

Understanding Homelessness Experienced by Youth in Waterloo Region: A Discussion Document

April 2007

Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration



**Understanding Homelessness Experienced by Youth in Waterloo Region:
A Discussion Document**

by

Social Planning, Policy, and Program Administration
Regional Municipality of Waterloo

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Understanding Homelessness Experienced by Youth in Waterloo Region: A Discussion Document is one of seven background reports commissioned as part of a larger project – the development of a *Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy* designed to increase the housing stability of all Waterloo Region residents. Planning for this report was initiated by the Youth Homelessness Coordinating Group (YHCG). The YHCG is a group of approximately 20 service providers in the region who are concerned with addressing the issues of youth homelessness.

This work examines the trends and issues of homelessness which are specific to youth in Waterloo Region. It focuses on two of the three components within the housing stability system – services that meet immediate needs and shorter term housing stability programs. The third component, longer term housing stability programs, is not included because the very nature of youth-specific programs is that they are time limited, where all youth transition out of them into adult or mainstream programs when they reach a certain age.

Youth-specific services that intersect with the housing stability system are important to recognize and understand as youth who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness are likely to access and/or be referred to them. The primary systems identified and briefly discussed in this report include: the education system, the judicial system, and the child welfare system.

Defining youth experiencing homelessness

This report focuses on youth who are both experiencing and at-risk of homelessness, where those experiencing homelessness are divided into “hidden” or “absolute” categories. In the literature, youth experiencing homelessness are sometimes further distinguished as:

- “runaway” – someone who is away from the home at least overnight without parental consent or knowledge
- “throwaway” – someone that has been told that he or she may not return home

-
- “familial homeless” – someone who is experiencing homelessness along with their adult caregiver

For the purposes of this report, youth refers to persons between 12 and 24 years of age, with or without an adult caregiver. The term “youth experiencing homelessness” is used as an inclusive term that is meant to reflect all the ways in which homelessness for this population can be defined.

Prevalence rates

In Waterloo Region, the total number of youth 16 to 24 years of age accessing both youth-specific and non-youth-specific formal emergency shelter services was approximately 1,166¹ in 2005/2006, representing 28% of all emergency shelter users 16 years and older, in Waterloo Region during that time. It is estimated that 1.8% of all youth 16 to 24 years of age in the region access formal emergency shelter services over a one year period. Youth also represented 12% of Kitchener-Waterloo out of the Cold guests (or an estimated 54 unique individuals in 2005/2006). Therefore, the total number of youth accessing both formal and other recognized emergency shelter services over a one year period of time between the ages of 16 and 24 is estimated to be 1,220, representing 1.9% of all youth in the region.

The prevalence rate of persistent homelessness (defined as those with three or more emergency shelter intakes within one year²) among youth 16 to 24 years of age in the region is lower in comparison to adults. Data from Argus Residence for Young People (Argus), a youth-specific emergency shelter, indicated that over the period of 1999 to 2004, approximately 5% of all youth experienced persistent homelessness. For adults in the region, this rate is approximately 15%.

¹ Data was gathered from Argus Residence for Young People, Cambridge Shelter, YWCA-Mary's Place, and Charles Street Men's Hostel on the “total number of clients served per year”. Please note that some individuals may be served by more than one program in this section of the system.

² It is recognized that other definitions of persistent homelessness exist. For more information on the rationale for using this definition, see this project's Urban Adults report (Regional Municipality of Waterloo, 2007).

Service capacity in Waterloo Region

Youth-specific services that meet immediate needs

Youth-specific programs categorized as services that meet immediate needs in Waterloo Region include: one formal emergency shelter, one other recognized emergency shelter, a drop-in program, and a street outreach program. The following is a summary of the capacity and numbers served at each of these programs:

- A total of 32 emergency shelter beds are available for people ages 12 to 24 experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region through Argus and Safe Haven. In 2005, 422 youth 12 to 24 years of age accessed these youth-specific emergency shelters.
- Reaching Our Outdoor Friends' (ROOF) drop-in capacity (previous to the fire at the end of 2005) was frequently met, with as many as 40 youth accessing services over a four to five hour period. Over 2,600 youth are served by ROOF's drop-in facility each year.
- Street outreach does not have a defined capacity as it is a mobile service. In 2004, street outreach workers made a total of 13,809 contacts with 487 different individuals.

Youth-specific shorter term housing stability programs

Shorter term housing stability programs in Waterloo Region include: a transitional support program, three maternity homes, one transitional housing program, and one supportive housing program. The following is a summary of the capacity and numbers served at each of these programs:

- ROOF's transitional support program was originally targeted to directly support up to 50 youth ages 16 to 20 each year; however, in 2005, 70 youth were served.
- The three maternity homes include: Cara's Hope Maternity Home, Saint Monica House Inc., and Marillac Place. In total, there are 51 spaces available. In 2005, 171 young pregnant or parenting females were housed by one of these maternity home agencies.
- There are six spaces available at Kiwanis House transitional home. In 2005, 29 young males were housed at Kiwanis House.

-
- At the Cambridge Kiwanis Village Youth Supportive Housing, there are eight spaces for males and females. In 2005, 13 youth were served.
 - Overall, a total of 283³ youth were served in at least one of these shorter term housing stability programs in 2005.

Non-youth-specific housing stability services

A significant number of youth in the region access non-youth-specific emergency shelter services. It was estimated that approximately 25% (or 988) of all non-youth-specific emergency shelter clientele were youth 16 to 24 years. Aside from emergency shelter services, youth represent a very small minority of clients served in all other non-youth-specific housing stability programs.

Gender and age trends

Gender and age trends in emergency shelter usage were similar in Waterloo Region compared to other communities. More male youth (70% for both youth-specific and non-youth-specific) accessing emergency shelter services in Waterloo Region compared to females in 2005. The average age of youth accessing youth-specific emergency shelter services in Waterloo Region is estimated to be around 16 and 17. Males accessing emergency shelter services are typically older than females.

Youth Issues and Insights

Through the literature review, analysis of local research and consultations with local service providers, it was determined that regardless of age, sex, or ethnicity, most youth share common challenges. Many services focus on issues of abuse, family breakdown, problems in school, substance use, mental health, and involvement in the judicial system in their efforts to help youth stabilize their lives after leaving home. Added to the complexity of these issues are the systemic, biological, and discriminatory challenges faced by youth because of their age. In order to lay the groundwork to address these issues of homelessness among youth in Waterloo Region, the following eight insights were developed:

³ Please note the survey requested that each agency provide the “total number of clients served per year” for each program; it is not known whether the data provided represents an unduplicated count of individuals. Also note that some individuals may be served by more than one program in this section of the system.

-
1. The most cited causes of youth homelessness are factors in the home, particularly abuse and family conflict. Support for families to reconcile issues to help keep youth in the home should be a priority whenever possible. Explore and identify options for increasing respite and reconciliation supports to assist youth to remain connected to their informal and formal support networks.
 2. Identifying and engaging youth within two weeks of their becoming street-involved or homeless is important. Street outreach is effective in connecting quickly with youth; however, there is a lack of stable funding for outreach services. Ensure stable funding and adequate numbers of outreach workers to meet the demands on the street as well as in the schools so that youth experiencing homelessness are connected to supports as soon as possible.
 3. Drop-ins are effective in connecting youth to resources, particularly for youth who are not likely to seek emergency shelter services. While there are many drop-ins in Waterloo Region, youth-specific services are lacking due in part to a lack of staff resources and heavy reliance on volunteers unfamiliar with youth-specific issues. Youth-specific services within drop-ins should be assessed and enhanced where needed, in order to effectively connect youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness to appropriate resources.
 4. While prevention and early intervention are preferred when working with youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, it is recognized that the option to return home may not be immediate or even possible for many youth.
 - a) Explore best practices on youth-specific housing options for youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness.
 - b) Depending on research results, explore and support options for the implementation of specific programs.
 5. Many youth experiencing homelessness do not have the level of education or skills necessary to secure sustainable jobs. Support strategies for youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness that increase attachment to meaningful activity with the longer term goal of securing sustainable employment. Programs within and outside of the public and separate school boards should be taken into consideration such as:

trade school, skills training, Youth Suspension Programs and post-secondary training.

6. Prevalence rates of youth with substance use and mental health issues are high among youth experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region. Local service providers indicated that there is a lack of services in the community to address complex issues, including: substance use issues, developmental disabilities, mental health issues, and concurrent disorders.
 - a) Complete a review and further assessment with appropriate stakeholders on substance use, developmental disabilities and mental health services currently available in the region to determine which specific services are lacking for youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness and to determine priorities.
 - b) Based on the assessment, explore options for serving youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness who have complex issues.
7. Resources available in Waterloo Region for youth 16 and 17 experiencing or at-risk of homelessness are limited in comparison to the other age groups. A complete review and assessment is required to determine what specific services are lacking for youth 16 and 17 years of age who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness in the region and to determine priorities.
8. To effectively serve youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, staff need to be knowledgeable and sensitive to the key issues facing this unique population. Certain areas have been identified where there is very little information, or the issues are complex and staff would benefit from training. Provide youth-specific training for staff across the housing stability system in the following areas: youth development, sexual identity, risky sexual behaviour, mental health, and substance use.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding Homelessness Experienced by Youth in Waterloo Region: A Discussion Document is one of seven background reports commissioned as part of a larger project – the development of a *Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy* designed to increase the housing stability of all Waterloo Region residents. *All Roads Lead to Home: A Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy for Waterloo Region* will synthesize all seven background reports and include an action plan for housing stability service providers, the Regional Municipality of Waterloo (the Region) and the Homelessness and Housing Umbrella Group (HHUG) with its member groups.

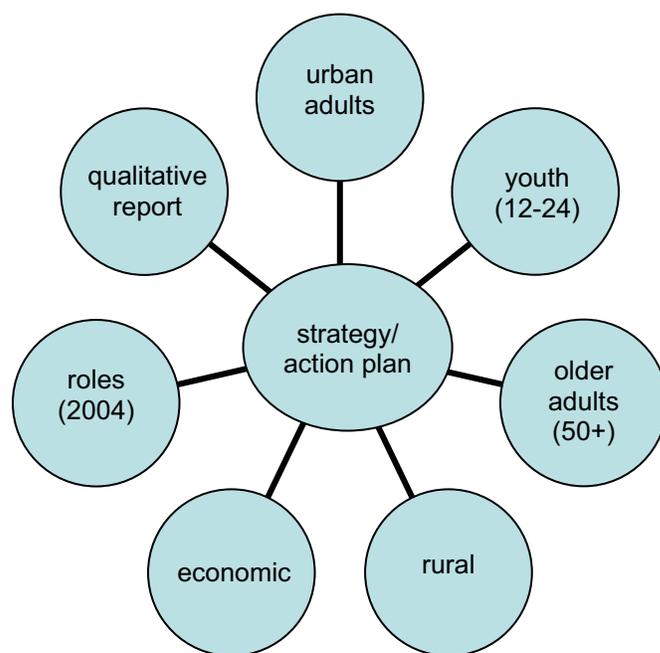


Figure 1. The development of a Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy and an action plan for the future.

The purpose of this report is to assess issues related to homelessness among the youth population and lay down the groundwork for further discussion and planning to address issues of youth homelessness in Waterloo Region. To fully assess and address issues related to homelessness among youth, it is necessary to look beyond the housing stability system as youth experiencing homelessness often fall under the mandates of

other systems that intersect the housing stability system. For example, a youth living in a group home falls under the mandate of the child welfare system. He/she can access programs through Family and Children's Services but may also likely access programs within the housing stability system. Other examples within the education system and the judicial system are further discussed in the body of the report. Housing stability service providers must take into consideration how these intersections with other systems and their mandates will affect service delivery. Thus, In the absence of a broad based consultation encompassing the systems that directly affect housing stability for youth, this report is presented as a discussion document to serve as a foundation for further discussion with respect to identifying and closing the service gaps for youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness in the community.

Organization of the report

The report begins with an introduction, discussing the purpose and how the report is organized. To set the stage for this report, two excerpts of real life experiences of youth who have experienced homelessness are presented. Information is then provided to identify the scope and limitations of this work, including: a definition of homelessness in the youth population, a discussion of the housing stability system as it specifically relates to youth, and the methodology used to gather data for this report.

The second section of the report discusses service capacity as it relates to specific services for youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness in Waterloo Region. Services that fall outside of the housing stability system but have a significant impact on youth experiencing homelessness are briefly summarized, including: the education, child welfare, and judicial systems.

Next is the youth trends section, which includes information on the socio-demographic profile of youth experiencing homelessness. Information is presented on prevalence rates, gender, age, and race and ethnicity trends. Where available, data from other communities as cited in the literature are presented first, followed by data specific to Waterloo Region.

Following youth trends, key youth issues are discussed. To determine the main issues facing youth experiencing homelessness, information was gathered from research studies from across North America. Where available, Waterloo Region data is presented to compare the extent of the specific issues as it relates to youth in the region.

The final section of the report is an analysis of the key youth issues, taking into consideration both the literature findings as well as local data. From the analysis, eight insights for action are identified and presented.

Voices from the streets

Excerpt - nowhere to grow (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999: 35-36): Case studies.

Amy Amy was 16 years old at the time of her interview. Her parents divorced when she was five and she lived with her mother until her father took her and her brother away from her mother illegally. When her mother regained custody she was living with boyfriends. When Amy was twelve, her mother, while high on drugs, told her and her brother to leave. Having no idea what to do or where to go, they spent that night at a friend's house. Soon after they returned home, her mother, still using drugs, became physically abusive. After a family argument that became violent, Amy again spent some time with friends. Child Protective Services became involved when the mother abandoned the family. Amy was then placed in a group home, where she attempted suicide. After a brief hospitalization she was returned to the group home and again made a suicide attempt. After another hospitalization she was released to a foster home that didn't work out. From there she was placed again in a group home, from which she ran away. Over the next nine months Amy ran away from a group home a total of 26 times. After yet another hospital stay, a foster home was tried again, but she was asked to leave due to behavioural problems. So it was back to the group home. After another series of runs she wound up in juvenile detention. When released she tried living with her mother again and then living with an uncle. When things did not work out at the uncle's house, she returned to live with her mother. Authorities removed her from her mother's house because of her ongoing drug habit and returned her to the

group home. Amy admits to serious drug use herself and has used IV drugs. She has recurring nightmares and obsessive thoughts regarding a stranger-rape during the past year. She was living at a group home at the time of our interview.

Excerpt - planet youth: Street-involved and homeless youth speak out

Clay

My name is Clay and I have been on my own since I was 15. I left my dad's to live on the street, or to live with my friend Dave at his house with his mom and dad until I could find a better place. Then, one day I went to my doctor's who was aware of my situation. She said that she had a foster family in mind. I met the lady and we hit it off, so I moved in with her. I was still going to middle school then. The relationship started to deteriorate, I had a nervous breakdown and my foster parents put me into a hospital. I think it was a way of getting rid of me 'cause they thought I was into criminal activities. The truth was that, all I wanted was to have a family. My grandmother got me out of the hospital and I started living with her for about a year. By then I had started high school. My grandmother was not willing to have me stay there with my brother so I left. I stayed at Brennan house (an emergency shelter) for a year and then moved back in with my grandmother. That was the last time I stayed at a shelter for about six months. Then I moved into my own apartment with the help from the counsellors at Brennan House.

Defining "homelessness" in the youth population

This report focuses on individuals who are both experiencing and at-risk of homelessness, where those experiencing homelessness are divided into "hidden" or "absolute" categories. The chart below describes these categories in more detail.

at-risk of homelessness	hidden homelessness	absolute homelessness
people who are in jeopardy of losing their housing because it is unaffordable, unsafe, overcrowded, insecure, inappropriate, and/or inadequately maintained; it also refers to cases where the person lacks necessary supports to maintain housing stability	the experience of living in temporary accommodation not meant for long-term housing (e.g., staying in time-limited transitional housing programs; with family, friends, or acquaintances; or in residential treatment programs or withdrawal management centres)	the experience of living or sleeping in indoor or outdoor spaces not intended for inhabitation (e.g., in streets, parks, abandoned buildings, stairwells, doorways, cars, or under bridges) and/or emergency shelter residence

Numerous studies have been published involving youth experiencing homelessness, each with a different definition. Appendix A provides a sampling of some of these. In the literature, youth experiencing homelessness are sometimes also further distinguished as “runaways”, “throwaways”, or “familial homeless”. *Runaway* is used to refer to someone who is away from home at least overnight without parental consent or knowledge (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999; Schaffner, 1999; Artenstein, 1990). *Throwaway* is used to refer to a child that has been told that he or she may not return home, or a child that has been kicked out or locked out of the parents’ house (Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999; Adams *et al.*, 1985). Finally, with the rise in the number of homeless families in North America, researchers have started to distinguish between *youth experiencing homelessness* (in general) and *youth experiencing familial homeless* – a term used to refer to youth who are experiencing homelessness along with their adult caregiver (Hicks-Coolick *et al.*, 2003).

There is also a lack of consensus among researchers concerning the age range that separates youth from children and adults. Many studies define “*youth*” in terms of ages that fall somewhere in between 12 and 24 (Peressini, 2003; Hagan & McCarthy, 1998; Kufeldt & Burrows, 1994; Robertson, 1992). However, this age range poses a potential dilemma from a service perspective, as it spans several core and distinct sectors of service provision. From an applied and policy perspective, it may be most logical to consider services that are specifically available to youth and to use those age ranges instead. For example, youth ages 15 and under are eligible for services through Child

and Family Services, youth ages 16 and 17 years are eligible for some adult services (with restrictions), and youth ages 18 and over are generally eligible for all adult services.

For the purposes of this report, youth refers to persons between 12 and 24 years of age, with or without an adult caregiver. The term “youth experiencing homelessness” encompasses hidden and absolute homelessness, as well as, all categories for housing instability identified in the literature.

Housing stability system specific to youth

Focusing on *housing stability* (investing in affordable housing and individualized support systems to address homelessness over the long-term) rather than *homelessness* (which often encourages shorter-term “stop gap” measures like emergency shelters) allows for a solutions-based perspective. There are three components of the housing stability system: services that meet immediate needs (e.g. emergency shelter services and street outreach), shorter term housing stability programs (e.g. transitional supports and shorter term housing), and longer term housing stability programs (e.g. housing with supportive services). This report focuses on the components which are specific to youth, including services that meet immediate needs and shorter term housing stability programs. The third component, longer term housing stability programs is not relevant to the youth population because the very nature of youth-specific programs is that they are time limited, where all youth transition out of them into adult or mainstream programs when they reach a certain age.

In terms of addressing homelessness, Housing First is a preferred approach for adults, which means that people experiencing homelessness should access housing as a first priority rather than services to address any pre-existing issues. While a Housing First approach has been found to be successful among the adult population experiencing homelessness (Regional Municipality of Waterloo, 2007), the success of this approach among youth experiencing homelessness is not known. Local service providers are not supportive of this approach, highlighting the need for a more flexible approach to meet the unique challenges faced by youth. Youth are at different stages in terms of their

readiness and desire to live independently in the community. In addition, youth face barriers in securing permanent, affordable housing that differ from adults. These issues are further explored within the body of the report.

The focus of this report is to assess the housing stability system's ability to meet the needs of youth experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region. It also highlights the complexities and uniqueness of the youth homeless population compared to the adult homeless population within the housing stability system. As mentioned earlier, systems that intersect with the housing stability system in serving youth will not be assessed as it is not within the scope of this report and would require extensive further research. However, it is acknowledged that many youth experiencing homelessness are likely to be accessing and/or be referred to programs within the judicial, education and child welfare systems. Therefore, a brief summary of those programs specific to youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness is included in the section on local capacity.

Methodology

As with all homeless populations, there are methodological concerns with the data presented in the literature on youth. Many research studies have collected their data using different methods, encompassing different time periods, and including different youth populations (Peressini *et al.*, 1996). Thus, comparing the extent of homelessness in the youth homeless population between communities is not reliable or valid. Despite this limitation, it can still be useful to consider data from other communities in terms of assessing risk factors and trends.

Several sources were used in this report to describe the youth homeless population in Waterloo Region, including data from local research studies, community consultations, and information provided by housing stability service providers. Several local research reports were used, including: *Homeless Youth in Waterloo Region: A Report on Two Pilot Projects* (DeSantis, 2002), *Inventory of Services for the Housing Stability System in Waterloo Region* (Regional Municipality of Waterloo, 2006), *Centre for Research and Education in Human Services (CREHS) Final Report* (CREHS, 2005), *Reaching Our Outdoor Friends (ROOF) Youth Survey Report* (ROOF, 2004), and *Waterloo Region in*

the 21st Century: A Community Action Plan for Housing (2005) that documented findings from the Region's *Housing Needs Survey* (2002). In addition, information was obtained through several consultations, including: information shared at the "From Homelessness to Housing Stability in Waterloo Region: Developing a Plan of Action" community forum held in November 2006, input from the Youth Homelessness Coordinating Group (YHCG), and feedback provided by housing stability service providers in Waterloo Region.

As defined earlier, information on the youth homeless population in this report focuses on those between the ages of 12 to 24; however, it was not always possible to provide information that encompassed this full age range. There are three data sources cited throughout the report where the complete 12 to 24 age range was not captured. To reduce some of the repetitiveness of reiterating the different age ranges when citing these three sources, the following age ranges should be assumed, unless otherwise indicated. The first data source is from emergency shelter service providers. Since all formal emergency shelters in Waterloo Region are mandated to serve individuals 16 years and over, data from all formal emergency shelters encompass youth ages 16 to 24. Safe Haven is a recognized emergency shelter that serves youth ages 12 to 15. The second data source is from the *ROOF Survey Report* (ROOF, 2004), which only included youth ages 12 to 18. The third data source is from the *Homeless Youth in Waterloo Region: a Report on Two Pilot Projects* (DeSantis, 2002). The two pilot projects, which included Project Warmth emergency shelter and Off the Street Into Shelter (OSIS) street outreach, focused on different age ranges. Project Warmth focused on youth ages 12 to 18; however, the actual age range of youth accessing Project Warmth was between 13 and 21. OSIS focused on youth ages 12 to 17; however, there were some youth 18 years and over who were also served.

CAPACITY

The following summarizes youth-specific services that are categorized as services that meet immediate needs and shorter term housing stability programs. As discussed earlier, no youth-specific programs are categorized as “longer term”. Each section begins with a summary table, followed by a summary of program capacities and any notable trends within the region. All information was sourced from the 2006 version of the *Inventory of Services*.

Following the summaries of the programs within the housing stability system, a brief overview of some of the programs within the education, judicial, and child welfare systems are discussed. As indicated earlier, the programs within these other systems have not been fully assessed. Developing a more complete inventory is not within the scope of this report and would require further research.

Services that meet immediate needs

Table 1 provides a summary of youth-specific services that are categorized as services that meet immediate needs. These include: a formal emergency shelter, a recognized emergency shelter, a drop-in program, and a street outreach program. A more in-depth summary of data regarding services, capacity, and demand follows.

Table 1: Services that meet immediate needs

Organization and/or Program/Service	Location	Eligibility	Services & Capacity	Length of Stay Guidelines	Unique Individuals Served and/or Units of Service Provided	Area Served
Formal Emergency Shelter Services						
Argus Residence for Young People (female)	Cambridge	females ages 16-24	regular: 10 beds expanded/emergency: 11 beds (additional 1 couch)	3 months	2005: individuals: 178 (female: 82 male: 96) bed nights: 6,550	Waterloo Region
Argus Residence for Young People (male)		males ages 16-24	regular: 10 beds expanded/emergency: 11 beds (additional 1 couch)			
Other Recognized Emergency Shelter Services						
Lutherwood: Betty Thompson Youth Centre Safe Haven Shelter	Kitchener	children ages 12-15	regular: 10 beds	no specific length of stay guidelines	2005: 244 clients	Waterloo Region and beyond
Drop-in Services						
ROOF: Drop-In	Kitchener	street youth ages 12 to 25	services: Monday – Friday 12-4 p.m. & 7-11 p.m. & weekends 2-7 p.m. meals; food hampers; clothing; hygiene products; laundry & shower facilities; prescription medication subsidies; connective outreach; life skills training; anger management; sports & recreation; crisis counselling & referral; therapeutic craft/art work; educational groups; advocacy; family mediation; substance abuse education/treatment referral/treatment aftercare; emergency shelter referral capacity: as many as 40 youth over one 4-5 hr period	N/A ⁴	Annual: 2600+	Waterloo Region

⁴ N/A: Not Applicable

Table 1: Services that meet immediate needs (continued)

Organization and/or Program/Service	Location	Eligibility	Services & Capacity	Length of Stay Guidelines	Unique Individuals Served and/or Units of Service Provided	Area Served
Street Outreach Services						
ROOF: OSIS	mobile service	homeless and at-risk of homelessness youth ages 12 to 25	<p>services: weekday services provided up to 11:00 p.m.; connect youth with health & safety supports; provide immediate need items such as food, clothing; attend meetings with potential landlords, initial counselling sessions or intake appointments at other agencies, court processes, etc.; during the winter months provide supportive outreach services</p> <p>Out of the Cold sites</p>	N/A	<p>2004: 487 individuals total of 13,809 contacts</p>	Waterloo Region primarily in core areas

Emergency shelter services:

Services

Emergency shelter services for youth are provided by non-profit agencies in the community. Argus is a formal emergency shelter with a purchase of service agreement with the Region. Located in Cambridge, Argus has operated emergency shelter services for youth ages 16 to 24 since 1985. Betty Thompson Youth Centre Safe Haven Shelter does not have a purchase of service agreement with the Region, but is a recognized emergency shelter located in Kitchener, providing shelter services for youth ages 12 to 15 since 1996.

Argus provides many services for its residents, including: life skill programming, community integration planning, nutritional planning, cooperative living, mediation and conflict resolution, individual goal setting and progressive discharge planning, household management, on-site group and individual therapy, access to a family physician, no-charge access to the Chaplin Family YWCA, and strong referral and advocacy assistance with individual needs and case plans.

Safe Haven also provides many services to its residents, including: runaway prevention education, life skills groups, social skills groups, recreational programming, individual and family counseling, referrals, case coordination, assessment, and mediation with families.

Argus and Safe Haven both receive referrals from across the housing stability system. When Argus has reached its capacity and is no longer accepting new residents, referrals are made to the Cambridge Shelter, YWCA-Mary's Place or Charles Street Men's Hostel. When Safe Haven has reached its capacity and is no longer accepting new residents, referrals are made to Family and Children's Services (FACS) or to the hospital.

Capacity

The regular capacity of Waterloo Region's formal emergency shelter services for youth ages 16 to 24 experiencing homelessness is 20 beds (10 for females and 10 for males), provided by Argus. Argus can "expand" its regular capacity within the residences by one bed for each gender (when using these extra beds, the shelter is considered to be in "overflow"). The regular capacity of Waterloo Region's other recognized emergency shelter services for youth ages 12 to 15 experiencing homelessness is 10 beds, provided by Safe Haven. Therefore, there are a total of 32 beds available within youth-specific services for people ages 12 to 24 experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region.

Although Kitchener-Waterloo Out of the Cold has operated a youth-specific night in the past, as of November 2006, this option is no longer available.

Demand

At Argus, the number of bed nights has increased by almost 50% from 1999 to 2005. Number of intakes has fluctuated slightly over the years; fewer intakes in 2003/2004 may have been partly due to renovations. Over the last seven years, residents stayed for an average of 32 days, with the highest per year average length of stay reported in 2004 at 43 days. Occupancy rates have hovered around 90% since 2000, with the exception of 2003 when the rate was closer to 80%. In 2005, 178 individuals were served at Argus (54% male, 46% female) and bed nights totaled 6,550. Of the 135 reported days in "overflow", almost 90% were in the male residence. The average length of stay for all residents was 37 days. Twenty-one percent of residents were those who had returned for services.

In 2005, 244 youth stayed at Safe Haven. In general, the shelter's capacity was met 65% of the time. The average length of stay was 12 days. On average, about 10% of residents returned for services.

Street outreach services (fixed and mobile):

ROOF is a non-profit agency located in Kitchener that provides drop-in and street outreach services to youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. At the end of 2005, ROOF suffered a devastating fire which destroyed the building. Consequently, ROOF services were moved to two different sites in 2006. Although youth were able to access services at the temporary locations, the disruptions and scaled back services will have reduced ROOF's capacity to provide services in 2006 and 2007. The following summarizes data that was collected in 2005 prior to the fire.

Services

ROOF's drop-in has been available to youth ages 12 to 25 since 1989. Youth can access basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, laundry and shower facilities) as well as life skills training, counselling, and referrals through the drop-in.

The street outreach service has been available to youth ages 12 to 25 since late 2001. It is a mobile outreach service which connects youth with health and safety supports and provides immediate needs items. The program is operated largely in the core areas of the region.

Capacity

Frequently, ROOF's drop-in facility is at capacity, with as many as 40 youth accessing services over a four to five hour period. As street outreach is a mobile service it does not have a defined capacity.

Demand

Over 2,600 youth are served by ROOF's drop-in facility each year; however, this number is expected to be lower for 2006 and 2007 as a result of a fire at the end of 2005. Seventy-five percent of these youth use the services more than once. On average, youth tend to use drop-in services for about two years. It is estimated that about half of the youth using ROOF's drop-in facility are experiencing homelessness.

In 2004, street outreach workers made direct contact with 487 different individuals (114 ages 12 to 15; 168 ages 16 and 17; 205 ages 18 and over). Most individuals were

contacted more than once, for a total of 13,809 contacts made during this period through youth street outreach services. It is estimated that about half of the youth using street outreach services are experiencing homelessness, with the other half being at-risk of homelessness.

Shorter term housing stability programs

Table 2 is a summary of programs categorized as shorter term housing stability programs available in Waterloo Region. They include: a transitional support program, three maternity homes, a transitional housing program, and a supportive housing program; the table provides a general overview, which is then followed by a more in-depth summary of data regarding services, capacity and demand.

Table 2: Shorter term housing stability programs

Organization and/or Program/Service	Location	Eligibility	Services & Capacity	Length of Stay Guidelines	Unique Individuals Served and/or Units of Service Provided	Area Served
Transitional Supports						
ROOF: Youth Housing and Community Program	Kitchener	youth who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness ages 16-20	help prepare for independent living; individualized support to help maintain a healthy environment (housekeeping); conflict resolution skill development; assist with eviction issues & budget limitations; accompaniment & introduction to recreational, health, educational, self-help & social programs; support & advocacy regarding issues of eviction risk, and institutional involvement (schools, court, tribunal)	primary support for up to 3 months; secondary support for up to 5 months	Annual: 70	Waterloo Region
Maternity Homes						
Cara's Hope Maternity Home	Cambridge	females ages 15-24	4 pregnant young single mothers	first trimester and up until babies are 3 months old, longer if needed	2004/2005: housed 12 pregnant teens & 10 babies; helped more than 20 other women living in the community	Cambridge & beyond
Saint Monica House Inc.: Monica-Ainslie Place	Cambridge	single mothers ages 16-24 with up to 2 children	15 single mothers & their children	residency limit of up to 2 years	Annual: 124 individuals served in residential care; 190 served through community program	Waterloo-Wellington & Dufferin Counties
Saint Monica House Inc.: Saint Monica House	Waterloo	females ages 12-22	22 pregnant young single mothers	8 weeks post-natal		

Table 2: Shorter term housing stability programs (continued)

Organization and/or Program/Service	Location	Eligibility	Services & Capacity	Length of Stay Guidelines	Unique Individuals Served and/or Units of Service Provided	Area Served
Marillac Place	Kitchener	females ages 16-25; new mothers with children under 2	10 pregnant young single mothers	full pregnancy plus 1 year postnatal; children can only be up to 2 years of age	2005: housed 35 young mothers & children; 857 calls & 115 visits through outreach; 14 families received a food hamper	Waterloo Region & areas in South-western Ontario
Transitional Housing						
House of Friendship: Kiwanis House	Kitchener	young men ages 16-19 (possibly up to 21 years of age)	6 spaces are available; it is a life skills training and support program	11 months	2004/2005: 29 youth	Waterloo-Wellington County
Supportive Housing						
Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Housing Corporation & Argus Residence for Young People: Cambridge Kiwanis Village Youth Supportive Housing	Cambridge	homeless youth ages 16-24	Services: a worker is available 24 hrs/day via payer & cell and provides one-on-one & group counselling, life skills coaching; crisis intervention; mediation with landlords & help with school, work and income support capacity: 4, 2-bedroom units house 8 male & female youth	no length of stay guidelines	2005: 13 youth	Cambridge & North Dumfries

Shorter term housing stability programs:

Services

Local shorter term housing stability programs for youth are provided by non-profit agencies that have been operating the programs for a range of time periods in the community, from two to almost 40 years. The Youth Housing and Community Program through ROOF is a transitional support program that has been available to youth ages 16 to 20 since 2004. This program helps youth prepare for independent living and focuses on housekeeping, conflict resolution skill development, assistance with eviction issues and budget limitations and support and advocacy regarding issues of eviction risk and institutional involvement (e.g., schools, court, and tribunal).

Three of the shorter term housing stability programs are targeted to pregnant or parenting youth. They include: Cara's Hope Maternity Home (located in Cambridge, for ages 15 to 24 and babies up to the age of three months), Saint Monica House Inc. (Cambridge-based Monica-Ainslie Place for ages 16 to 24 with a maximum of two children and Waterloo-based Saint Monica House for ages 12 to 22), and Marillac Place (located in Kitchener, for ages 16 to 25 and children up to the age of two).

Kiwanis House, operated by the House of Friendship, is a transitional housing program located in Kitchener open to young men ages 16 to 19 (youth up to 21 years of age may be admitted on a case-by-case basis).

Cambridge Kiwanis Village Youth Supportive Housing is operated through a partnership between Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Housing Corporation and Argus. The housing is located in Cambridge and opened in 2002 with one full time Supportive Housing Worker (but is currently part-time).

A range of services are offered by these housing programs (not necessarily by each program), including: life skill development, parenting classes, workshops (decision making, self awareness, independent living, budgeting, personal health and nutrition, baby wellness, household management, anger/stress management, building self

esteem, conflict resolution, relationships), mediation with landlord issues, finding employment, counseling, peer support, health care and prenatal classes, pre and post adoption support, career counseling, recreational opportunities, toy lending library, referrals to other community agencies, and educational opportunities.

Capacity

ROOF's Youth Housing and Community Program worker maintains a caseload of eight to 12 participants. Primary support is provided for a period of up to three months and secondary support is provided for a period of up to five months. The project as a whole can directly support up to 50 individuals each year. There is currently no wait list for services.

The total capacity for all shorter term housing programs is 65 spaces, including: 51 spaces for young pregnant or parenting females, six spaces for young males at Kiwanis House transitional home, and eight spaces for males and females at Cambridge Kiwanis Village supportive home.

Demand

In total, 70 youth were served through ROOF's Youth Housing and Community Program in 2005 and approximately 40 find housing each year. Seventy-five percent of those served return to the worker within the year to follow-up on the issues that they worked on together. On average, youth tend to use this program for about eight months in total.

In 2005, 171 young pregnant or parenting females were housed by one of the three maternity home agencies. Most homes reported that their capacity was usually met and 80-90% of the youth returned for other supportive services following their stay. Residents tend to stay at the maternity homes for about six or seven months on average.

Twenty-nine young men were housed at Kiwanis House in 2005. Over the last five years, Kiwanis House's occupancy rate has fluctuated from 50-83% and about one in

five residents have returned for housing services. Youth tend to stay at Kiwanis House for about two months on average.

In 2005, 13 youth were housed by the Cambridge Kiwanis Village Youth Supportive Housing program. On average, youth stay for about 10 months and do not return for services.

Most programs noted that the demand for their services is increasing. It was estimated that 90% of residents would be homeless without these services.

Youth accessing non-youth specific services

All adult programs serve those who are 18 years and over, and most serve people 16 years and over, thereby capturing a number of youth in their service clientele. What follows is information that describes service use among youth in programs across the housing stability system that primarily serves adults.

Services that meet immediate needs

There are three formal emergency shelter services that serve people 16 and over in Waterloo Region, including: the Cambridge Shelter (a mixed gender shelter located in Cambridge), Charles Street Men's Hostel (a men's shelter located in Kitchener) and YWCA-Mary's Place (a women's shelter located in Kitchener). In addition, Kitchener-Waterloo Out of the Cold is categorized as an other recognized emergency shelter that operates seasonally out of different church sites.

Although YWCA-Mary's Place is not a designated youth-specific emergency shelter, they receive annualized funding from the Ministry of Child and Youth Services for one full-time Youth Support Coordinator who works directly with YWCA-Mary's Place residents aged 15 to 20 years, providing enhanced case management and life skills support to approximately 180 youth per year.

In 2006, the Cambridge Shelter served a total of 2,403 clients, of which 610 were youth 16 to 24 years of age. Data categorized by age were not available from YWCA-Mary's

Place and Charles Street Men's Hostel; however, service providers estimated that youth at these shelters represented about 25% of their total clientele in 2005/2006. Given that the number of unique individuals served in 2005 at YWCA-Mary's Place and Charles Street Men's Hostel was 577 and 937 respectively, using the 25% proxy it can be estimated that 144 youth were served at YWCA-Mary's Place, and 234 were served at Charles Street Men's Hostel. Overall, it is estimated that 988 youth stayed at the three non-youth-specific emergency shelters for people experiencing homelessness in the region over a one year period.

In 2005/2006, there were 756 bednights for youth between 16 and 22 years of age at one of the Kitchener-Waterloo Out of the Cold sites (this number included those who stayed overnight at the youth-specific site). Based on statistics from 2001/2002 through 2005/2006, youth under 20 years represented 12% of Kitchener-Waterloo Out of the Cold guests on average. Numbers of youth using these overnight services dropped noticeably twice in the last seven years (in 2002/2003 and again in 2005/2006).

Aside from emergency shelter services, youth represented generally less than 10% of clients served (with the exception of a few programs) in the other non-youth-specific services that meet immediate needs (street outreach, both mobile and drop-ins).

Shorter term housing stability programs

Youth represented a very small minority of clients served in non-youth-specific shorter term housing stability programs.

Systems that intersect the housing stability system

Youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness are likely to access and/or be referred to programs within the education, judicial, and/or child welfare systems. For the youth homeless population, it is particularly important to understand the intersections and barriers that these systems may pose as it relates to housing stability outcomes. For example, in the *ROOF Youth Survey Report* (ROOF, 2004), participants identified three key areas of concern related to systemic barriers, these included: issues connected to residency in child protection group homes, issues connected to poor attendance within

the educational system, and issues connected to negative contact within the criminal judicial system.

While the following is not a comprehensive inventory of the programs within the systems that intersect with the housing stability system, it provides an overview of those that are specific to youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness in Waterloo Region.

Education

In Ontario, the Ministry of Education recently developed new programs specific to youth at-risk of homelessness that are delivered locally through the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) and the Waterloo Catholic District School Board (WCDSB).

Programs through the WRDSB that have particular focus on unemployed youth with little or no attachment to school include: *Choices for Youth*, *Workplace Essentials*, and *U-turn*. These generally focus on providing academic support, interpersonal development, setting goals, career development, skill development and individual support (e.g. counselling, mentoring, and peer support).

Through the WCDSB, the *Building Successful Students* program focuses on developing programs for struggling students and students who are disengaged with school. There are four components of the program focusing on increasing students' academic skills (Literacy and Numeracy), successful transitioning of grade 8 students into Secondary School (Pathways), and a bullying prevention program (Community, Culture and Caring).

Judicial

Several crime prevention programs are delivered locally through the John Howard Society of Waterloo-Wellington and through Ray of Hope. Much of the funding for crime prevention programs is through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

Specific programs at the John Howard Society include: *Extra Judicial Measures and Sanctions*, *Attendance Centre Model*, *Anger Management*, *Community Service Order*,

and *Communicating Our Perspectives and Emotions Successfully*. Generally, these programs provide opportunities for youth who have committed minor offences to take responsibility for their actions, develop cognitive skills that reinforce positive values and promote responsible behaviour, enhance their problem solving skills, and learn productive ways of managing their anger. Youth are referred to these programs by police, courts, or probation officers.

Programs through Ray of Hope include: *Youth Re-integration* program, *Youth180 Addiction Treatment* program, and *Anchors School* program. The *Youth Re-Integration Program* is a voluntary mentoring/peer program serving youth ages 12-17 coming out of custody. The program assists youth to reintegrate with family, school and work. *Youth180 Addiction Treatment* is a new community-based treatment program being launched at Ray of Hope. In collaboration with St. Mary's Counselling, this six month program is accessed primarily through FACS Waterloo, although a private pay option is available. *Anchors School* is a Section 20 school program in collaboration between Ray of Hope and the WRDSB. Youth enter the program from two streams: 1) those who are transitioning out of custody and are either not quite ready for regular school or are leaving custody at a time when they cannot rejoin a regular classroom; and 2) those who are at high risk of truancy charges in the regular school. Access to this program is generally through a probation officer or school counselor.

Child welfare

Programs through FACS Waterloo that are specific to youth at-risk of homelessness include: *Youth Service Program*, the *Going Beyond Group*, and the *Specialized Adolescent Intake Team*. The *Youth Service Program* provides life skills and independence skills program and case work for youth in care between the ages of 15 to 21. Services offered through the *Going Beyond Group* include: adventure-based recreational activities, counselling, camping, and family activities. The *Specialized Adolescent Intake Team* was introduced in 2005 to improve response times for crisis calls, and to provide supports, resources, and/or programs to help keep adolescents with their family and prevent them from going into care.

YOUTH TRENDS

Prevalence

Prevalence rates in other communities:

Given that different communities have used different definitions for youth experiencing homelessness in their various research studies, comparing prevalence rates is not meaningful. Emergency shelter usage data between Ontario communities provides a more relevant comparison to the data that is available in Waterloo Region.

In Hamilton, it was estimated that roughly 600 youth aged 16 to 21 are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, representing around 1.5% of the total youth population in the area. Moreover, youth staying in emergency shelters accounted for roughly .05% of all youth in Hamilton (Hamilton Community Services, 2006). Rates of youth using youth-specific emergency shelter services were estimated to be 395 in Peel Region in 1999-2000 (CMHC Research Highlights, 2001) and more than 600 in Ottawa in 2006 (City of Ottawa, 2005). Finally, in the City of Toronto, it was estimated that 6,900 youth between the ages of 15 and 24 stayed in municipally funded shelters in 2002⁵, representing 22% of emergency shelter residents (City of Toronto, 2003).

Prevalence rate in Waterloo Region:

The following estimates were taken from the 2006 version of the *Inventory of Services*, using unduplicated counts of individuals 16 to 24 years of age accessing emergency shelter services.

Of the formal youth-specific emergency shelters, Argus served 178 youth in 2005. Of the formal non-youth-specific emergency shelters, it was estimated that 988 youth were served at YWCA-Mary's Place, Charles Street Men's Hostel, and Cambridge Shelter in the last reported year. Thus, for 2005/2006, the total number of youth accessing formal emergency shelter services was 1,166, representing 28% of all emergency shelter

⁵ It should be noted that while recent research has been published (Toronto's 2006 Street Needs Assessment), rates specific to youth were difficult to extrapolate as it was combined with the adult population.

users in Waterloo Region. Over a one year period, it is estimated that 1.8%⁶ of all youth 16 to 24 years of age in Waterloo Region access formal emergency shelter services. Youth also represented 12% of Kitchener-Waterloo out of the Cold guests (or an estimated 54⁷ unique individuals in 2005/2006). Therefore, the total number of youth accessing both formal and other recognized emergency shelter services over a one year period of time between the ages of 16 and 24 is estimated to be 1,220, representing 1.9% of all youth in the region.

While the data seems to suggest that Waterloo Region has a higher proportion of youth accessing emergency shelter services compared to other Ontario community estimates, given the discrepancy with time periods, age ranges, and limited data available, the ability to compare with other communities is limited.

The prevalence rate of persistent homelessness (defined as those with three or more emergency shelter intakes within a year⁸) among youth is lower in comparison to adults. Data provided by Argus indicated that over the period of 1999 to 2004, an average of 5% of youth experienced persistent homelessness. For adults, this rate is approximately 15% (Regional Municipality of Waterloo, 2007).

Gender and Age

Gender trends in other communities

Most North American studies of youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness report an average age for their sample in the mid-teens – anywhere from 15 to 19 depending on the study (Stefanidis *et al.*, 2002; Whitbeck *et al.*, 2004; Clements *et al.*, 1997), with males being slightly older (e.g. typically six months to a year) than females on average (McLean, 2005). While the majority of youth experiencing homelessness are male, the

⁶ This calculation used a forecast of the total youth population 16-24 years in Waterloo Region in 2006, which was 63,165 (Source: Planning, Housing, and Community Services Department of Waterloo Region, 2006).

⁷ Youth refers to individuals 16 to 22 years of age. Note that some youth may have accessed formal emergency shelter services during this period.

⁸ It is recognized that other definitions of persistent homelessness exist. For more information on the rationale for using this definition, see this project's Urban Adults report (Regional Municipality of Waterloo, 2007).

number of females experiencing homelessness is growing across Canada (McLean, 2005; CMHC, 2001). Among the younger age categories, there is typically an even split between males and females and there is some evidence that females outnumber males as age decreases (Novac *et al.*, 2002; Caputo *et al.*, 1997).

Of youth who accessed emergency shelters in Canada, the average age has been reported to be between 15 years in Winnipeg (SPC-W, 2005) and 20 years in Toronto (City of Toronto, 2006). Males are more likely to use emergency shelters than females (McLean, 2005; Wingert *et al.*, 2005), whereas females tend to use all services across the housing stability system more consistently than males (Witkin *et al.*, 2005). The most notable gender difference in the population is between new, regular and occasional emergency shelter users: females are more likely to be new users of emergency shelters, whereas males are more likely to be occasional or regular users of emergency shelters (SPC-W, 2005).

Gender and age trends in Waterloo Region

In Waterloo Region, some of the gender and age trends found in other communities were confirmed. Data from the 2002 research study “Homeless Youth in Waterloo Region: a Report on Two Pilot Projects” found that during the study period (December 10, 2001 to March 31, 2002), the average age of those who stayed at the emergency shelter was between 16 and 17. Data gathered through the 2006 *Inventory of Services* indicated that nearly 70% of the youth that accessed youth-specific emergency shelter services in 2005/2006 were male while roughly equal numbers of females and males accessed all youth-specific services across the housing stability system.

When taking into consideration all individuals 16 and over accessing emergency shelters in Waterloo Region, it was found that the proportion of males was slightly higher (74% were males). At Charles Street Men’s Hostel, 80% of the male youth were in the 18 to 24 age category and only 20% were in the 16 to 17 age category. Similar trends were found at the Cambridge Shelter, where 84% of the youth were between 18 and 24 years old, with 89% being male. The number of females accessing YWCA-Mary’s Place in the 16 to 17 age category was almost equal to those in the 18 to 24 age

category. This supports the research findings that females accessing emergency shelter services are likely to be in the younger age range and males are disproportionately represented in the older age range for youth.

Unfortunately there is no data available to distinguish between new, regular and occasional emergency shelter users in the region.

Race and ethnicity

Race and ethnicity trends in other communities

Most Canadian studies indicate that Aboriginal people make up no less than 20% of the overall youth population and may constitute up to as much as 67% of the youth homeless population depending on geographical area. The rates vary based on the proportion of Aboriginal people in the population for a given area, thus, it is no surprise that cities such as Calgary and Winnipeg report larger numbers of Aboriginal homeless youth than cities such as Toronto, where Aboriginal persons constitute a smaller percentage of the general population. Beyond this, there is very little other information about the ethnic and racial composition of the youth homeless population. The data that is available indicates that 19.5% of those accessing youth-specific emergency shelters in Toronto self-identified as Aboriginal (City of Toronto, 2006). In addition, visible minorities make up between 1 and 9% of the youth population experiencing homelessness (McLean, 2005; Wingert *et al.*, 2005; SPC-W, 2005; City of Toronto, 2006).

Race and ethnicity trends in Waterloo Region

Immigrants account for 21% of Waterloo Region's population (Census 2001), and roughly 10% identify themselves as visible minorities. For youth in Waterloo Region, available data indicates that the percentage of visible minorities experiencing homelessness is higher compared to the overall population in the region and in comparison to other communities. Where reported, about 19% of youth experiencing homelessness identified as visible minorities (DeSantis, 2002). This difference may be due to methodological approaches, or may indicate that visible minorities are overrepresented in the youth homeless population in Waterloo Region. Whichever the

case, more research is needed to gain a better understanding of race and ethnicity trends among youth experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region.

YOUTH ISSUES

In reviewing the literature in the area of youth homelessness, it quickly becomes clear that there are as many theories or explanations for housing instability of this population as there are youth. For the most part, the available accounts of street-involvement are a product of each researcher's own particular take on the issue, either stemming from their academic background or expertise or through direct contact with small, biased samples of youth experiencing homelessness.

Thus, it is no coincidence that sociologists whose expertise is that of deviance, criminology or juvenile delinquency tend to explain the dynamics of street involvement as a function of teenage rebellion, deviant sub-cultures and/or crime and delinquency (Brannigan & Caputo, 1993). On the other hand, researchers with a background in social welfare, social policy or political economy tend to explain street-involvement as a consequence of multiple social systems; particularly their failure. Hence, it is argued that street involvement results from family breakdown and/or failures in the education system and gaps in the social safety net addressing the needs of Canada's children and youth (Hagan & McCarthy, 1998). Similarly, community and behavioural psychologists tend to explain youth street-involvement and homelessness as resting with the individual – as a function and product of individual choice and an extension of the normal processes of adolescent development – or as Whitbeck and Hoyt describe it, “precocious independence” (Whitbeck & Hoyt's, 1999). Further information regarding these models is contained in Appendix B.

While there is an element of truth in all of the existing theories and explanations, no one theory or explanation adequately encompasses the divergent pathways that youth traverse to the street. The important fact to be gleaned from the above assumptions is that they are the driving force behind the research literature contributing to our current understanding of the issues facing youth experiencing homelessness.

Through a summary of background literature and local data, this section highlights the main issues that impact youth experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region.

Abuse and other issues in the home

Background literature:

Most youth experiencing homelessness identify their home as their previous permanent address, and problems at home are the major precursor to their leaving. Abuse in the home is one of the most common reasons for youth leaving. Studies indicate that one-third of youth experiencing homelessness have suffered sexual abuse and half have suffered either physical abuse or neglect in the home (Tyler & Johnson, 2006). These numbers are likely underestimates as some youth may not be apt to disclose their experiences of abuse. In addition to abuse, other reported problems within the home that result in youth leaving for the streets include: neglect, parental substance use, poverty, divorce, and blended family situations (McLean, 2005).

Waterloo Region data:

For youth experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region, problems within the home were also identified as the main contributing factors for leaving (DeSantis, 2002; ROOF, 2004; consultation with emergency shelter service providers, 2006). Issues of abuse were the main causes of youth leaving home, followed by family conflict or breakdown (ROOF, 2004). More than half (60%) of the youth who access Argus disclose physical, sexual, or emotional abuse to staff at intake (Vlasov, personal communication, 2007).

Despite the finding that problems within the home are the main precursors to youth leaving, local service providers indicated that there is a lack of supports for parents and youth experiencing crisis situations to help youth stay connected to home. Furthermore, there is a need to recognize that reconciliation is not immediate or even possible for some families (Consultation with YHCG, 2007).

Meeting immediate needs

Background literature:

The impact of lack of intervention at an early stage of homelessness for youth is significant. Youth are quickly caught up in the street environment and research has found that if not reached in the first two weeks, youth become entrenched and exposed to more serious threats within two months (McLean, 2005). The challenge with early intervention among the youth population is that when they first leave home, they typically do not stay at emergency shelters or are visible on the streets. McLean (2005) estimates that youth experience homelessness for approximately two months before they are even identified as a result of staying with friends (also known as “couch surfing”).

Basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter, as well as services to help youth stabilize their living conditions (e.g., counselling, life skills programs, help with housing search, referrals, etc.) can often be provided or accessed through emergency shelters. Unfortunately, compared to adults, emergency shelter use by youth experiencing homelessness is lower because they prefer or choose to sleep outdoors. Most Canadian studies indicate that about one in three youth sleep outdoors, while only about 20 to 30% stay in emergency shelters (McLean, 2005; City of Toronto, 2006). A Vancouver study that conducted a one day count found that 65% of individuals 24 years and under experiencing homelessness slept on the streets or couch surfed, whereas 51% of those 25 and over did (Goldberg, 2005).

The tendency for the low number of youth to stay at emergency shelters may also be the fact that there are few emergency shelters designated specifically for youth in most jurisdictions in Canada and that adult emergency shelters are restricted from allowing youth under the age of 16 to stay there.

Waterloo Region data:

Results from “Homeless Youth in Waterloo Region: A Report on Two Pilot Projects” (DeSantis, 2002) confirmed data from the literature – that youth experiencing

homelessness in Waterloo Region typically stay with friends. Sleeping on the street, however, was not a frequent response. Immediate needs reported by youth experiencing homelessness included: food, clothing and transportation. More specific needs reported included a youth drop-in in Cambridge, and the need for meal programs to be available more days of the week in Cambridge.

The Report on Two Pilot Projects also indicated that youth felt there was a lack of youth-specific emergency shelters, particularly for those 12 to 17. However, the majority said they did not have difficulty finding emergency shelter due to lack of beds, nor was shelter identified as an immediate need. Interestingly, youth who accessed the emergency shelter for longer periods of time (20 or more nights) identified emergency/transitional shelter as a priority. So it seems that although emergency shelter services may not be regarded as important at first, it becomes more important as usage increases (DeSantis, 2002).

There is no youth-specific emergency shelter in the Kitchener-Waterloo area and limited space at the youth shelters in Cambridge. Consequently, more youth are staying at emergency shelters that primarily serve adults. As indicated earlier, 178 youth stayed at the formal youth-specific emergency shelters and approximately 988 stayed at adult emergency shelters in 2005/2006. The qualitative data gathered for this project (CREHS, 2005) indicated that the mixing of youth in adult-oriented emergency shelters has posed some problems in the region. Most programs offered in these shelters are adult-oriented, which are not appropriate for youth's stage of development. Emergency shelter residents also reported that there is tension between youth and older residents. Furthermore, mixing youth with adults in the emergency shelters exposes vulnerable youth to adult lifestyles and high risk activities.

Intervention for youth 16 and 17 years of age may be even more challenging as local service providers indicate that services specific to youth in this age group are lacking (Information shared at the November 2006 community consultation and verified by the YHCG, 2007).

Involvement in criminal activities

Background literature:

Youth experiencing homelessness often engage in a progressive process of deviance and delinquency, beginning with typical adolescent deviance, which then evolves into street-level crimes (e.g., theft), and finally progresses towards serious and long-term criminal behaviour (McLean, 2005). Criminal activity is seen as a “natural” outgrowth of survival on the street (Innovative Housing for Homeless Youth, 2002). Another Canadian study even sees criminal activity as a “logical approach” if one has nothing and wants to survive (Byrne *et al.*, 2003).

Studies of youth experiencing homelessness in Canada have found that half to all of those interviewed have been involved in illegal activities and over half have been apprehended by police (Clarke, 2000). Law and order responses by police as a means of intervention may further stigmatize victims of abuse, encouraging defiant and persistent involvement in street crime (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997).

Waterloo Region data:

Involvement in criminal activity for youth experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region is not different from that reported in the literature. A high percentage (75%) of youth who accessed ROOF agency in 2004 reported a history of negative contact within the criminal judicial system (ROOF, 2004). Of these, 83% identified as being on a probation order and 69% identified as having been charged or convicted for what are deemed petty crimes. Finally, 39% reported ongoing contact with the judicial system resulting from unresolved matters. Surprisingly, of those who were charged, no one had participated in “extra-judicial measures” and all had a poor understanding of the term. Extrajudicial measures are alternative consequences for youth, such as requiring him or her to repair the harm done to the victim (Department of Justice Canada, 2007).

Perceptions of police services were also highly negative among youth, with 95% of interview respondents indicating a low likelihood of accessing police services in the event of their own criminal victimization. Harassment by police simply for being young and visible in a community setting was also reported to be high (46%) (ROOF, 2004).

Substance use and mental health issues

Background literature:

Many youth experiencing homelessness have mental health, alcohol and/or drug problems. Research indicates that substance use and mental health issues are significant risk factors for homelessness and subsequent barriers to getting off the street (Boivin *et al.*, 2005; Cameron *et al.*, 2004; Baer *et al.*, 2004). Mental health issues are also indicators for higher likelihood of persistent homelessness (SPC-W, 2005).

Youth experiencing homelessness are at a higher risk of anxiety disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide due to increased exposure to violence while living on their own (NHCH, 2000). In addition, the majority of youth experiencing homelessness have used street drugs and, in one study, as many as half identified themselves as having a substance use issue (Clarke, 2000; Murphy *et al.*, 2001).

Waterloo Region data:

Among youth experiencing homelessness, mental health and substance use issues are also significant. In the OSIS pilot project, outreach workers highlighted that substance abuse and mental illness were significant issues among youth they met on the streets (DeSantis, 2002). Service providers across the housing stability system estimated that 43% of youth accessing youth-specific services had mental health issues and 39% were identified as having substance use issues (Regional Municipality of Waterloo, 2006). Compared to estimates provided for all individuals 16 and over accessing emergency shelter services in Waterloo Region, 35 to 40% have mental health issues and 25 to 80% have substance use issues⁹ (Regional Municipality of Waterloo, 2006).

Consultations with local service providers also confirmed that substance use and mental health issues are significant risk factors for homelessness among youth (Regional Municipality of Waterloo, 2006; Consultation with YHCG, 2007). In consultation with the YHCG in 2007, four out of the top ten issues identified for youth experiencing

⁹ At Charles Street Men's Hostel and YWCA-Mary's Place it was estimated that 25% of their residents have substance use issues, where the Cambridge Shelter estimated that 75% of their residents have substance use issues and Kitchener-Waterloo Out of the Cold estimated that 80% of their guests have substance use issues.

homelessness were related to substance use and mental health. Specifically, these included: 1) lack of understanding for youth with substance use and mental health issues, 2) lack of supports available for youth with substance use issues and concurrent disorders, 3) lack of substance use treatment programs and 4) lack of supports available for youth transitioning back into the community after treatment.

Sexual identity

Background literature:

Increasingly, youth are leaving their homes or being thrown out because of conflicts with their parents regarding their sexual orientation (Rew, 2005). Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLBTQ) youth are overrepresented in the population of youth experiencing homelessness (Calenda *et al.*, 2005; DeCastell & Jensen, 2002; Cochrane *et al.*, 2002). In a San Francisco study, service providers estimated that of youth who are street-involved, anywhere from 20 to 40% are GLBTQ youth (Calenda *et al.*, 2005). Similarly, studies assessing sexual orientation of youth experiencing homelessness have revealed rates ranging from 11% to 35% (Cochran *et al.* 2002).

Compared to heterosexual youth experiencing homelessness, GLBTQ youth are more vulnerable to health and psychological problems, social stigma and threats of violence in school and community (Cochrane *et al.* 2002; DeCastell & Jensen, 2002). In addition to these barriers, there are fewer services and supports available for GLBTQ youth experiencing homelessness in comparison to heterosexual youth (Calenda *et al.*, 2005; DeCastell & Jensen, 2002).

Waterloo Region data:

There is no local data available on GLBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. Anecdotal estimates of youth who identify as GLBTQ, staying at Argus ranges from 2 to 5%; however, this estimate only takes into consideration those who chose to disclose (Vlasov, personal communication, 2007).

Risky sexual behaviour

Background literature:

Youth experiencing homelessness are more likely than the general population of youth to engage in, or be forced or coerced into, risky and unsafe sexual activities. As a result, concerns around Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's), HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B and C have been reported (CMHC Environmental Scan on Youth Homelessness, 2001; Vengris, 2005).

A B.C. study took an in-depth look at the sexual behaviour of street-involved and homeless youth (Murphy *et al.*, 2001). Among other things, it found that 26% of youth in the study had sex for the first time before the age of 13, and 14% were younger than 12. Almost half of the girls and almost 20% of the boys were forced or coerced to have sex. Approximately 60% of the sexually active youth reported using drugs or alcohol before the last time they had sex and 15% indicated that they had been diagnosed with an STI. Fewer than 60% of males used a condom and three-quarters of the females used birth control. Thirty-five per cent of street youth interviewed in Vancouver and 24% in the suburbs reported having been pregnant or were involved in a pregnancy – compared to 2% in a school-based survey.

Waterloo Region data:

Prior to the fire at the end of 2005, a public health clinic was available at ROOF's drop-in centre to provide health services to youth, including: STI tests and treatment, pregnancy tests, confirmation, and counselling, Hepatitis B immunization, HIV tests, HPV treatment, and medication pick-up. It is anticipated that once ROOF has rebuilt, the public health clinic will be available again. Data from Region of Waterloo Public Health ROOF Clinic indicated that in 2005, 258 youth accessed the clinic, of which 31 were male and 227 were female. Of those accessing the ROOF Clinic, approximately 21% were for STI tests and 18% were for pregnancy tests.

Youth stages of development

Background literature:

Youth is often defined as a time of opportunity and growth, when young people explore their identities and roles. Through this process of experimentation, learning and development, youth “lay down the foundations for physical, psychological and social maturity” (CAMH, 2002). During this vulnerable development period, youth are faced with significant life changes and emotional upheaval.

The age of majority was defined in the early 1970’s as being 18. When an individual reaches their eighteenth birthday, they are entitled to the same rights as those provided for adults (e.g. the right to vote in federal elections, enter binding contracts, assessed as an “independent adult” for the purpose of eligibility for social assistance). Although considered an “adult”, most people at age 18 do not have the ability to be self-sufficient. Through a review of the literature, research by the Children’s Advocacy Institute (Delgado *et al.*, 2007) argued that persons at age 18 are biologically immature, as the brain continues to develop into early adulthood. It was suggested that the biological age of maturity may be as late as 26. The transition into adulthood for most youth is generally supported by their parents, both financially and in forms such as housing, and emotional support.

For youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, biological development can be delayed by the effects of stressors such as physical or sexual abuse or neglect. In addition, the transition into independence can be hindered by the lack of parental support (Delgado *et al.*, 2007).

Waterloo Region data:

Although no formal local data is available in regards to the issue of youth development, life skill training for youth is readily available in most agencies and sometimes is a requirement for youth participating in housing stability programs. This indicates that many agencies recognize that youth typically lack the necessary skills needed for independence. For example, YWCA-Mary’s Place has a designated Youth Support

Coordinator who works with youth to enhance their life skills as well as provide other supports.

Transitioning from residential systems

Youth transitioning from residential systems, such as foster care, group homes, custody facilities, and treatment facilities often do not have the same opportunities and resources compared to the general youth population. Without adequate resources, youth transitioning out of these residential systems face multiple obstacles which place them at a high risk of homelessness. The following discusses issues related to youth transitioning out of the child welfare system, the judicial system, and treatment facilities.

Child welfare system

Background literature:

Problems within the home often lead youth into the care of the child welfare system (Novac *et al.*, 2002). Studies have found a high correlation between previous child welfare system involvement and youth street involvement and homelessness (40% to 49%) (Novac *et al.*, 2002; Vengris, 2005).

Although foster care is intended to be a temporary arrangement, many children remain in care until they literally "age out" of care, usually by age 18 (Delgado *et al.*, 2007). Studies of aging-out foster youth present a consistent picture: higher rates of homelessness, unemployment, and involvement with the criminal justice system when compared with others in the same age group (Corrigan, 2004).

In a recent research in California, "Expanding Transitional Services for Emancipated Foster Youth: An Investment in California's Tomorrow" (Delgado *et al.*, 2007), it was reported that in any given year, foster children comprise less than 0.3% of the state's population, and yet 40% of persons living in emergency shelters are former foster children. A similarly disproportionate percentage of the nation's prison population is comprised of former foster youth.

Waterloo Region data:

Consistent with the literature, there is a high percentage of youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness in Waterloo Region who have a history of involvement with the child welfare system. Available data indicated that over 30% of youth accessing youth-specific housing stability services had a history of group home residency (ROOF, 2004; DeSantis, 2002).

Judicial system

Background literature:

As discussed earlier, youth involvement in criminal activities and the judicial system is high among those who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. Incarcerated youth report higher rates of mental health and substance use issues, and youth transitioning from custody have more difficulty finding housing in comparison to the overall youth population (Children's Forum, 2007).

Waterloo Region data:

Youth seem to have more difficulty transitioning from judicial facilities compared to adults. Data from the New Directions Program, a transitional housing program for adult men released from Federal penitentiaries, indicated that 25% of their residents were at-risk of homelessness (Regional Municipality of Waterloo, 2006). For youth, information from Argus indicated that approximately 35% of youth with previous involvement in the criminal justice system access the youth-specific emergency shelter (Vlasov, personal communication, 2007). Furthermore, 55% of the youth who participated in focus group questionnaires at emergency shelters and drop-ins in the region said they had been in custody at some point in their past (DeSantis, 2002).

It is estimated that over 93% of youth in custody re-offend (Hallman, personal communication, 2006). Data provided by Ray of Hope indicated that of the youth in the Youth Re-integration program, 90% struggle with substance use issues. Prostitution and gambling were also identified as problematic for the local youth homeless population.

The John Howard Society of Waterloo-Wellington offers various programs to mitigate the normal court process and having to go into custody (see section on Capacity for descriptions). Unfortunately, there is no data currently available to assess the success of these programs. Of youth surveyed by ROOF, only 19% who identified as having contact within the criminal judicial system had taken part in a criminal judicial diversion program (ROOF, 2004).

Treatment facilities

Background literature:

Substance use and mental health issues were discussed earlier as being significant barriers to increasing housing stability. However, it was difficult to find research assessing the risk of homelessness among youth transitioning out of substance use or mental health treatment facilities. Similar to youth transitioning out of care and custody, it is expected that youth in treatment facilities would require intensive support in order to transition back into the community.

Waterloo Region data:

No information is currently available for youth transitioning out of treatment facilities. In a consultation with the YHCG (2007), supports for youth to help them transition back into the community after treatment was identified as a priority.

Education and employment

Background literature:

Employment opportunities are often correlated with level of education. Youth experiencing homelessness have an average of nine years of schooling. While some stay in school during their homeless experience, very few will have graduated high school (McLean, 2005). Without sufficient education, and compounded by the fact that youth under 18 in Ontario are required to be in school full time, it is almost impossible for youth under 18 experiencing homelessness to find and keep sustainable employment. In addition, given the high threshold of skills that are required for most jobs, access to the job market is especially difficult for those without specialized training or academic achievement.

Although it is very difficult for youth experiencing homelessness to stay in school, research shows that one of the key factors in getting youth who are experiencing homelessness off the street, and keeping them off the streets, is education. Studies report that youth recognize the importance of schooling in terms of increasing their economic opportunities (McLean, 2005; Caputo *et al.*, 1997; and Hagan and McCarthy, 1997). Youth also consistently identify help with getting back into school and staying in

school as one of their most important needs (Raleigh-DuRoff, 2004; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Kufeldt & Burrows, 1994).

Some research literature suggests that educational problems and negative school experiences are factors that are highly associated with street-involvement and runaway behaviour (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Kufeldt & Burrows, 1994). Educational problems are also seen as prime indicators of family dysfunction and problems at home that push the youth to the street (Whitbeck & Hoyt 1999). Whichever perspective is emphasized, all researchers agree that re-engaging youth in educational activities is a key early intervention strategy.

Waterloo Region data:

The employment rate among youth experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region is very low. Results from focus group questionnaires conducted at emergency shelters and drop-ins indicated that 86% were not employed (DeSantis, 2002).

Youth who participated in the ROOF Youth Survey reported issues with school attendance, with only 50% reporting that they were attending school. Youth identified a lack of motivation or interest and peer influence as factors that influenced their decision related to lack of attendance at school (ROOF, 2004).

Local service providers stated that although there are many education options offered in Waterloo Region, the challenge is linking them to youth who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness (Community Consultation, November, 2006).

Government assistance

Background literature:

Regardless of age, individuals without an address have significant difficulties qualifying for social assistance. In addition, assistance levels are insufficient for finding decent, unsubsidized housing. However, for youth under 18 years of age, qualifying for social assistance is even more difficult and involves additional barriers. In one study, two thirds of females 18 and over experiencing homelessness received social assistance in

Canada, while almost none (3%) of the younger respondents did (Novac *et al.*, 2002). Youth under the age of 16 in Ontario are not eligible for Ontario Works. Sixteen and 17 year olds who may qualify for Ontario Works are required to have a trustee as a support person and to whom cheques are issued (if monies are issued). In addition, 16 and 17 year olds cannot be funded through OW in their own apartments – they must be in the care of a responsible adult.

Waterloo Region data:

Although people over 16 years of age can qualify for assistance, very few do. Focus group questionnaires conducted at emergency shelters and drop-ins revealed that the majority of youth were not eligible for social assistance (DeSantis, 2002).

During consultations for this report, it was shared that helping youth to obtain eligibility for Ontario Works has proven to be a challenge among service providers (Community Consultation, November 2006; Consultation with the YHCG, 2007). Youth under 18 are required to be in school full-time, and although an agency (e.g., ROOF) can act as a trustee, the challenge is in securing an appropriate guardian.

Street economy

Background literature:

Life on the street is a constant struggle for survival. In order to survive on the streets, youth use a number of strategies, some of which include: pooling resources to rent accommodation, staying in emergency shelters, or sleeping outside or in abandoned buildings. Few youth experiencing homelessness receive any form of government assistance and few have truly marketable skills. As a result, many youth resort to the street economy (Murphy *et al.*, 2001). Participation in the street economy includes activities ranging from busking and picking up temporary work for cash, to robbery, drug dealing, and prostitution. Some studies suggest that early participation in the street economy often leads to prostitution (Weber *et al.*, 2004) and a higher risk of contracting HIV (Ennett *et al.*, 1999).

One research study that summarized current findings on survival sex and prostitution found that the prevalence rate appears to be about 20%, and the rates for males and females on the street appear to be similar. Males tend to trade sex for money while females tend to trade sex for drugs and alcohol (Tyler & Johnson, 2006).

Waterloo Region data:

No data is available at this time for Waterloo Region.

ANALYSES AND INSIGHTS

Regardless of age, sex, or ethnicity, most youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness share common challenges. Many services focus on issues of abuse, family breakdown, problems in school, substance use, involvement in criminal activities, and mental health in their efforts to help youth stabilize their lives. Added to the complexity of these issues are the systemic, biological, and discriminatory barriers faced by youth because of their age. The following is a summary of the analyses of youth issues and related factors as discussed in previous sections of this report. Insights were drafted from the analyses and refined through several consultations with the YHCG.

Prevention and Early Intervention

Keeping youth in the home

The most commonly cited factors contributing to homelessness are conditions rooted in earlier life experiences. Abuse within the home, parental substance use, poverty, divorce, and blended family situations were identified as main factors for youth leaving the home.

Local service providers discussed the importance of recognizing the different levels of prevention and intervention required when working with families experiencing crisis within the home (YHCG group discussion, 2007). Early intervention, through identifying and addressing issues in early childhood before they even become a problem, is the first level of prevention. Early prevention strategies are highly supported because of their positive effects on the family's ability to resolve issues in the future. Ideally, prevention initiatives should occur as early as possible; however, early prevention and intervention are not within the scope of this report.

Early crisis intervention presents the next opportunity for working with families, when issues in the home are just starting to become a problem. However, most families try to resolve issues on their own and are not likely to seek outside help (YHCG group discussion, 2007). Families who seek formal help often do so as a last resort, when the

problems within home become too difficult to resolve without additional supports. Crisis intervention at this stage should take into consideration the family's capacity for reconciliation.

Insight #1:

Support for families to reconcile issues to help keep youth in the home should be a priority whenever possible. Explore and identify options for increasing respite and reconciliation supports to assist youth to remain connected to their informal and formal support networks.

Street outreach

Researchers have shown that connecting with youth as soon as possible after they arrive on the street is extremely important. Ideally, youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness are served best if contacted within two weeks of arriving on the street. Service providers agree that street outreach is an effective way to identify and engage youth on the street as quickly as possible (YHCG group discussion, 2007). ROOF has also found that outreach within the schools is effective in educating youth about the realities of street life, provides another vehicle to connect with youth. While outreach services are important and effective, current funding sources for outreach programs in Waterloo Region are not stable and future funding is unknown.

Insight #2:

Ensure stable funding and adequate numbers of outreach workers to meet the demands on the street as well as in the schools so that youth experiencing homelessness are connected to supports as soon as possible.

Drop-ins

Drop-ins are effective in connecting youth to resources, particularly for youth who are not likely to seek emergency shelters services. Service providers indicated that there are many agencies in the region that have drop-ins; however, youth-specific services are lacking due in part to a lack of staff resources and heavy reliance on volunteers unfamiliar with youth-specific issues (YHCG group discussion, 2007).

Insight #3:

Youth-specific services within drop-ins should be assessed and enhanced where needed, in order to effectively connect youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness to appropriate resources.

Supporting youth in their transition

While prevention and early intervention are preferred when working with youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, it is recognized that the option to return home may not be immediate or even possible for many youth. For families where problems are so entrenched that reconciliation is not immediate, efforts should be directed to the supporting the family and youth within the community.

A Housing First approach has been found to be successful among the adult population experiencing homelessness (Regional Municipality of Waterloo, 2007); however, adopting this model for youth experiencing homelessness would be challenging and not ideal for a number of reasons (YHCG group discussion, 2007). First, many youth experiencing homelessness do not have a steady source of income (either through employment or social assistance). Finding and maintaining full-time employment is difficult for youth under 18 because they are required to be in school full time. Additionally, youth often lack the necessary education and skills required in today's job market. Securing Ontario Works is also challenging. If youth under 18 years of age qualify for assistance, they need to be in the supervision of a responsible adult in order to secure accommodation. Maintaining housing without a steady source of income is not feasible in the long term.

Second, there are challenges unique to youth's stage of development that affect their ability to maintain housing. As discussed earlier, youth are at a vulnerable stage in their lives where they are experiencing rapid biological, emotional, and social changes. It was estimated that youth are considered biologically immature until the age of 26 and, in most cases, parental support is a significant factor for successful transitioning into "adulthood" or independence. For youth experiencing homelessness, biological development can be hindered as a result of past experiences with trauma and abuse.

Moreover, they often lack parental support and life skills necessary to live independently.

Finally, experiences from local service providers have found that youth do not do well in independent rental units (YHCG Consultation, 2007). In addition to income and youth development factors, service providers stated that youth often face discrimination from landlords who are more reluctant to rent to youth and may be more apt to enforce rules because of negative stereotypes. Once youth find housing, following rules can be very challenging as they are highly influenced by their peer groups. For example, they may have friends couch surfing, or engaging in activities that are disruptive to others, putting them at a higher risk for eviction.

A Housing First approach is not flexible enough for youth as it assumes permanent housing is the best option and does not take into consideration where the youth is at with respect to their developmental stage and desire for independent living. In order to begin exploring what the best approaches are to assist youth with stabilizing their living conditions, current youth-specific housing stability programs in the region need to be assessed. As described in the Capacity section of this report, housing options in Waterloo Region for youth experiencing homelessness include emergency shelters, transitional homes and housing with supports. An initial assessment of these programs is discussed below.

There is a lack of youth-specific emergency shelter in the Kitchener-Waterloo area; however, given the limited resources and priority for ending homelessness (investing in strategies in the long term rather than “stop gap” measures), building new emergency shelters is not preferred. Argus is a youth-specific emergency shelter in Cambridge with a current capacity to serve 10 males and 10 females, with one bed for each gender for use in times of overflow. Data indicates that there is a high demand in the male residence: approximately 90% of the overflow days in 2005 were in the male residence. Argus currently has the space to expand their existing emergency shelter by five beds in the male residence, provided that additional resources are available.

Local service providers agree that strategies to support youth experiencing homelessness in their transition to more stable housing should focus on shorter term housing stability programs. These programs need to be flexible and address the unique needs of youth (YHCG group discussion, 2007). In Waterloo Region, there is a lack of youth-specific transitional and supportive housing outside of maternity homes. Specifically, Kiwanis House transitional home has six spaces for males, and Cambridge Kiwanis Village supportive home has eight spaces for males and females.

The YHCG also indicated that while transitional supports are important, sometimes programs are too intensive. Youth may benefit more when programs are less demanding. Most emergency shelters and crash bed programs (e.g., Out of the Cold) have low demand¹⁰ on residents; however, as discussed earlier, putting resources into creating additional “stop gap measures” is not preferred. Options that meet the needs of youth who require low demand programs and incorporate transitional supports should be further explored. For example, crash beds within a drop-in centre may be able to provide easy access to resources and transitional supports while closing the gap in the lack of youth-specific shelter options.

When assessing housing stability options for youth experiencing homelessness, it is important to consider the constraints of each program. For example, when programs are funded by the Province or other source, there are limitations and guidelines that must be followed in order to meet funding requirements. Thus, it is important to engage all relevant stakeholders when planning for the implementation of specific programs.

¹⁰ Low demand housing is a service approach that has principles which are similar to harm reduction and voluntary services such that housing is provided in an environment that emphasizes ease of entry and ongoing access to services with minimal expectations placed on the tenant.

Insight #4:

- a) Explore best practices on youth-specific housing options for youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, where reconciliation with their parent or guardian is not immediate or possible.
- b) Depending on research results, explore and support options for the implementation of specific programs.

Increasing attachment to the education system

Many youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness do not have the level of education necessary to secure sustainable jobs. Engaging in education is essential for youth (especially those under 18) in order to access income and housing opportunities. Although it is very difficult for youth experiencing homelessness to stay in school, researchers agree that engaging youth in educational activities is a key early intervention strategy. It was also reported by the YHCG that once youth disengage from school, it often leads to additional conflicts in the home and greater likelihood of street involvement.

There are a variety of educational opportunities offered through the public and separate school boards that are specific to youth who are unemployed or have little or no attachment to school. Local service providers indicate that youth are not fully engaged in the educational programs and it is challenging for youth to stay in the programs once started. Activities outside of the school boards, such as the Youth Suspension Program, skills training, and post-secondary training, should also be considered (YHCG group discussion, 2007).

Insight #5:

Support strategies for youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness that increase attachment to meaningful activity (e.g. school, training), with the longer term goal of securing sustainable employment.

Addressing complex issues

Although the literature clearly indicates that substance use and mental health issues are significant risk factors for homelessness and subsequent barriers for housing stability, there appears to be a lack of comprehensive services to address these issues. Moreover, prevalence rates of youth with substance use issues and mental health issues are high among those experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region. Local service providers confirm that there is a lack of services in the community to address complex issues, including: substance use issues, developmental disabilities, mental health issues, and concurrent disorders (YHCG group discussion, 2007).

Serving youth with complex issues in the housing stability system has proven to be challenging. Staff from Kiwanis transitional home and Cambridge Kiwanis Village supportive home indicated that without increased resources, they cannot fully serve youth experiencing homelessness with complex issues.

Insight #6:

- a) Complete a review and further assessment with appropriate stakeholders on substance use, developmental disabilities and mental health services currently available in the region to determine which specific services are lacking for youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness and to determine priorities.
- b) Based on the assessment, explore options for serving youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness who have complex issues.

Enhancing services for 16 and 17 year olds

Information from research studies as well as local data confirms that youth benefit most from programs that are specific to their age. Youth under 16 are able to access programs through FACS, while those 18 and over can access all adult programs. Youth who are 16 and 17 have very limited resources available to them.

Insight #7:

A complete review and assessment is required to determine what specific services are lacking for youth 16 and 17 years of age who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness in the region and to determine priorities.

Training staff on youth-specific issues

The research literature and local information highlighted key issues related to youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. To effectively serve youth, staff need to be knowledgeable and sensitive to these issues. While overall there is a good understanding of youth issues, certain areas have been identified where there is very little information, or where the issues are complex and staff would benefit from additional training. Local service providers indicated that the areas (in no particular order) where staff training would be beneficial include:

- Youth development
- Sexual identity
- Risky sexual behaviour
- Mental health
- Substance use

Insight #8:

Provide youth-specific training for staff across the housing stability system in the following areas: youth development, sexual identity, risky sexual behaviour, mental health, and substance use.

NEXT STEPS

Understanding Homelessness Experienced by Youth in Waterloo Region is presented as a discussion document due to limitations with its scope and availability of data at the time of writing. Information presented in this report is an environmental scan of youth experiencing homelessness in Waterloo Region and is intended to stimulate further discussion and lay down the initial groundwork for future research and planning.

In terms of limitations, the scope of the report was focused on the housing stability system as it relates to youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. While narrowing the focus allowed for a more in-depth analysis, youth are often interconnected with the mandates of other systems that directly affect housing stability. As discussed in the report, the intersections of these systems (education, judicial and child welfare) with the housing stability system need to be further explored. Moreover, the report does not provide a complete analysis of best practices on models and service delivery strategies for youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. Several insights presented in this report highlighted the need for further research in this regard.

The eight insights that were developed in consultation with local service providers will be incorporated into the action plan of the *Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy*. Working in partnership with local service providers has been an essential element in the success of this project. Future outcomes in this area are dependent on the commitment and support of the community. To aid in the continued discussion and planning efforts, this report will be presented to several community groups in the region concerned with addressing youth homeless issues (including: the Alliance for Children and Youth, Partners for Safe and Caring Schools, and the Justice Advisory Group).

Several key principles emerged from the environmental scan:

1. Connecting with youth soon after they arrive on the street is extremely important. Ideally, youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness are best served if they can be contacted within two weeks of arriving on the street.

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2. When working with youth under 18 years of age, it is necessary to take into consideration the mandates of other systems that they may be connected with (e.g., education, judicial, child welfare).
 3. It is important to recognize that the transition to “adulthood” and independence may not occur at age 18. In fact it has been suggested that the age of independence could be as late as 26. Thus, while youth 18 years of age and over are able to access adult programs, these programs may not be suitable because they do not take into consideration youth-specific developmental stages.
 4. Housing options for youth need to be flexible and take into consideration age-related barriers (e.g., requirements for accessing OW, connection to the mandates of other systems) and where the youth are at in terms of their stage of development.

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APPENDIX A: Sample of definitions of homelessness

The table below provides a sampling of definitions that have been used in the research literature on street-involved youth. With the exception of Ringwalt *et al.*'s (1998) and Robertson's (1992) definitions, the definitions have been taken from various Canadian studies of homeless and street-involved youth. As can be seen, the definitions vary in detail and specificity and none are truly representative of the whole population.

Without exception, the Canadian definitions expressly highlight the absence of permanent housing and are, therefore, rooted in the basic definition of absolute or literal homelessness. Because of this, none of the above definitions are inclusive in the sense of capturing the whole population of street-involved and/or homeless youth.

Table 3: Sample of definitions used in the street-involved & homeless youth research literature.

Study author(s)	Study location	Study definition
Higgit <i>et al.</i> , 2003	Winnipeg, Manitoba	<i>a person who is actively engaged in the street lifestyle and does not have secure, long-term housing or who may be transiting from the street to some form of permanent housing or shelter</i>
Youth Homeless Coordination Group, 2002 [as cited in: Graham & Graham, 2002]	Region of Waterloo	<i>a person is homeless if they are literally homeless, members of the hidden homeless population who live in illegal or temporary situations, or at-risk of becoming homeless. Three groups of homeless youth are distinguished: those ages 12-15, who must give their consent to be brought into care under the Child & Family Services Act; those age 16-17, who no longer have access to services for children under 16 and are also ineligible for services aimed at those over 18; and, those age 18 and older, who are eligible for adult social services</i>
Murphy & Liebel 2002	Vancouver, B.C.	<i>young people who are involved in a street lifestyle which, in addition to uncertain housing arrangements, may include panhandling, involvement in the sex trade, selling or using drugs, or engaging in criminal activities</i>

Study author(s)	Study location	Study definition
Clarke & Cooper, 2000	Calgary, Alberta	<i>a person is homeless if he does not have a permanent residence to which he can return whenever he so chooses. "Youth" are defined as people between the ages of 12 and 24. A young person without child welfare status is one who has not been made a temporary or permanent ward of the state</i>
Ringwalt <i>et al.</i> , 1998	U.S. National Youth Risk Behaviour Survey	<i>a person is homeless if they spent the night in a youth or adult shelter or in any of several locations not intended to be dwelling places or where their safety would be compromised; youth are asked whether, during the past 12 months, they had spent the night (1) in a youth or adult shelter; (2) in a public place, such as a train or bus station, a restaurant, or an office building; (3) in an abandoned building; (4) outside in a park, on the street, under a bridge or overhang, or on a rooftop; (5) in a subway or other public place underground; (6) with someone they did not know because they needed a place to stay; or (7) in a car, truck or van</i>
Haley <i>et al.</i> , 1998	Montreal, Quebec	<i>all street-active youth in Montreal between 14 and 25 years of age. Street active youth were defined as youth who had run away from or been thrown of home or had been without a fixed address for 3 days or more or had used the services of one of the Montreal street youth agencies during the last 6 months. These agencies included different types of resources such as emergency shelters, drop-in centres, mobile vans, food banks and outreach agencies</i>
Hagan & McCarthy, 1998	Vancouver, B.C. & Toronto, Ontario	<i>youth as living on the street once they leave home and are without a permanent place of address</i>
Kufeldt & Burrows, 1994	Calgary, Alberta	<i>all youth that have run away, been asked to leave, or left home or substitute care (i.e. foster care or group home care). They range in age from 12 to 24 years. This population includes: first-time runners, repetitive runners, chronically homeless youth, and, those who are almost off the street.</i>
Robertson, 1992	U.S. Dep't of Health & Human	<i>runaways are youth away from home at least overnight without parent or caretaker permission; homeless are those</i>

Study author(s)	Study location	Study definition
	Services	<i>with no parental, foster or institutional home, including push outs (urged to leave) and throwaways (left home with parental knowledge or approval without an alternative place to stay); street kids are youth who believe they belong on the street and have become accustomed to fending for themselves</i>
Taylor <i>et al.</i> , 1991	Vancouver, B.C.	<i>teenagers who have lost their family ties and social support systems, lack dependable sources of food and shelter, and have gravitated to the urban downtown as a last resort for survival and freedom. They attempt to survive by putting themselves at-risk for money in prostitution, small-scale drug trafficking and petty crime. They tend to go unnoticed except by those with whom they do business.</i>

Robertson’s (1992) classification is included in Table 1 as it adopts the definition that was legislated in the United States in the mid-1980’s and constitutes the current official American definition; presently, there is no Canadian equivalent of an official definition. The definition used by Ringwalt *et al.* (1998) is included because it ignores the reasons for being on the street, and focuses on defining the population in terms of where a youth has slept – e.g. anywhere other than in permanent place of residence. In doing so, Ringwalt *et al.*’s (1998) definition circumvents the complexities involved in trying to define the street youth population based on demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnic/minority status), reasons for being on the street (e.g. runaway, throwaway, homeless or delinquent), or the consequences of being street-involved (e.g. prostitution, drug-trafficking, petty crime, etc.). Basically, it potentially covers the whole population of street youth, while focussing on the most salient and, important, characteristics of the population – that they are on the street and they are in need of services and supports.

APPENDIX B: Models of youth homelessness

Deviance & delinquency: model of out-of-the-mainstream youth¹¹

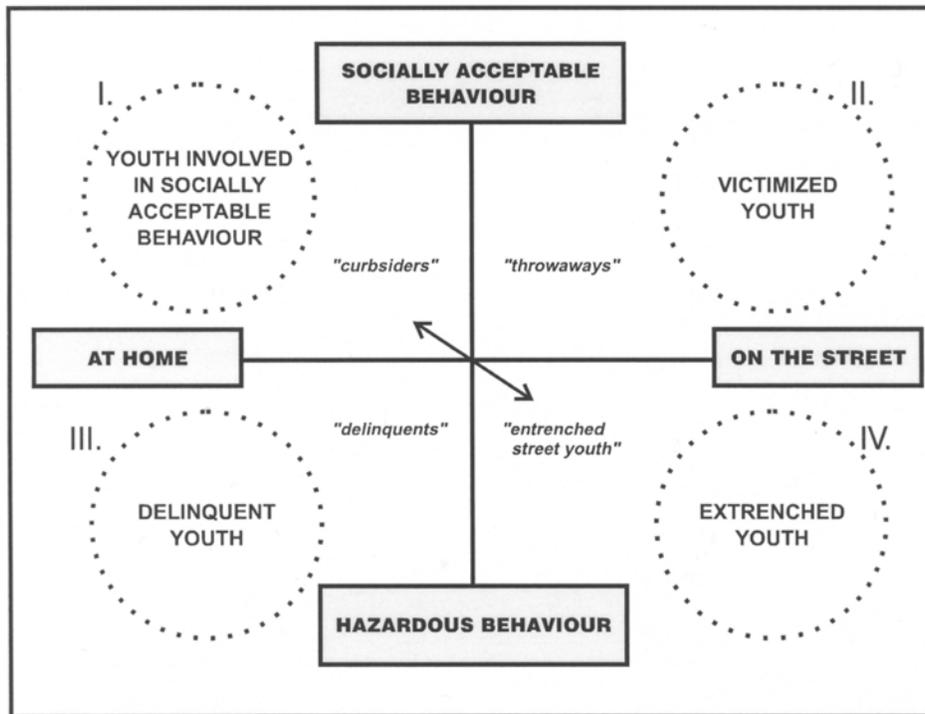
In their study of runaway and street youth in Canada, Brannigan and Caputo (1993) employ a traditional model of deviance and delinquency to explain how and why youth become and stay street-involved. The focus of their model (see Figure 2 below) is the high-risk youth population that they label “out-of-the-mainstream”. Not surprisingly, this segment of the population is then compared to and contrasted with mainstream – “normal” – youth who engage in socially acceptable behaviour; loosely defined as living at home, going to school, playing varsity sports, and/or having a job. Time spent on the street is seen as a gradual progression from socially acceptable behaviours to a full-blown “street lifestyle” embedded in deviant sub-cultures that may include participation in illegal activities such as substance abuse, high-risk sexual activities, violence, stealing, shoplifting and/or other criminal activities. According to Caputo *et al.* (1997) youth engage in a “street lifestyle” in order to acquire the resources needed to meet their basic needs while living on the street.

In addition, the concept of mainstream youth implies some measure of social stability and continuity of living arrangements in youth’s lives (Caputo *et al.*, 1997: 4). This is where street-involvement meets homelessness in terms of explaining the gamut of youth encountered on the street. According to this model, conventional youth include those who attend school or have a job, or who live under the control of a parent and/or guardian. Alternatively, deviant, homeless and/or street youth include those who are viewed as not under the immediate control of a socially accepted authority – in other words, as “out-of-control” (Brannigan and Caputo, 1993: 97). Because they are seen as uncontrollable, these street youth are concurrently viewed as an annoyance, a problem, a threat or potentially dangerous. Cast in this light, Brannigan and Caputo’s notions of out-of-the-mainstream youth and street lifestyle fall within the rubric of a traditional

¹¹ Readers should also refer to: McCullagh, J. and M. Greco (1990). *Servicing Street Youth: A Feasibility Study*. Toronto: Children’s Aid Society, as Brannigan and Caputo build their model on the sub-groups of youth and their reasons for running that are identified in this study (e.g. runners from intolerable home situations; runners to adventure; throwaways; absconders from CAS/Young Offenders Act care; and curb-kids).

deviance model: establishing a standard for living arrangements, authority structures and normative activities and then segregating and labelling those who do not meet this standard as deviant, delinquent, criminal or ... out-of-the-mainstream.

Figure 2: A model for understanding runaways and street youth.



Source: Caputo et al., 1997: 3.

The advantage of this model is that it is one of the first to call attention to the fact that street youth are not a homogeneous group. They come from a variety of backgrounds and follow multiple pathways to the street. The drawback of this model is that it situates street-involvement exclusively in the context of deviance. Any youth who lives in a non-conventional, non-permanent, non-stable living environment, with little or no parental (or parent-like) authority in their life is considered to be deviant. While quadrant II of the model in Figure 2 acknowledges that some youth are predisposed to becoming street involved because street life represents a safer alternative to living at home with a guardian or parent, or that their street-involvement is not a choice per se, it still depicts throwaways, runaways and homeless youth as in the process of becoming deviant

and/or delinquent. In approaching the study and understanding of street involvement from the perspective of deviance, this model, thus, reverts back to categorizing all non-conventional youth as in the process of becoming conventionally deviant; thereby, once again, rendering them a homogeneous group.

Thus, this model of street-involvement does little in the way of capturing or explaining the complexity of factors (personal, familial, peer group, community or societal) that push and/or pull youth onto the streets. In fact, it could be argued that it grossly oversimplifies the constellation of causes and consequences of street-involvement. Although the model encapsulates a temporal dimension by categorizing youth according to the amount of time spent on the street – for example, curbsiders are defined as young people who spend considerable time on the street and participate in various activities, but, who usually have a home connection (Caputo *et al.*, 1997: 4) – it fails to capture youth's movements onto and off of the street over time. Finally, the biggest drawback of this model is that it reinforces popular and common stereotypes of street-involved and homeless youth as being way-ward and in need of discipline and structure; youth who should be sent back home to their parents to be dealt with. With the mainstay of the research literature on homeless youth consistently indicating that the majority of youth on the streets are there fleeing physical, emotional and sexual abuse, or have been kicked out of home, this model does little in the way of explaining these youth's plight and reasons for being on the street.

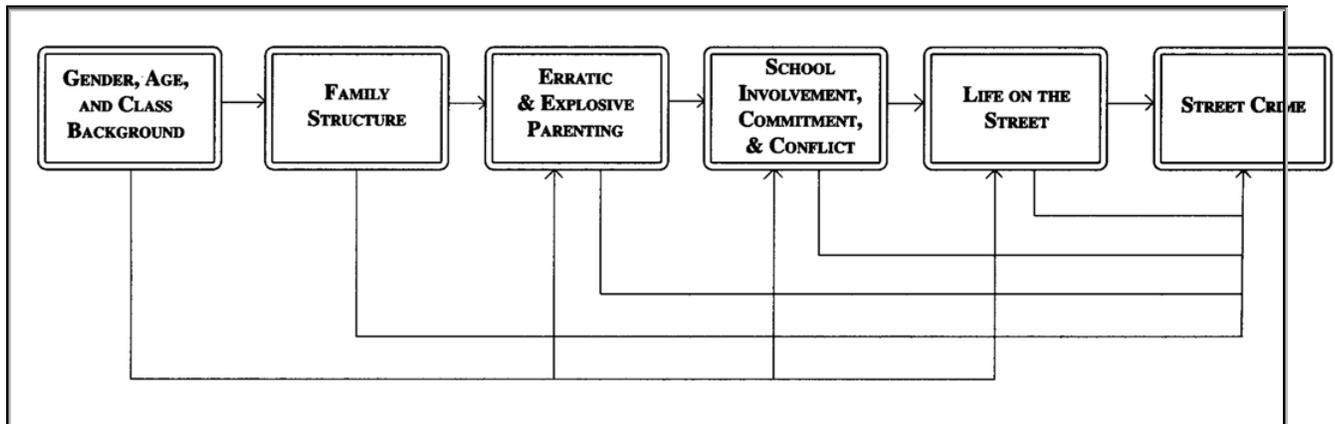
Mean streets: model of street crime as situational adversity

Narrowing the focus for mapping out the steps youth take in entrenching themselves on the street, Hagan and McCarthy (1998) in their study of street and homeless youth in Toronto, Ontario and Vancouver, British Columbia develop an integrated model which charts the route youth take in their journey from home to their involvement in street-level crime (see figure 3). Arguing that traditional sociological models of crime (specifically, strain and control theory) underestimate situational adversity as a cause of crime, Hagan and McCarthy develop a model which highlights the pressures, inducements and/or motivations for crime (1992: 598) that youth experience in the process of becoming street involved. In short, their model incorporates the background and

developmental factors (such as age, class, gender, family structure, parenting, peer pressure, poverty etc) that lead youth to the street, as well as the adverse situational conditions (hunger, unemployment, homelessness) that motivate/pressure youth to engage in criminal activities once they become entrenched in a street life style. Using data from youth on the street and in school to test their model, Hagan and McCarthy find consistent evidence that street-level crime is very much a function of the adverse social conditions associated with living on the street. Specifically, they find significant correlations between street-involved crime and lack of food, work and shelter (Hagan & McCarthy, 1998: 231).

More importantly, Hagan and McCarthy's research clearly demonstrates and confirms the complex interplay of pre-street and post-street risk factors that culminate in youth becoming entangled in a variety of criminal activities. They find that street youth disproportionately come from poverty-stricken families where the head of household is unemployed, where one or both biological parents are absent, and explosive, violent families characterized by reduced levels of parental control, and erratic parenting. In turn, familial dysfunction and instability contribute to poorer academic performance, increased conduct and behavioural problems, as well as a greater propensity for conflict with teachers and peers. All of these factors, push kids to the street, where there most common adaptation to life on the street is engaging in criminal activities such as: stealing, drug trafficking and prostitution. In addition, Hagan and McCarthy outline a range of factors that increase the likelihood and propensity of engaging in what they term, "street-level crime", including: hunger, shelter, length of time on the street and arrests of street friends (McCarthy and Hagan, 1992: 614). Of particular interest is their finding that street crime is clearly gender specific, with males more likely to steal and females more likely to work in the sex trade.

Figure 3: A conceptual model of street life and crime.



Source: Hagan & McCarthy, 1998: 60.

Thus, unlike Brannigan and Caputo's (1993) model, Hagan and McCarthy offer a model of street-involved and homeless youth which examines in detail the lives of youth on the street and the factors which "push" them to engage in criminal behaviour. The main drawback of this model is that, despite appearances, it approaches the issue from both classical sociological and criminological perspectives, starting with a definition of street-involved and homeless youth which is rooted in deviance and juvenile delinquency. Thus, this model does not capture (or acknowledge) the normative pathways that youth follow to the street or the legitimate and normative behaviours and activities that they engage in to get themselves off the streets. More importantly, the simple set of cause and effect relationships depicted by this model overlooks and ignores the complex psychosocial factors that force youth to the streets and keep them there; particularly the degree and depth of exploitation and victimization that many youth experience both prior to and during their street-involvement.

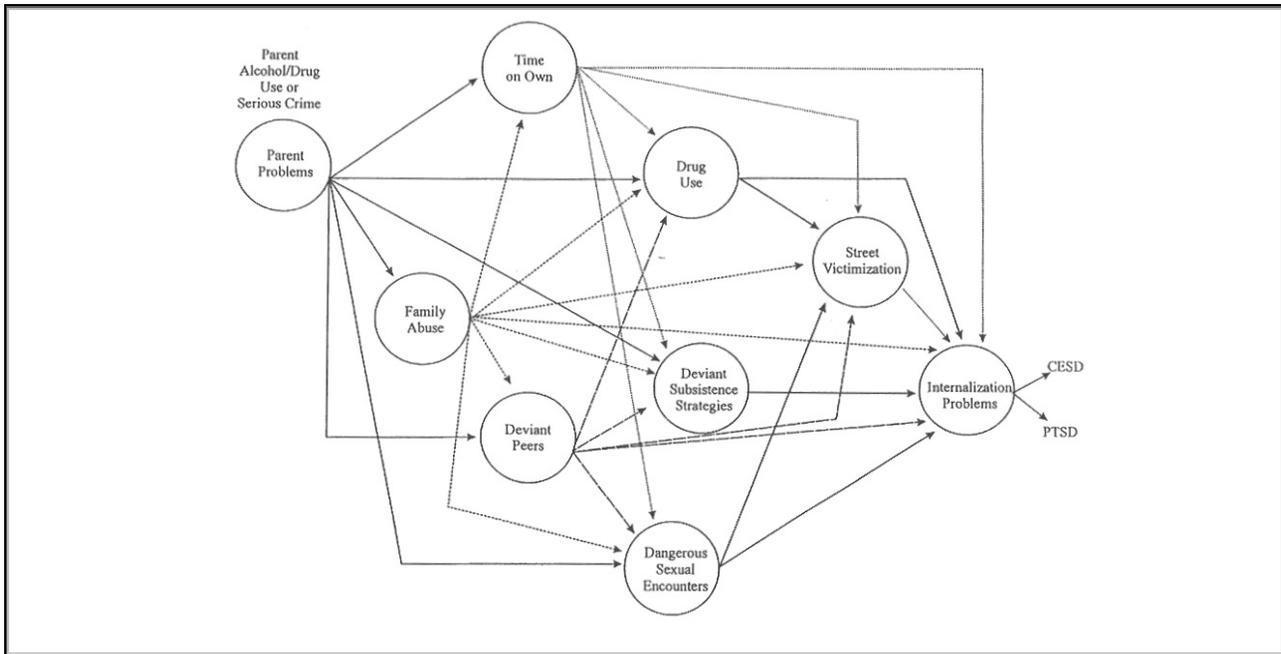
Precocious independence: risk amplification developmental model of homeless & runaway adolescents

Like Hagan and McCarthy, Whitbeck and Hoyt (1999) examine the life course trajectories of adolescence that result in them becoming street-involved and homeless. These researchers approach the study of street-involved and homeless youth from a life course perspective in which street-involvement is a function of cumulative continuity for antisocial behaviours. In short, according to Whitbeck and Hoyt (1999) youth

homelessness is an extension of normal developmental behaviours which exceed the threshold from normal and expected delinquency to long-term and pernicious delinquency. Essentially, adolescents' initial street-involvement is seen as a natural and necessary part of learning to become independent young adults. It is only when certain pre-conditions in the youth's psycho-social development and exposure to aberrant and ineffective parenting occurs that these experiments into adulthood turn into a long-term pattern of street-involvement and homelessness.

Whitbeck and Hoyt argue that because of the harmful developmental effects originating in the families the adolescents leave are accentuated by their experiences when they are on their own, young people fail to learn conventional behaviours that serve as alternatives to antisocial behaviours. Adolescents are further hampered by the consequences of their own behaviours. Each negative event in the adolescent's life adds to the next such that "...the accumulation of negative chains of events diminishes opportunities for change (1999:12)." The result is that youth are left with fewer and fewer options but to stay involved and to become further involved in street-life. Thus, once on their own for any extended period of time makes it harder and harder for youth to leave the street and return to normative patterns and routines of rules and the supervision of adult authoritarian structures.

Figure 4: Risk amplification developmental model of homeless & runaway adolescents.



Source: Whitbeck & Hoyt, 1999: 151.

Figure 4 above depicts a model of the causal relationships between the risk factors that increase the likelihood of adolescents progressing from experimenting with adult-like and delinquent behaviours (e.g. errors of judgement, rebellious behaviours, tobacco use, alcohol and drug use and sexuality) that are a normal part of growing up and maturing into adulthood, to developing lifelong patterns of anti-social and delinquent behaviours; that is, the factors that increase the risk for chronic homelessness. The model below begins with biological parents who are perceived by their adolescent children as having problems with alcohol and/or drug use or serious criminal behaviours. Many of these effects have been found to be highly correlated with an increased risk for exposure to physical and/or sexual abuse within the family. Whitbeck and Hoyt found that "...in general, the more abusive the family background, the earlier the age the child left home and the greater the time the adolescent will have spent from home ...(1999:151).

As can be seen in Figure 4, the process of adolescent development from home to street is the outcome of a complex process of dysfunctional and anti-social socialization, which is reproduced and reinforced by the youth' street relationships with other youth and adults on the street. In the context of this model, family abuse is singled out as one of the key risk factors associated with street involvement and progression to permanent and/or chronic homelessness in adulthood. As Whitbeck and Hoyt (1991) note, it is not only a determinant of the types of social relationships that youth have on the streets but also a strong predictor of street victimization and deviant survival strategies (e.g. street-level crime). Adolescents from abusive families tend to associate with other deviant youth who have experienced serious abuse at home. More importantly, deviant peer affiliations were found to be highly associated with engaging in high-risk behaviours (such as, drug/alcohol use, risky sex, and street-level crime), which, in turn, is more likely to result in high rates of physical and sexual victimization while on the streets.

The end of this process is what Whitbeck and Hoyt term, *internalization problems* – that is, youth are at increased risk for depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (1999: 119-134). On the one hand, higher levels of depressive symptoms correlate with higher rates of social isolation, lower levels of social supports – particularly in terms of helping youth to cope with stressful life events – as well as, lower self-image and self-esteem and poorer peer relationships; all factors which decrease adolescents' resilience to cope with and exit the street. On the other hand, PTSD is predictive of victimization (both physical and sexual) when youth are alone and on the street. As Whitbeck and Hoyt note, "...for many of these young people the cumulative trauma ranging from maltreatment at home to multiple victimization when on their own may create a sense of "normalcy" regarding situations that others would view as traumatic ..." (1999: 127). Having a history of trauma, Whitbeck and Hoyt (1999) argue, results in normative expectations of further trauma, thus, increasing the odds that youth engage in risky behaviours simply because they don't know any different or better.

Overall, then, this model examines the issue of street-involved and homeless youth from a purely psychological perspective where street-involvement is a product of long-

term, learned dysfunctional behaviours and activities. In many respects, Whitbeck and Hoyt's approach does not differ from that of Brannigan and Caputo's or Hagan and McCarthy's models insofar as they focus on street-involved and homeless youth as dysfunctional and/or deviant. In addition, all three models focus on family dysfunction and history of family violence as a key factor pushing and keeping youth on the streets. Where Whitbeck and Hoyt's model makes a unique contribution is in: (1) not starting from the premise that street-involved and homeless youth are deviant or juvenile delinquents; (2) precisely mapping the psycho-social factors that increase the odds of youth leaving home for the street; and (3) identifying the risk factors that keep youth on the street over the long term.

Thus, rather than labelling youth, Whitbeck and Hoyt (1999) attempt to get to the root of adolescent street-involvement by identifying and explaining the push/pull factors that lead youth to the street and keep them there. One of main shortcomings of this model is that it views street-involved and homeless youth' behaviour as a function of psychopathology, rather than as reasonable and normal responses to unreasonable and untenable circumstances in the family of origin. Finally, it should be noted that this model was developed based on data and information from one sub-group of the street-involved and homeless youth population: traumatized youth and youth with dysfunctional and violent family histories. As Jeff Karabanow notes in his study of street and homeless youth in Toronto, Halifax, Montreal and Guatemala City, "... street culture and street youth populations alike are comprised of many groups --- in so far as categorical labels do describe some aspects of street youth culture, they are nonetheless partial, frequently limiting out understanding of street youth as diversified complex people ..." (2004: 3-4). Thus, street-involved and homeless youth are a heterogeneous population, and Whitbeck and Hoyt's model only captures one of the diverse pathways youth take to the street.

Eco-streets: environments & systems that impact on homeless and street youth

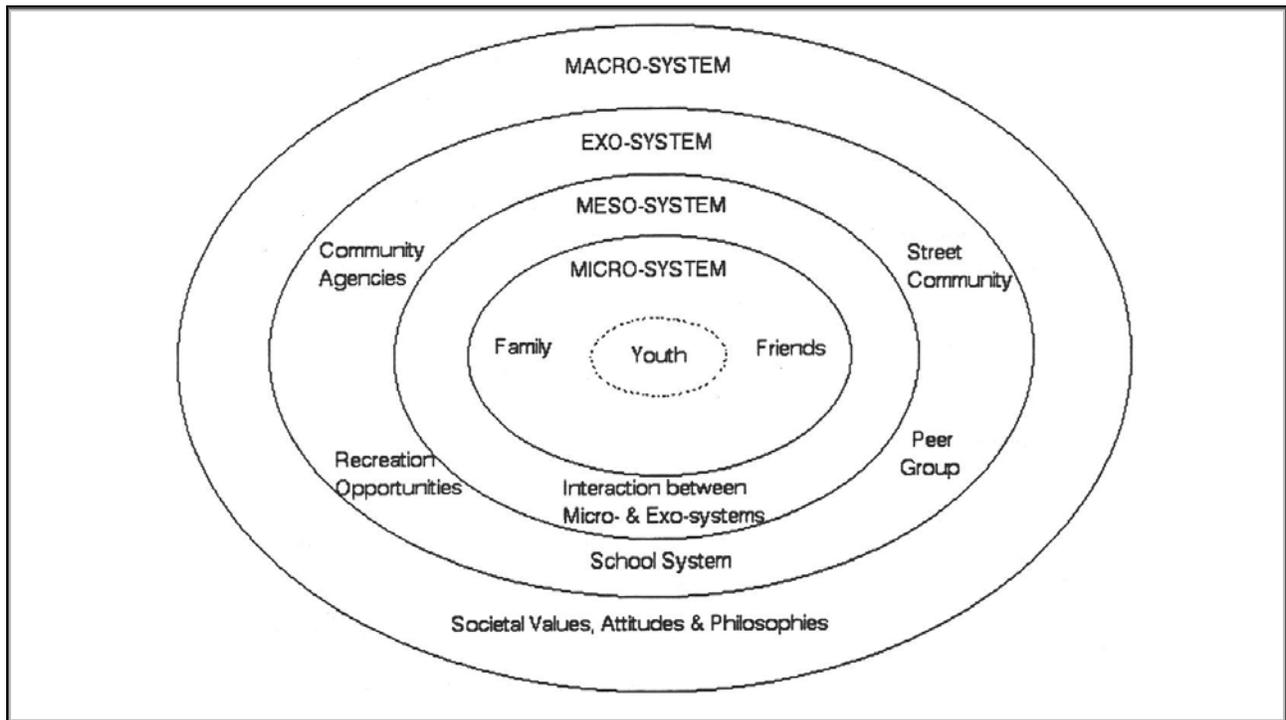
Unlike the previous models discussed, Kufeldt and Burrows (1994) examine homeless and street youth within the context of an ecological model of human development. Kufeldt and Burrows argue that in order to understand their social circumstances, street-

involved and homeless youth must be examined in the context of how society as a whole works to raise children (1994: 13). To this end, Kufeldt and Burrows (1994) present a conceptual framework (Figure 5) that identifies the systems or environments that impact on homeless and street-involved youth.

Figure 5 below graphically depicts the relationship between street-involved and homeless youth and the various levels and systems that touch and affect their lives. The circles or levels represent the dynamic, nested systems or environments that impact and are impacted by street-involved and homeless youth. Youth lie at the core of the framework and interact with the various levels of the social system¹². It is the outcome of the interactions across the circles that determine: (1) whether or not an adolescent will become homeless; and (2) whether or not they will remain on the street. The concentric rings represent such factors as: the prevailing value system, the public policy environment, the external community environment, social services network, schools, family and peer network, and the interactions between the systems (Kufeldt and Burrows, 1994: 13). Last, it should be noted that the impact of the systems and how they are experienced by youth vary based on the youth' personality and previous experiences.

¹² Kufeldt & Burrows (1994: 15) define the four systems as follows: *Microsystem* – the immediate setting, or series of settings, in which a person resides; *Mesosystem* – the connections between the person's microsystems and exosystems, where risk and opportunity relate to the quality of connections and relationships; *Exosystem* – a setting in which the adolescent does not participate directly, but which has an effect on the youth through the meso- and Microsystems (e.g. school); and *Macrosystem* – the values, beliefs, culture and ideology of the society in which a person resides.

Figure 5: An ecological & systems framework for understanding homeless & street youth.



Source: Kufeldt & Burrows, 1994: 14.

While this model is abstract, simplistic and somewhat antiquated, it does serve to underscore the fact that street-involved and homeless youth do not exist in a vacuum and that their involvement with the street is not simply the outcome of a dysfunctional family or a deviant or aberrant personality. Street-involvement is the product of both personal and personality factors, as well as systemic factors. Remaining on the street is as much an artefact of peer pressure from other street-involved youth as it is systemic failures in the foster care, child welfare, social service and/or juvenile justice systems in a society. Unfortunately, Kufeldt and Burrows do little to develop or elaborate their framework further based on their 1992 study of Calgary street youth. They do not put the outcomes of their study back into the context of their framework; therefore, there is limited supporting evidence for it.