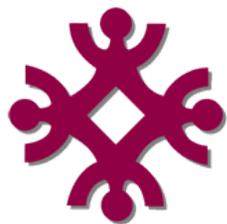# Saint John's Plan to End Youth Homelessness

Strategic Framework

August, 2016

Human Development Council

A WAY HOME
VERS UN CHEZ-SOI

Acknowledgements

The Human Development Council would like to formally acknowledge Eva's Initiatives, the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, and the Catherine Donnelly Foundation for having the vision to create the Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness Program (MLC), which has ultimately led to the creation of A Way Home, a national coalition of organizations working together to end youth homelessness in Canada.

Background Info on MLC

The Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness (MLC) Program is part of a national effort to address youth homelessness. Partners of the MLC program include Eva's Initiatives, Catherine Donnelly Foundation, Home Depot, The National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, The Canadian Housing Renewal Association, The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, and Raising the Roof.

There are two main areas of focus in the program. The first is working with local communities to develop a community plan to end youth homelessness. The second is a collaborative national campaign that will shift public policy towards solutions to end youth homelessness, in particular, systemic change to public policies.

As the MLC website states: "Existing systems – including child welfare, mental health, criminal justice systems, and others – must be transformed and integrated to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness. These systems need to work together to provide effective and seamless supports. A review of existing programs and policies through a 'youth lens' can help to eliminate service gaps."

The first two communities selected to participate in the MLC were Kamloops, BC and Kingston, ON. In 2014, Saint John was selected, along with Wellington County in Ontario, as a pilot community in the MLC Program, with the Saint John Human Development Council (HDC) as the lead agency.

The Strategic Framework

We have outlined three distinct, attainable goals, which, if met, will mean we have taken major strides as a community to end youth homelessness. Under each of the three goals, we have outlined key strategies to help us attain our goals, as well as results.

Goal #1: Prevent youth from becoming homeless in the first place

Preventing youth homelessness is the most important thing that can and should be done. Preventing youth homelessness means working upstream with young people, their families, communities and government institutions like education, child welfare, justice and health.

Currently in Canada the majority of resources are directed at managing our emergency response to homelessness rather than preventing it in the first place. However, research and evidence based prevention models (Gaetz 2014, Youth Reconnect Works), reveal that if youth are prevented from becoming street involved or leaving their families, schools and communities to seek services, they are significantly less likely to become homeless. Therefore, they are able to avoid the associated negative outcomes: chronic adult homelessness, low high school completion rates, high unemployment, persistent health issues, substance abuse, addictions, involvement with the law, etc.

Preventing youth homelessness not only saves significant resources down the road, it can also prevent or reduce the trauma that many youth who end up homeless experience.

1.1	Create an awareness and engagement campaign for schools and broader public.	✓ An awareness campaign exists in order to educate students on youth homelessness, deter stigmatization, assist in recognizing contributing factors and most importantly identify resources available to homeless or at-risk youth. ✓ A media campaign designed to educate the broader public on youth homelessness rolls out in conjunction with the school based campaign.
1.2	Ensure proper exit plans and supports are in place for youth released from Government care, in particular Correctional, Health and Child Welfare programs.	✓ Government systems are aware that there is an increased risk for youth to experience homelessness if proper exit plans and supports are not in place, and have adopted or enhanced work related to youth exiting the care of provincial programs. ✓ Successful adoption of the Provincial Youth in Care network's recommendations in 'A Long Road Home' will decrease the number of youth in care and aging out of government institutions who become homeless.
1.3	Youth are meaningfully engaged in the 'Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Saint John.'	✓ A committee composed of and led by youth with a wide range of personal experiences in relation to homelessness is established. ✓ Youth priority populations are represented and form an integral part of the committee's composition.

1.4	**Divert youth from shelters and services to youth oriented housing options and supports.**	✓ Adult service providers in Saint John are connected to youth-serving agencies and services, and are able to direct youth to the appropriate programs in an appropriate and caring manner. ✓ A family reconnect program that meets the needs of Saint John's at risk and homeless youth, and supports young people in re-establishing healthy and supportive relationships with those they define as family, is developed. ✓ The feasibility of a Host Homes program for Saint John, which, when appropriate, diverts youth from emergency shelters to family settings where they would better thrive, is assessed.
1.5	**Promote Mental Health Support and school based early intervention and prevention programs for youth.**	✓ Youth have access to timely mental health services in Saint John through support in mental health service navigation and benefit from peer support in a safe and positive environment. ✓ School based Integrated Service Delivery teams work collaboratively with community services. ✓ Youth-serving agencies work closely with all community partners to establish timely mental health support for youth not enrolled in education programs.

Goal #2: Homeless youth in Saint John have access to housing options, supports and employment opportunities that match their needs

The availability of appropriate housing options is the key element for the community of Saint John to be able to reduce and end youth homelessness. However, the needs of developing adolescents suggest that housing is only the first step. The goal of providing stable housing for young people is not merely to put a roof over their head, but rather to support successful transitions to adulthood. Youth need a range of individualized community and clinical supports to stay housed, as well as employment opportunities that match their needs. Housing stability may not always be a direct line for many young people; they must be able to move through housing with different levels of support as they mature into healthy adults.

2.1	**All participating youth-serving agencies adopt the Housing First for Youth model in addressing youth homelessness:**	✓ Youth have immediate access to housing with no pre-conditions; youth choice and self-determination, positive youth development, individualized and client driven supports, and social and community integration guide the delivery of these housing services. ✓ Client centred, continuous case management within a system of care is at the centre of the work to organize and coordinate the delivery of supports and services. ✓ Transitional Housing is considered as a Housing First For Youth accommodation option by meeting criteria for flexible length of stay and the type and depth of individualized supports.

2.2	**There is sufficient transitional housing to meet the needs of young people in Saint John.**	✓ Transitional housing supports the transition to healthy adulthood with flexible time limits, life skills and opportunities to access income and education. ✓ Safe Harbour reopens with a sustainable operating model in order to provide safe housing and support services to homeless youth. ✓ Within the system of care the link between Safe Harbour staff and community resources is strengthened.
2.3	**The development of a housing continuum for youth experiencing homelessness provides appropriate housing options and supports to meet the needs of homeless youth.**	✓ Housing options for youth experiencing homelessness are enhanced by a second stage housing program to complement Safe Harbour's program (e.g. ONE LIFE program) with individualized supports that follow the young person to ensure housing stabilization. ✓ Targeted supports and safe spaces exist for diverse subpopulations of youth who are over represented in the homeless population and require additional supports to achieve housing stability and well-being, including LGBTQ2S, pregnant and parenting, Indigenous and newcomer youth. ✓ Outreach services are enhanced so that street involved youth are aware of, and connected to, services. ✓ Develop a landlord strategy that strengthens relationships with landlords to increase the number of private market landlords who will rent to young people with follow up supports.
2.4	**Socially innovative youth education, employment and career readiness programs support at-risk and homeless youth in maintaining stable tenancy and employment.**	✓ Homeless and at-risk youth have access to educational and/or pre-employment options that support them towards meaningful employment or further education. ✓ Youth have a range of employment options through social enterprise to choose from as they prepare to enter the workforce. ✓ A tool exists so that youth-serving agencies and department staff in the region have an up-to-date understanding of the availability of, and eligibility criteria for, pre-employment and skill development, and employment opportunities in Saint John.

Goal #3 Implementation of Saint John's Plan to End Youth Homelessness is established through the creation of a System of Care

Finally, ending and preventing youth homelessness will work more efficiently and effectively if there is coordination between programs, services, and resources so that young people receive the supports they need no matter where they come in contact with the system. Different agencies or systems have specific roles and mandates but work collaboratively to serve the needs of youth.

3.1	The work of public and community youth-serving agencies and departments are integrated and coordinated.	✓ A youth serving committee works to enhance the coordination between public and community partners. ✓ Collective principles, values and a definition of youth homelessness are established. ✓ Goals, opportunities, research and data from Saint John's Plan to End Youth Homelessness are in line with local poverty reduction strategies. ✓ System of Care members are supported to meet the organizational changes necessary for continual improvement of services for youth at-risk of or experiencing homelessness.
3.2	The collection and dissemination of data from youth serving agencies and departments allows for an enhanced understanding of the issues faced by youth at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.	✓ In conjunction with the Community Council on Homelessness, a coordinated intake and assessment tool is used widely by youth serving organizations to ensure accurate prioritization and matching of services. ✓ HIFIS 4 is used as a system to collect and share local data on youth homelessness. ✓ Data collected locally and nationally is consolidated to create a road map of pathways into homelessness to be used to ensure all systems that at-risk and homeless youth connect with are aware of their role in reducing the number of youth experiencing homelessness. ✓ Overall plan implementation and individual programs are evaluated in order to guide changes to existing programs and enable effective resource allocation.