



A WAY HOME VERS UN CHEZ-SOI

KELOWNA

**A YOUTH HOMELESSNESS
PREVENTION STRATEGY**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A Way Home Kelowna was initiated in the community in late 2017 with the support and creation of the A Way Home Kelowna Steering Committee. This work coincided with the initiation of Journey Home, the community's initiative to address homelessness. The timing was a perfect opportunity to design our ideal system of care. Aligning a dedicated youth strategy with the broader community systems plan helps address the traditional gaps in the system between the youth and adult serving sectors.

City of Kelowna Council endorsed the Journey Home Strategy in June 2018. Since then the Journey Home Transition Team have been hard at work. They have created the Central Okanagan Journey Home Society, a new non-profit tasked with being the Backbone Organization responsible for implementing the actions in the Journey Home Strategy. They have been busy establishing the foundations of the Backbone Organization and continuing to build capacity and awareness in community on the challenges and opportunities we face.

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All youth who lent their voice and continue to partner with the Central Okanagan Journey Home Society through A Way Home Kelowna and Youth Advocates for Housing

Youth Advocates for Housing members: Tamara, Fox, Kim, Brittany, and Nuge

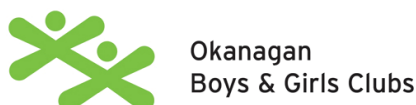
A Way Home Kelowna January 2018 Summit Participants

Journey Home Community Summit and Design Lab Participants

Support from April Nicholson, Canadian Mental Health Association - Kelowna
Report designed by Aaryn Secker.

Kelowna is situated on the unceded territory of the Syilx Okanagan Nation

Partners:



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PURPOSE

Youth homelessness is a priority for Journey Home, and for Kelowna. This issue isn't always visible. But it exists.

The absolute homeless population had a mean age of **31** years when they had their first experience of homelessness, with **37%** of those experiencing absolute homeless before the age of **25**.

- McKenzie, J. (2018) Kelowna Point-in-Time Count: Community Report. Central Okanagan Foundation. Kelowna, BC.

Being without a home is more than being without a roof over your head or sleeping at City Park. Being a homeless youth in Kelowna feels unsafe, it's not having resources, being exposed and naked, abandoned, like you don't exist. Homeless youth have hopes and dreams just like everyone else but face obstacles and barriers to those hopes and dreams when they don't have access to safe, affordable and appropriate housing.

The Journey Home Strategy has set our community on a common and shared path to tackling homelessness in Kelowna. Over the past year we have learnt a lot about our community: you're innovative, you want change, you know homelessness is an issue, you know youth homelessness is an issue, and you know we can and must prevent and address homelessness.

This report, A Way Home Kelowna: Youth Homelessness Prevention Strategy, carries on from the Journey Home Strategy. It is informed by the voice of youth with lived/ living experience in Kelowna. It makes the case for shifting our approach to preventing and addressing youth homelessness. We acknowledge collaboration and innovation in Kelowna is happening. We also acknowledge that we need to go further, we need systems change, and we need clearly defined actions.

This means shifting our approach so:

- We intervene early, and PREVENT youth homelessness
- Youth have access to housing CHOICE and SUPPORT: Housing First for Youth
- Youth are supported through ALL transitions
- We are all aware of the stigma and discrimination facing youth experiencing homelessness. And we know what we need to do.
- YOUTH VOICE is included in decision making: Youth Advocates for Housing

VISION



Our vision is to ensure every young person in this community feels valued and supported and every journey for them leads home. We are committed to the action laid out in the Journey Home strategy. If you haven't read the strategy, then do it now. Collective efforts start with you as an individual. We need to work together so we can all contribute collectively to true systems change.

DEFINING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS



This report considers youth as adolescents and young people aged 13 – 24 years old. We define youth homelessness as young people aged 13 – 24 who are living independently of parents and/ or caregivers without the ability to secure a stable, safe, and consistent place to live. With their distinct legal rights, youth are a vulnerable population in our community with unique needs as they transition from being a 'youth' to an 'adult'

They face not only a lack of secure housing, but they also lack experience living without their family or caregiver, and are going through developmental changes (social, physical, emotional, and cognitive)¹.

1. Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016:
http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/Definition_of_Youth_Homelessness.pdf

WHY PRIORITIZE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS?

Transitioning from being a 'youth' to an 'adult' can be fraught with difficulties and exacerbated by vulnerabilities. It's our responsibility to ensure the social safety net is robust to ensure youth don't fall through the cracks of the system while they transition from one stage of life to the next.


Youth homelessness is preventable. We know the causes and consequences of youth homelessness are unique. How we as a community consider and intervene with youth homelessness is also distinct from adults experiencing homelessness.

There were over 200 youth accessing emergency shelters in Kelowna during 2016. The majority accessing the adult shelter system. Realistically this number could be anywhere from 250 – 290 young people². This could have been prevented.

Shifting our approach to prevention means we need to consider primary, secondary and tertiary approaches of prevention. Ensuring we support youth no matter where they are in their journey home and respect and uphold the rights of youth.

This means adopting the following typology:

- Structural prevention: legislation, policy, and investment to address risks of homelessness and increase social equality.
- Systems prevention: breaking barriers and enhancing access to services and supports.
- Early intervention: strategies designed to act early and address the risk of homelessness, as well as provide crisis intervention to those who have recently experienced homelessness.
- Eviction prevention: a type of early intervention, programs designed to keep people stably housed and help them avoid eviction.
- Housing stability: supporting people who have experience homelessness to find and maintain housing³.



We must recognise that prevention addresses vulnerable youth across a continuum, from before they are at risk through to systems changes to address structural and systemic barriers and issues through to housing stabilization efforts. Once we have strengthened our system of care we can move towards a duty to assist, an aspiration legislative rights based approach to ultimately ending youth homelessness.

2. Journey Home Strategy 2018

3. Gaetz, S., Schwan, K., Redman, M., French, D., & DeJ, E. (2018). The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness. A. Buchnea (Ed.). Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

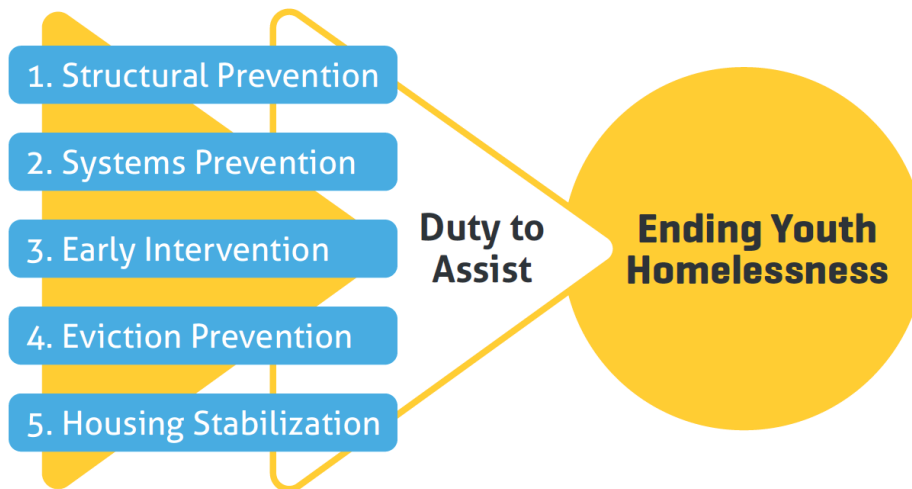


Figure 1: The five prevention models to lead to the ending of youth homelessness.
Source: Gaetz, S., Schwan, K., Redman, M., French, D., & Dej, E. (2018). The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness. A. Buchnea (Ed.). Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

SHIFTING OUR APPROACH

Kelowna has a vast system of care. Youth service providers in Kelowna have worked hard to ensure youth experiencing homelessness are connected to the right services and supports they need. Whether they are youth accessing youth specific services or youth accessing 'adult' services.

When we start to look at the services and resources available in Kelowna we start to see our gaps:

- there is a distinct transition point in service in Kelowna, delineated by those under 19 years old and over 19 years old
- no coordinated assessment and prioritization mechanism to house and support youth in Kelowna
- no treatment beds for youth under 19 in Kelowna, youth face long waitlists and are removed from community
- minimal choices for youth housing, a handful of beds in transitional and scattered site housing to find and maintain housing

Shifting our approach to youth homelessness will take a collective effort to address effectively and sustainably. It's about intervening earlier to prevent youth homelessness. It's about giving youth access to housing choice through a Housing First for Youth approach. It's about supporting youth through all transitions. It's about educating ourselves and becoming aware of the importance of addressing youth homelessness. It's about ensuring youth have a voice and are made to feel at home in our community.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS

Collaboration and innovation is not new to the youth serving sector in Kelowna. There is impressive work being undertaken and will continue to take place. Journey Home has given Kelowna a strong call to action and Kelowna will continue to make sure action happens.

“ I was tossed around. Different foster homes, shelters, group homes, treatment centres and off and on homeless. ”

NOV 2017

A Way Home Kelowna begins, Steering Committee convened and Project Coordinator appointed



81
attendees

FEB - MAR 2018

Journey Home
youth design labs



52
attendees

FEB - APR 2018

Youth lived experience
focus groups



71
participants

MAY - JUNE 2018

Youth validate the
priorities and actions for
youth in Journey Home



JUNE 2018

The Bridge Youth & Family
Services fundraiser to open
a Youth Recovery House



80
attendees

JAN 2018

A Way Home
Kelowna Youth Summit



JUNE 2018

Journey Home Strategy is launched



30
participants

SEPT 2018

Housing First for Youth Training



79
attendees

OCT 2018

Making Zero Count Consultation



800+
attendees

NOV 2018

Ending 'Us & Them' awareness event

JULY 2018

Youth Advocates for Housing is established - a youth voice for Journey Home



OCT 2018

Central Okanagan Journey Home Society is established to implement the Journey Home Strategy



40
community
partners
trained

JAN 2019

Youth Assessment & Prioritization (YAP) Tool training

“ I wanna help kids through what I'm going through because it's horrible. ”

ADDRESSING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

We've made progress but there is more that needs to be done to shift how we approach preventing and addressing youth homelessness.

We heard our community clearly. We have identified high leverage Journey Home youth actions we can get started on now to begin addressing youth homelessness. Our success hinges on our ability to work together to collectively change how we address youth homelessness. Together means service providers, all levels of government, businesses, academia, lived experience, and the general public.

Our actions in 2019 will focus on:

01

STRATEGY: We intervene early, and PREVENT youth homelessness **JH Pillar 1: Inclusion & Prevention**

ACTION:

- Explore and pilot prevention initiatives, such as The Upstream Project, to identify and support youth before they become homeless.
- Enhancing connections to healthy opportunities that support those at risk, experiencing, or exiting homelessness to thrive in community and to stay in housing where possible.
- Launch prevention programs to support people to stay in housing where possible – create targeted caseload spaces for youth.
- Work with key Provincial ministries to enhance positive housing transitions for youth from public systems. This includes developing discharge/ transition protocols that prevent homelessness.
- Participate in regional, provincial and national learning communities to share and learn best practices and champion preventing and ending youth homelessness.
- Work with lived experience youth and service providers to ensure programming is tailored to them, and offer training across the homeless serving system to enhance capacity to serve this group.


02

STRATEGY: YOUTH HAVE ACCESS TO HOUSING CHOICE AND SUPPORT
JH PILLAR 3: HOUSING & SUPPORTS

ACTION:

- Create and monitor a policy to ensure the homeless serving system for youth up to the age of 24 receive a minimum of 20% of program and housing spaces
 - Establish a Youth Coordinated Access and Assessment Table, using a consistent tool, to ensure youth are housed and supported quickly
 - Advocate for more housing options in Kelowna, working towards a Housing First for Youth model
 - Develop a clear mechanism to assess how the needs of youth are being met through identification, analysis of outcomes, access, and Key Performance Indicators
 - Create youth funding targets to ensure Journey Home resources are being distributed in an equitable manner
-

03

STRATEGY: YOUTH ARE SUPPORTED THROUGH ALL TRANSITIONS
JH PILLAR 1: INCLUSION & PREVENTION

ACTION:

- Work with provincial ministries to enhance positive housing transitions for youth, including developing discharge and transition protocols that prevent youth homelessness
- Develop formal links with aligning strategies to ensure we are integrated across systems
- Develop a person-centred approach to harm reduction and sobriety on a continuum to meet people where they are at
- Leverage technology to develop data driven and informed decision making
- Engage in a comprehensive system mapping process to define the Homeless-Serving System in detail, including touch points between youth, adult, and other service points
- Support efforts to increase treatment beds, especially for young people in Kelowna

ADDRESSING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

04

STRATEGY: WE ARE ALL AWARE OF THE STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION FACING YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS. AND WE KNOW WHAT WE NEED TO DO.

JH PILLAR 1: INCLUSION & PREVENTION

ACTION:

- Ensure addressing stigma on youth homelessness is part of the broader Central Okanagan Journey Home Society campaign to address stigma and raise awareness.
 - Support education on the Truth & Reconciliation Calls to Action across the broader community and the homeless-serving sector, and determine implications for operations and strategy moving forward.
-

05

STRATEGY: YOUTH ARE INCLUDED IN DECISION MAKING
JH FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPT: LIVED EXPERIENCE

ACTION:

- Continue to empower and partner with the Youth Advocates for Housing, a committee for youth with lived/ living experience of youth homelessness.
- Formalize Backbone Organization relationships, including with A Way Home Kelowna and Youth Advocates for Housing to ensure ongoing focus on the Youth Strategy is embedded in community efforts.
- Continue to ensure youth homelessness is a priority in Journey Home implementation .
- Work with Youth Advocates for Housing to support start-up and acceleration of social enterprise ideas from a lived/living experience lens.
- Introduce peer support models, including peer outreach to address conflicts between the homeless population, businesses, and the community in partnership with business, bylaw services, and police.
- Develop easy to access resource guides with lived experience input to ensure those at risk of or experiencing homelessness know where to go for the right help fast. This includes support to the families or friends of those in need of help.

We will be flexible and adaptable to changes over the course of the year ahead. These actions will inform our work plan, which in turn will guide our work to achieving the shifts in how we prevent and address youth homelessness.

MOVING FORWARD



The work we need to do is not easy. But it is not impossible.

While we have clearly identified our five key action areas, we must also be ready to adapt to the changes around us. We know we can collectively make a difference in the lives of our youth and we can prevent and address youth homelessness. Over the following year (2019) we will strive to achieve the actions set out above and will ensure our community is keep abreast of our progress.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

There are numerous ways for you to get involved and make a difference as our community shifts towards tackling youth homelessness. Here's a list of actions for you:

- Share this report with your friends, family and colleagues – build awareness and be the change
 - Read the [Journey Home Strategy](#) – then share it with your networks
 - Familiarize yourself with youth services in Kelowna – then share then with those who need them Volunteer your time and skills on a board of youth serving organizations
 - Donate personal care products to shelters and safe spaces
 - Volunteer at a shelter, drop-in or safe space
 - Learn what it means to be at-risk of homelessness, how to identify it, and what can be done about it
 - Purchase and watch the documentary '[Us & Them](#)' – host an awareness party
- Learn more by reading and sharing:**
- The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness [definition of youth homelessness](#)
 - [The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness](#)
 - Jesse Thistle's [definition of Indigenous Homelessness](#)
 - [Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action](#)
 - [United Nations Right to Adequate Housing](#)



