The authors undertook a survey of eleven shelters over a six-month period and gathered demographic data for all who used the shelters. A random sample of 200 youth (18 to 30 years) was interviewed. Results include a family situation in which the majority of parents are separated, divorced or deceased (62%); large families (56% have 3 or more siblings); many lived in foster homes; half of the girls were victims of incest; and 80.3% had no contact with families. Major problems include alcohol (59.9%) and drugs (56.3%); 45% are depressed; 71% have contemplated suicide and 48% have attempted suicide; 47% have a police record (theft, fraud, possession and selling of drugs). The authors conclude that the great problems are alcoholism and drug use. Mental health is less of an issue but has a role to play since 23% of those surveyed had been hospitalised in psychiatric wards and this percentage would have been higher if the researchers had not excluded the youth who were delirious during data collection. The researchers note the very high rate of suicidal thought and attempts in this population.

Les Cahiers de recherche sociologique vol 27. *Jeunes en difficulté : de l'exclusion vers l'itinérance*. Département de sociologie, Université du Québec à Montréal. Montréal 1996

Results of a conference organised by the Collectif de recherche sur l'itinérance (CRI) in June 1995. Presented in four sections. The first looks at youth homelessness as a societal phenomenon and explores themes of inclusion of various social groups in social structures and the notion of citizenship. The second section looks at the factors of social exclusion that lead to homeless youth. Two issues are examined; the first is work and the impact of the transformation of the workplace that has resulted in the growing marginalisation of youth, if not their total exclusion. The impact of the young offenders act and the stigmatisation that follows conviction can set off a

chain of events that can lead to homelessness. Third section is on the youth and survival strategies that they develop. According to one author, street youth are excluded from institutions that should receive them and confronted with impossibility of constructing a social identity, even a marginal one. The street becomes the site for this – a “zone of social protection”. Another presentation looks at concrete strategies for survival. The fourth section examines interventions. Three presentations examine interventions from a different perspective but all raise the question of integration, transformation or tolerance of the youth.

Margison, Sharon et al. 1997. *Gimme Shelter: Sharing Successes in housing for youth: Forum Highlights*. Ottawa: CMHC.

Reports on the proceedings of a two-day forum in 1997 organized by CMHC to celebrate and promote the accomplishments of organizations working to provide more housing choices for youth. It summarizes workshops and presents the winners of the Youth Housing Awards. The document focuses on youth in general, with limited reference to youth homelessness.

McCarthy, Bill (1995) *On the Streets Youth in Vancouver*. Victoria: BC Ministry of Social Services.

This report provides an overview of the Vancouver respondents⁴ to a 1992 study by researchers in the departments of sociology at the University of Toronto and University of Victoria. It provides basic information for street youth on the characteristics, family backgrounds, leaving home, school experiences, street life, exposure to crime, criminal victimization, and crime at home and on the street. Street youth are defined as people aged 14 to 24 years who do not have regular access to permanent shelter. 152 youth participated in the study. They were located in social service agencies, parks and street corners. Data is not presented by gender. It concludes with a comparison of street crime in Toronto and Vancouver. The study found that:

- Two thirds of youth lived in four or more unique family types as they were growing up;
- Over 40% had lived in a foster home or group home;
- Two-thirds reported they had received social assistance at least once;
- Youth spent some evenings walking the streets (80%), at all night restaurants (70%) in abandoned buildings (65%);
- 30% reported having been paid for sex more than three times;
- 47% said they had been arrested simply for being homeless; and
- 55% were charged with a criminal offense.

McCreary Centre Society (1994) *Adolescent Health Survey: Street Youth in Vancouver*. Prepared by Larry Peters and Aileen Murphy. Burnaby, BC: The McCreary Centre Society.

Reports on the results of a study conducted in the Fall of 1993 focused on street youth in Vancouver. The objectives were to measure health status, identify risk behaviour patterns, and to compare health status and risk behaviours with mainstream youth. Follows the completion of the 1992 *Adolescent Health Survey (AHS)* which was administered to over 15,000 BC youth between 12 and 18 enrolled in school. The Street Youth Survey used a convenience sample of 110 youth between 12 and 18 years of age, mostly recruited through street youth workers. The questionnaire developed for the school survey was adapted for use with street youth. Domains covered included: physical health, chronic illness/disability, and mental health, behaviours that result in injuries; sexuality, STDs and pregnancy; tobacco, drug and alcohol use; physical activities, school achievement and self esteem; nutrition, eating behaviours and dietary disorders; and individual and family demographics. The report provides a quantitative basis for comparing

health and other issues facing street youth with youth in school. An appendix compares the survey findings with other empirical studies of street youth. Most data is presented by gender.

Among the findings:

- One third of street youth surveyed are from Greater Vancouver, and a similar proportion from elsewhere in Canada;
- 40% had been on the street for less than one year, one quarter for more than 3 years;
- 36% of street youth identify themselves as Aboriginal, yet the comparable percentage for youth in school is only 4%;
- for virtually all types of experiences with suicide, female street youth are more likely than male counterparts to report a personal incident during the past year;
- 18% of males on the street perceive their health to be excellent compared to 43% of males in school; and
- 71% of females on the street reported a history of physical and sexual abuse, compared to 13% of females in school.

O'Grady, Bill, Robert Bright and Eric Cohen. 1998. Sub-employment and street youths: an analysis of the impact of squeegee cleaning on homeless youth. *Security Journal*. Vol. 11. Pp. 315-323.

The authors interviewed two samples of street youth - youth squeegee cleaners and youth not involved in squeegee cleaning to determine the impact of this form of 'self-employment' on the lives of street youth. For each group of youth, the article presents demographic characteristics, mean income, frequency of alcohol and drug use, criminal activity, self-reported psychological well-being and current housing situation. It concludes that squeegee cleaning yields a positive return in terms of reducing depression and criminal activity and promoting more independent living conditions. The authors caution that a policy of criminalizing squeegeeing could further marginalize this group and lead to more street crime.

Paradis, Marguerite. *Histoires de Passion et de Raison : jeunes et itinérantes*. Montréal : Éditions du Remue-ménage, [1990?]

This is a feminist analysis of the situation of homeless young women through a biographical approach. Four homeless women in their twenties are interviewed. The author begins with a general description of general changes to families, schools, work and revenues in Quebec. The high rate of suicide in Quebec is noted, as are the issues of homelessness and violence. The life stories of the four young women reveal tumultuous family lives, physical and mental abuse and the lack of support. The experience of schools includes corporal punishment, isolation and victimisation as well as learning difficulties. The life stories also reveal early introduction to the sex trade, prostitution and nude dancing. However, all four of the young women aspire to a family life, marriage, and some ease. The author concludes that the situation of homeless women fits into a more general oppression of women that is linked to the economic, social and political structure of Quebec society.

Poirier, Mario et al. *Relations et représentations interpersonnelles de jeunes adultes itinérants Au-delà de la contrainte de la rupture, la contrainte des liens*. GRIJA, Groupe de recherche sur l'itinérance des jeunes adultes, Montréal 1999.

The study focuses on relationships in young person's lives, including the history of significant relationships such as the family, and their current situations. The researchers hypothesise that having this portrait will help elaborate community and clinical interventions. After meeting the

needs of survival, such as food and housing, the greatest problems that youth speak of are relational. Sample of 60 youth (between 18-35, equally male and female) who had used shelter services for a consecutive month or more than once in a six-month period were interviewed. The methodology consisted of an open-ended interview, application of TAT (Thematic Apperception Test), and a socio-demographic questionnaire.

Results indicate that 92% of the youth surveyed linked their homelessness to difficulties with families. Analysis interviews and relationships with parents revealed recurring themes of abandonment, rejection, conflict, violence and victimisation. These traits were different for fathers and mothers and their impact on the youth seemed to vary according to sex. Other sources of support, such as enlarged family, siblings, and friends were not very present in the lives of those surveyed. For almost all departure from family was a necessity and ultimately was the result of an untenable situation. For none of the homeless youth, was the family a starting point for the realisation of projects or dreams, it was more a place from which they had to extricate themselves. Ages of departure varied: (27% at childhood; 25% at adolescence; 48% at young adulthood) but the authors point out that the distancing, rejection and cutting ties happened early in the young person's life. The current networks are very restricted, not only in terms of contact with families but also friends and other homeless persons.

The authors conclude that in order to survive, homeless youth had to cut the ties that ultimately cannot be completely cut, they run away try to escape but are "haunted" from inside. They note a sense of destiny and fatalism as the youth look at their lives and those of their parents. Interventions with homeless youth is especially difficult since experiences with relationships have been so unfavourable that they do not want to get involved and make any commitment.

Pollock, Sheryl. 1998. *Strategies for Homeless Youth. Background Information for the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force. Toronto: City of Toronto.*

This document prepared as a background report to the Toronto Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force identifies the causes of youth homelessness as family breakdown and abuse. The experiences of being homeless for youth are described as being more challenging because they must survive without the lifeskills adults possess. Homeless youth in Toronto are predominantly male, over-represented in the hostel population, and their chance of becoming homeless is three times the general population. They are often parents of their own children, and they are just as likely to come from outside Toronto as from within Toronto. This population is also more likely to have dropped out of school. The key issues facing homeless youth in Toronto are difficult family situations, short-term survival issues, difficulty accessing social assistance, difficulties facing young families, discrimination by landlords, refugee issues, health problems, safety issues, finding and maintaining housing, barriers to education upgrading and employment, and difficulty leaving the streets. It identified gaps in services such as shelters (with a harm reduction approach), more funding for outreach programs, drop in centres for the hardest to serve youth, transitional and permanent housing, education and employment, support services and prevention services. It proposes a strategy to address the specialized needs of youth consisting of shelter, street outreach, drop-ins, pre-employment strategies, transitional and permanent housing and prevention strategies.

Radford, Joyce, Alan J.C. King and Wendy Warren. 1989. *Street youth and AIDS. Social Program Evaluation Group, Queens University at Kingston.*

This report presents the findings of interviews with over 700 Canadian street youth aged 15 to 20 years regarding their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours respecting AIDS and other sexually

transmitted diseases (STDs). The study confirmed that street youth are at high risk for contraction and transmission of HIV and other STDs. Almost all street youth are sexually active and despite reported fears of HIV, condom use patterns are inconsistent. Many tables and graphs (some comparisons with students attending school and other groups), and personal stories.

Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal-Centre. *Réflexion sur la situation des jeunes sans abri.* Montréal, janvier 1993

Work done by a committee from the Régie and the city of Montreal. The report includes a literature review, and interviews with those working with the youth and youth themselves (18-30 years). Literature indicates that about half of homeless youth spent part of their childhood in institutions and that poverty is one of the major causes of homelessness for them. Based on various studies it is estimated that there are about 15,000 homeless persons in Montreal and that a third are under 30 years.

According to youth workers the youth have behavioural problems – addiction, prostitution and delinquency. According to some authors criminality is no higher among youth than the rest of the population while one study reports that 47% of homeless youth have a criminal record and another indicates that 30% have spent time in prison.

Health problems are related to lifestyle – malnutrition, lack of sleep and behaviour. Youth workers indicated that when there were problems they did not get treated, didn't deal with symptoms and let their health deteriorate further. While youth were in better health than older homeless persons, they also were at greater risk of dying prematurely – suicide, overdose and AIDS. Some also thought that youth were more exposed to violence but this could be related to activities such as drug dealing and prostitution. Deinstitutionalisation is not a problem for youth - it is rather finding adequate services.

Services offered to youth are described as a continuum - telephone support, street outreach, day services (centres), shelters and housing. Problems with existing services include: compartmentalisation, often related to the capacity of the services, which can lead to youth being referred elsewhere and defined as a “problem” to “fit” into the services offered. Even when dealing with specific problems, e.g. drug addiction, there is a problem of finding appropriate services for youth. The report underlines the importance for youth to be “anchored” even when dealing with a variety of specific problems and the need to keep in contact with the youth. HIV and AIDS pose very specific problems for youth (i.e. lots of services & attention needed). Also noted is the need for services for English-speaking youth as well as those from cultural communities. Difficulties for minor youth include the imposition of very short stays. They also do not allow the kind of support needed. Often the controls that are placed on the youth are those that they were fleeing in the first place. Shelters must also report minors to youth protection if they come for services. Precarious financial situations make staff stability very difficult – which has an impact on the stability of the relationship with the youth.

Short term solutions that are proposed include consolidation of outreach services, shelter and referrals. There are also proposals for youth protection, for example more support for youth in family as an alternative to placing them in foster homes, and if taking them out of the family is inevitable to encourage contact with the family. There is also a need to prepare youth when they are release from the youth protection milieu.

Social Planning Council of Winnipeg. 1990. *Needs Assessment on Homeless Children and Youth.* Winnipeg: SPC

This report presents the results of a study to define the nature and scope of homelessness among children and youth in Winnipeg through interviews with 127 street kids age 10 to 21 years and service providers. The purpose was to explore the issue in a way that would support the development of policy and programs that are responsive to the needs of young people. The study finds that runaway behaviour is a serious problem in Winnipeg, it affects more females than males, the average age of surveyed youth was 12 years old, and many serious problems in the parental home are cited as reasons for runaway behaviour. The interviews showed that these youth engage in many high-risk behaviours while on the street such as unprotected sexual activity, drug abuse and criminal activities. Many tables present information on characteristics of the runaway youth, characteristics of the 'run', experiences while on the run, use of services and assessment of services. A summary of key informant responses includes recommended approaches for addressing the needs of homeless youth.

Thompson, Lisa and Virginia Servage. 1998. *The Forgotten People: Street Youth Speak Out About BC Benefits and Youth Works*. For Child and Youth Advocate, City of Vancouver.

A report prepared for the Child and Youth Advocate for the City of Vancouver to determine how changes to BC's income assistance program, Youth Works and BC Benefits, are affecting youth on welfare who are street-involved. The changes were designed to help young people "move from welfare to work." A survey was administered to 55 street youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years. It provides detailed information on the responses to each question. The report finds that the youth interviewed think the new income assistance policies provide few alternatives to living on the street and few opportunities to gain the personal and occupational skills they need. The study finds a need for enhanced communication, as youth knew little about the new policy and programs. Provides recommendations related to BC Benefits and Youth Works.

Ville de Montréal- MSSS. *Réflexion sur la situation des jeunes sans abri*. Rapport du comité de travail à l'intention du Comité de suivi du Programme conjoint Régie Régionale de la Santé et des Services sociaux de Montréal-Centre, Montréal, janvier 1993

The report focuses on youth 14-25 years. Using police statistics for nine months (January to September 1992) the number of missing persons, 14-17 years is 2,652 and 633 for those 18-30 years. While recognising that these data do not necessarily mean run away persons nor does it equate to life on the street, the statistics do represent a group that potentially, for a short or long time, were cut off from their usual milieu. Other studies place the number of homeless persons in Montreal at 10,000-15,000 while a study in 1984 estimated that there were 4,000-5,000 youth on the streets of Montreal.

Voakes, Les. 1992. *Street Youth: Difference between Small Towns and Cities*. Presented at the Rural Mental Health and Addictions Conference. Sudbury, Ontario.

Reports on the findings of a project funded by Health and Welfare Canada to investigate the issues, problems and needs of street youth in small rural communities. Completed in depth interviews with 20 rural street kids. Discusses survival strategies, prostitution, conflict resolution skills and substance abuse. Concludes that "there are many opportunities to develop strategies that would reduce the overall numbers of street youth [urban and rural] by focusing more resources within small communities." Small town youth are also better candidates for intervention as they are easily identifiable and less street entrenched.

Watari Research Association. 1994. *Working with Street Youth A Resource Manual*. For Health Canada, Health Promotion and Social Development. BC Yukon Region. Vancouver: Watari Research Association

The resource manual provides an excellent overview of street youth issues for use by people working with street involved children. It provides an overview of the size of the street youth population, their characteristics, reasons for leaving home, risks facing street youths, and community responsibility and initiatives for street youth. It estimates the number of street youth in BC, relying on data for missing children, as approximately 3,800 in 1993. Street involved youth are defined as people aged 17 to 24 years of age, who leave home temporarily or permanently and find themselves without a place to live. Characteristics of street youth include a lack of education and employment skills, a high incidence of transiency, poor physical health, substance abuse, mental health problems, conflict with the law, violence and street relationships. Street youth in urban centres are connected with small town street youth, because many of the latter end up in larger centres. It describes reasons for leaving home generally leave because they have a good reason to do so, called 'push factors'. These include abuse, familial rejection and neglect, systemic neglect and unresolved conflict. For some youth, there are 'pull factors' that make life on the street seems better than the alternative. The street lifestyle provides youth with a sense of community, there is a support system, there are many compassionate victims, and they protect and look out for each other. The lure of the 'big city' is also a pull factor. Risks of street life include criminal activity, suicide and self-mutilation, violence, exploitation by adults, homelessness, health risks and entrenchment. Asserting that the 'community' is responsible for its children, the document describes some specific initiatives addressing the needs of street youth the Downtown Eastside/Strathcona Street Involved Youth Protection and Provision Strategy, the Vancouver Street Youth Detox and the Nelson Youth Issues Project. Contains an annotated bibliography.

Webber, Marlene. 1991 *Street Kids: The Tragedy of Canada's Runaways*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

A Toronto writer grapples with the issues facing street kids by interviewing front line workers across Canada and the kids themselves. Includes many personal accounts. Explores family background, sexual exploitation, homelessness, crime, drugs and potential solutions.

Appendix B

Environmental Scan on Youth Homelessness Key Informants

Region	Federal/Provincial/ Territorial Government	Municipality	Community Organization
National	<p>Carol Sutherland-Brown Health Canada, Child Youth and Family Health Phone: 613-941-3321 Fax: 613-946-2324 Carol_sutherland-brown@hc-sc.gc.ca</p> <p>Richard Coutts National Secretariat on Homelessness Phone: 819-997-6157 Fax: 819-997-9957 richard.coutts@hrdc-drhc.gc.ca</p>	N/A	N/A
Nova Scotia	<p>Jim Graham Housing and Municipal Affairs Nova Scotia P.O. Box 216 Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 2M4 Phone: 902-424-3224 Fax: 902-424-0661 Grahamjd@gov.ns.ca</p>		<p>Patricia Richards Coordinator Community Action on Homelessness 2020 Gottingen Street Halifax, Nova Scotia B3K 3A9 Phone: 902-420-2186 Fax: 902-420-2817 Patriciar@hfx.eastlink.ca</p> <p>Timothy Crooks Executive Director Phoenix Youth Programs 6035 Coburg Road Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 1Y8 Phone: 902-420-0676 Fax 902-422-7656 Tcrooks@phoenixyouth.ca</p>
New Brunswick	<p>Janet Thomas Director, Planning, Research and Evaluation Branch (and Jean Rioux, Dave Dell and Barbara Lemieux) Family and Community Services P.O. Box 6000 Fredericton, New Brunswick E3B 5H1 Phone: 506-444-3380 Fax: 506-453-7478</p>		<p>Brenda Murphy Urban Core Support Network 116 Coburg Street Saint John, New Brunswick E2L 3K1 Phone: 506-642-9033 Ucsnsj@nbnet.nb.ca</p>

Region	Federal/Provincial/ Territorial Government	Municipality	Community Organization
	Janet.thomas@gnb.ca		

Region	Federal/Provincial/ Territorial Government	Municipality	Community Organization
Prince Edward Island	Barry Chandler Youth Services Consultant Department of Health and Social Services P.O. Box 2000 16 Garfield Street Charlottetown, P.E.I. C1A 7N8 Phone: 902-368-6180 Fax: 902-368-6136 Blchandler@ihis.org		
Nfld.	Susan MacLeod, Supervisor, Youth Services Youth and Family Services, Health and Community Services, Saint John's Region P.O. Box 13122 Saint John's, Newfoundland A1B 4A4 Phone: 709-570-8466 Fax: SusanmaclLeod@hcssjr.ns.ca		

Region	Federal/Provincial/ Territorial Government	Municipality	Community Organization
Quebec		<p>Serge Bruneau Head of the Mayors Committee on Social Problems 303, Rue Notre-Damme Est Bureau 2.100 Montreal, Quebec H2Y 3Y8 Phone: 514-872-6155 Fax: 514-872-9848 Sbruneau@pe2.ville.montreal.qc.ca</p> <p>Réjean Boivin Technicien en organismes communautaires Ville de Quebec Quebec Phone: 418-691-6918</p>	<p>Réné Charest, Co-ordinator Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal (RAPSIM) 180 Ste Catherine Est Montreal, Quebec H2X 1K9 Phone: 514-879-1949</p> <p>Elisabeth Martin, Presidente Les Auberges du Coeur Montreal Director, Hebergement Jeunesse Le Tournant 1775 Wolfe Montreal, Quebec H2L 3J9 Phone: 514-523-2157</p> <p>Pierre Maheux Regroupement d'aide aux personnes itinérantes de Quebec Phone: 418-691-6918</p>
Ontario	<p>Bob Cooke, Director Provincial Municipal Liaison Ministry of Community and Social Services 12th Floor, 56 Wellesley Street West Toronto, Ontario M7A 1E9 Phone: 416-325-5411 Fax: 416-325-5423</p> <p>Linden Holmes Wenda Hodson Ministry of Community & Social Services Eastern Regional Office 10 Rideau Street Ottawa, Ontario K1N 9J1 Phone: 613-787-3964 Fax: 613-787-3990 Ottawa regional office</p>	<p>Rosemary Foulds, Coordinator, Hostels and Lodging Homes Social & Public Health Services Div. 31 King Street East 3rd Floor Hamilton, Ontario L8N 3V9 Phone: 905-546-2193 Fax: 905-540-5325 rfoulds@city.hamilton.on.ca</p> <p>Sheryl Pollock Community Housing Initiatives Shelter, Housing and Support City of Toronto Phone: 416-392-0053 Spolloc1@city.toronto.on.ca</p> <p>Zell Wear, Youth Shelters City of Toronto</p>	<p>Norma Pearson Director, Youth Services Good Sheppard Centre 14 Cannon Street West Hamilton, Ontario L8R 2B3 Phone: 905-308-8090 Fax: 905-308-9354</p> <p>Jenny Colborne Community Support Worker Eva's Initiatives Toronto Phone: 416-441-1414 Fax: 416-441-4130</p> <p>Liz Greaves, Executive Director Youthlink Inner City Toronto Phone: 416-967-1773 liz@youthlink.ca</p>

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<p>Manitoba</p>	<p>Roy Kirby Brian Williamson Winnipeg Housing and Homeless Initiative 100-233 Portage Ave Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 2A7 Phone: 204-940-3072</p>	<p>Linda Ring Planning, Property and Development Services Room 100, 30 Fort Street Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 4X5 Phone: 204-986-4560 Lring@city.winnipeg.mb.ca</p>	<p>Chari Arsenault Youth Resource Centre McDonald Youth Services 161 Mayfair Ave. Winnipeg, Manitoba R3L 0A1 Phone: 204-477-1804</p> <p>Sister Bernadette O'Reilly Rossbrook House 658 Ross Ave. Winnipeg, Manitoba R3Q 0M1 Phone: 204-949-4093</p> <p>Margaret Church Operation Go Home 195 Young Street Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 3S8 Phone: 204-783-5617</p>
<p>Sask.</p>	<p>Wendy Rath Program Policy Co-ordinator Saskatchewan Housing Corporation 7th Floor, 1855 Victoria Ave. Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 3V7 Phone: 306-787-1998</p> <p>Dawna Skagen, Regional Programme Consultant for Youth Partnerships HRDC Room 601, 2045 Broad Street Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 2N6 Phone: 306-780-7294</p>		<p>Bill Thidodeau EGADZ 301-First Ave. North Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7K 1X5 Phone: 306-931-6644</p> <p>Sandra Pfeifer Rainbow Youth Services 977 McTavish St. Regina S4T 3V2 Phone: 306-757-9743</p>

<p>Alberta</p>	<p>Ms. Mary Jane Graham Director, Youth Secretariat 5th Floor, Sterling Place 9940-106 Street Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2N2 Phone: 780-422-5873 Maryjane.graham@gov.ab.ca</p> <p>Cynthia Farmer Director of Strategic Initiatives Ministry of Children's Services 5th Floor, Sterling Place 9940-106 St. Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2N2</p>	<p>Sharon Small Community and Neighbourhood Services City of Calgary (8116) P.O. Box 2100, Station M Calgary, Alberta T2P 2M5 Phone: 403-268-5188</p>	<p>Jim Beaton, Chair Youth Alternative Committee Room 406, 301-14th St., N.W. Calgary, Alberta T2N 2A1 Phone: 403-297-8435</p> <p>Derek McGregor, Chair Youth Sector Group Calgary Homeless Foundation 2nd flr, 1011-6 Avenue S.W. Calgary, Alberta T2P 0W1 Phone: 403-297-5830 Derek.mcgregor@gov.ab.ca</p> <p>Sandy McCrone Safe Haven Foundation Box 409 919-Centre St. N.W. Calgary, Alberta T2E 2P6 Phone: 403-248-3636</p> <p>Darlene Petrie McMann Youth Services Ste. 404, 315-10th Ave. S.E. Calgary, Alberta T2G 0W2 Phone: 403-508-7742</p> <p>Mary Joh Pelton Avenue 15 938 – 15 Ave., S.W. Calgary, Alberta T2R 0S3 Phone: 403-543-9650</p> <p>Susan Gardner Wood's Homes 805-37th St. N.W. Calgary, Alberta T2N 4N8 Phone: 403-247-7115</p> <p>Irene Kerr-Fitzsimmons Executive Director Inner-City Youth Housing Project P.O. Box 1892, Main Post Office Edmonton, Alberta T5J 2P3 Phone: 780-479-1404 Icyhp@telusplanet.net</p> <p>Debbie Cautley, Executive Director Youth Emergency Shelter Society 0310-82 Ave Edmonton, Alberta T6C 0Z6</p>
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NWT	<p>Ann Kall Human Resources Development Canada Box 1170 Station Main Yellowknife, Northwest Territories X1A 2N8 Phone: 867-669-5002 Ann.kall@hrdc-drhc.gc.ca</p>		<p>Kevin Laframboise Side Door Youth Centre Yellowknife, Northwest Territories Phone: 867-766-3272 Fax: 867-766-3273</p>
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