

May 6th, 2022

Re: *No Where to Go: A Report from the Youth Homelessness Research Project*

To Whom it May Concern,

On behalf of our local community partners from Penticton B.C., we are pleased to present the attached report, *No Where to Go: A report from the Youth Homelessness Research Project*.

In 2020, a group of community partners received a grant from SPARC BC to understand youth homelessness in the region. The concluded research report, which includes ten recommendations for change, is based on the experiences of over 260 young people who completed surveys and interviews facilitated through youth peers. As the youth-led report states, “*there were clear messages [...] things can not continue the way they are*” (p. 27).

On February 15, 2022, Penticton’s Mayor and Council unanimously endorsed this report. Community partners have continued to mobilize to urgently act on the recommendations identified. As advocates of this work, we witness first-hand the impacts of homelessness on young people in Penticton, and the fear of those who are at-risk of becoming homeless. With Penticton facing a housing crisis with a shortage of affordable and youth friendly housing options, we are continually seeing young people pushed out of their own community to seek help. We know that the status quo is no longer an option. We need your help in supporting the early prevention and intervention efforts to ensure that no young person is ever left alone in our community.

As the Co-chairs of the grassroots youth homelessness committee that supported this youth-led project, we request that your office read this report with the level of urgency it requires. We call on all orders of government, in collaboration with each other, to support us in acting on the ten recommendations from this report. 100 More Homes, as the lead collaborative group of stakeholders addressing housing and homelessness in Penticton, has committed to leading the implementation of this report. However, we cannot do it alone. We know that moving the needle on youth homelessness requires dedicated and long-term commitments from all partners.

Enclosed you will find the written endorsement from A Way Home Canada – the national coalition of partners reimagining solutions to youth homelessness. We call on your endorsement and immediate action of this report to ensure that youth voices in our community are amplified so we can end youth homelessness once and for all.

Sincerely,



Kim Conroy
Co-chair, Youth Homelessness Committee
Foundry Penticton



Melisa Edgerly
Co-chair, Youth Homelessness Committee
Foundry Penticton

May 6th, 2022

To Whom it May Concern,

We are in a crisis. Perhaps it does not personally affect you or your constituents; however, it puts the lives of our youth at risk and harm, and their futures become derailed and uncertain because of the social problem of housing. This social problem is forcing youth out of their homes and communities and putting them into preventable, hazardous situations that have a greater influence outside of their backyards and apartments. From the perspective of youth, there is an increased fear and anxiety about never knowing where they will be safe to go - which is a constitutional right of Canadian youth, which has failed to be provided.

There is a broken system within the interior of BC and throughout Canada that pushes out youth from the communities that they were raised, with the rise of unattainable housing on a minimum wage budget, and the limited resources available. Some can afford the dream of owning property or investing for a future down the road; meanwhile, we are telling our youth that they can never afford to have a permanent home or have ownership. In short, this tells our youth – who are our responsibility – to shape and grow into individuals who will inherit and evolve our community. We hear, “you will never be enough to be here because you do not have a place” on social media and news posts, forecasting a future that we could never afford. What prospect does that give us?

We are blamed for being lazy and shammed for taking handouts that we do not deserve, because we do not know how to live – yet no one taught us how. For some of us, while our friends and peers were raving about their weekends away on vacation, or complaining about their parents' curfew, we were carrying our livelihoods in backpacks or whatever we could carry to school or to work, to see whose couch we could crash with for a safe night. We are considered housed and living if there is a couch and a roof over our heads; however, it does not solve housing insecurity and how we are assumed to know everything. When you have aged out of the system, or have no parental support, where do we go?

And for some of our youth they must jump the hurdles of systematic barriers that target them for more than just age. Our youth face discriminatory behaviour based upon assumptions on their housing, insecurity, by their race, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, education, disabilities, and mental capacity. This affects how our youth can look for or receive help. And for some, the problem comes from being unable to ask for help because of these barriers. Because our youth are forced out and left to defend themselves, we have failed to protect them. Our youth are looking for safety and security, and when that cannot be provided, they look for alternatives which make them vulnerable and susceptible to dangerous activities. The consequence is lost lives. We need youth specific housing options in to be included in the developments planned for Penticton, and we need to empower youth to share their experiences in a safe and meaningful way. Most importantly, we need to prevent this from ever happening in the first place.

The youth of today will be the leaders and change makers of our future and they are left with nowhere to go; our homeless population were once our youth and we have failed them. This cycle must be broken, and we must come from a place of community, and a place of understanding of how we got here. Let's give our youth safety, security, respect and a future.

But what would I know, I'm a youth after all.

Sincerely,

-Youth Today, Change Maker Tomorrow

This letter came from a youth with lived experience of homelessness from Penticton. They have been kept anonymous.



May 6, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

On Tuesday, February 15, 2022, Penticton City Council unanimously endorsed *No Where to Go*, a report from the Penticton youth homelessness research project:

10.5 Youth-Led Youth Homelessness Research Project

40/2022

It was MOVED and SECONDED

THAT Council endorse the report “No Where to Go: A report from the Youth Homelessness Research Project” as presented in Attachment A;
AND THAT Council direct staff to work with local youth to send a copy of the research report to relevant Federal and Provincial Agencies and Ministries;
AND THAT Council direct staff to work collaboratively with youth and community partners on implementing the 10 recommendations of the report.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

The City of Penticton is proud to have been asked by Penticton youth who participated in surveys, interviews, and other activities during the development of the report to “work with local youth to send this report to all applicable Provincial Ministers, Ministries and agencies outlining the community’s youth homelessness and housing priorities” (p. 41, *No Where to Go*).

Already, community partners are actively working on the report’s recommendations. We kindly request that you direct your staff, if they have not already done so, to engage in tangible, transparent, and timely action to support Penticton youth.

If you have any questions, please contact the City of Penticton’s Social Development team (SocialDevelopment@penticton.ca or 250.490.2400).

Sincerely,

Penticton Social Development Team

Thursday, May 5, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

Subject: A Way Home Canada's Endorsement Penticton's No Where to Go - Youth Homelessness Research Report and future direction

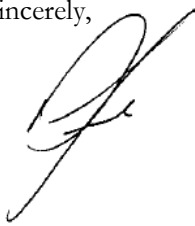
As a national coalition whose work focuses on reimagining solutions to youth homelessness through transformations in policy, planning and practice, A Way Home Canada celebrates the opportunities that are underway in Penticton, and endorses Penticton's *No Where to Go* youth homelessness research report.

The approach we take to addressing youth homelessness must be proactive, rather than reactive, given that research consistently shows that even a brief experience of homelessness is extremely harmful. As promising prevention interventions are pursued, researched, and scaled more deeply and widely, our understanding of the path forward grows. We can no longer ignore the opportunities we have for implementing preventative policies and practices across Canada. A shift to prevention will require systems change, and systems change is difficult work, but we fully support your path.

Across Canada, youth with lived experience of homelessness emphasized that system change is where youth homelessness prevention efforts could be most effective. These youth were very clear – we are waiting too long to intervene when a young person is at risk or experiencing homelessness. Young people and those working at the front line are calling for a sweeping shift to rights-based prevention and early intervention, this can be realized through the Right to Housing for Children and Youth. This requires communities and governments to adopt innovative models for programs and practice, as well as make significant policy and systems change. Multiple public systems, sectors, and all orders of government are implicated in this shift. Effective implementation of a systems-wide prevention approach requires deep, meaningful collaboration in order to create a System of Care to support young people and ensure they receive the supports they need to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

Penticton's progress suggests that these are challenges you are prepared to overcome. Our work is squarely positioned to support you overcoming these and finding success as a community, and we strongly recommend you support Penticton's work. If you have any questions or would like to get in touch to discuss any aspects of where you work and ours harmonize, I can be reached at dfrench@awayhome.ca.

Sincerely,



David K French,
Managing Director, A Way Home Canada

NO WHERE TO GO

**A report from the Youth Homelessness Research Project
January 2022**

Submitted by: WRH Consulting



Contents

“Things could have looked very different...”	3
Chapter 1: Background to the Project.....	4
Project Intention	4
Project Methodology	4
Key Steps in the Process.....	4
Ensuring Youth Voice	5
Stories and Numbers.....	5
The Impact of COVID.....	6
Survey of Youth	6
Project Reference Group.....	7
“I did things I didn’t want to have to do to have somewhere to sleep...”	8
Chapter 2: Community Consultations	9
Conversations with Service Providers.....	9
Resources for Youth Who are At Risk or Homeless	9
Shelter and Emergency Beds.....	10
What are the numbers?	10
Point in Time Count.....	11
History of Trauma.....	13
Unsafe Home Situations.....	13
Unmet Needs	13
Negative Experiences with Government Ministries.....	13
Additional Barriers	14
“It’s not the Hilton, but it feels safe...”	15
Chapter 3: What the Survey Revealed About Youth in Penticton	16
Profile of Youth	16
Living Circumstances of Youth	18
Housing History of Youth	20
Supports Available to Youth.....	21
Youth Perspective on Homelessness in Penticton	22
Youth that are Homeless/Precariously Housed	23
Discussion.....	24
Limitations.....	24
“I didn’t know how to find someone to help me...”	25

Chapter 4: Conclusion and Recommendations.....	26
Conclusion.....	26
Steps Forward	26
“It’s a do or die situation...”	29
Appendices.....	30
Appendix A.....	30
Appendix B	35
Appendix C	36
Appendix D.....	37
Appendix E	38

“Things could have looked very different....”

In his very early 20's, this young man has already walked a harder path than most. He is currently living on his own with the support of an Agreement with Young Adults, a funding option provided by MCFD. “I live alone and feel safe where I am now.”

His housing insecurity began in 2016 when his dad passed away due to an overdose. He was very close to his father and was living with him at the time of his death. After the trauma and tragedy of his father's passing, he moved in with his aunt to avoid going into foster care. Describing that awful time, he said, “My father's death killed my ambition. I played hockey..., somehow, I kept going to games, no matter what. In a way, hockey helped me keep on.”

Luckily, he has had the benefit of family support. “My family jumped through every hoop imaginable to get me on a youth agreement.” Eventually successful in getting this financial support, it has made a huge difference for him. However, he told us “had I not had family to rely on, things would have been very different for me. Finding support was very difficult...the government has made it harder than it should be to access financial aid.” He is clear that without the family support he has had, “my story would have turned out much differently.”

Also instrumental to his survival, was the support he received from a caring teacher, his school principal, and a youth worker. He has accessed Foundry for medical care and some counselling and found those resources helpful as well. Grief has been a difficult and ongoing challenge to manage – he dips in and out of attending counselling appointments depending on his energy.

After graduation, he enrolled in college courses but learned he “wasn't ready to manage the demand and dropped out”. He moved to Kelowna for a change of scenery...“everything in Penticton made me sad”. The time in Kelowna was brief. Returning to Penticton, he lived with his aunt for a while before moving into a shared house with four friends. As of March 2020, he has his own place. As part of his current financial support from MCFD, he is learning about money management and budgeting.

When asked what he needed throughout this time that would have helped, he told us he could have used food. “There were times I was really hungry, but my pride prevented me from asking for help.” He has also struggled to find work, necessary to supplement his income, and during the pandemic has been laid off 3 times. Balancing school, work, and life have been difficult – securing affordable, safe housing is an enormous problem. “Housing is unaffordable. If I was not on this agreement, I would not be where I am now. And having a supportive team....it has really helped.”

Chapter 1: Background to the Project

Project Intention

The City of Penticton applied for and was successful in receiving a grant from the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC) in early 2020. The grant provided financial assistance to support the development of a community-led youth homelessness assessment and strategy to mitigate, and ultimately work to eliminate youth homelessness in the City of Penticton. A contract to provide project leadership was awarded to WRH Consulting, a local company with extensive experience in youth serving organizations, community development, and the BC social services sector.

The project defined four primary deliverables:

- Completing community consultations to assess the size of the challenge, ensuring that the voices of youth are privileged,
- Convening the collaborative input of a collective of community service providers,
- Development of a draft implementation strategy for review, analysis, and endorsement by project partners, and,
- Completion and submission of a final report.

These deliverables were also intended to enhance local understanding of the issues precipitating youth homelessness, establish a baseline of numbers of at-risk and homeless youth, assess existing community capacity to respond, and support planning and decision-making with respect to the implementation of solutions and future, strategic investments of resources.

Project Methodology

Beyond recruiting baseline data on the numbers of at-risk and homeless youth in Penticton between the ages of 12 and 24, the project was designed to also privilege youth voice and promote youth leadership. Also key to the project intent was stimulating momentum on the topic among community stakeholders.

Key Steps in the Process

- Establishing baseline data regarding the numbers of at-risk and homeless youth (ages 12-24) in Penticton, including causal factors to determine the scope and size of the challenge.
 - This involved conducting research with community organizations, local services, and provincial entities and projects to develop a profile of youth who are at-risk or homeless and estimates of their numbers.
 - A comprehensive survey was created and distributed to youth via participating stakeholder organizations, through the dedicated support of the Foundry, and via School District 67. (see Appendix A for Survey used)
 - Research on youth homelessness within the province of BC and Canada was reviewed for contextual information relevant to Penticton's information.
- Supporting youth led, peer-to-peer stakeholder consultation including the development of skills and confidence.

- This involved recruiting youth facilitators, ensuring cultural representation to welcome the voices of Indigenous youth, GLBTQ2S+ Youth, and other marginalized groups. Recruitment occurred through accessing affiliated, partnering organizations including Foundry Peer Support team members and the RADAR group.
 - Youth Peer Workers assisted with designing interview questions and the survey content and participated in reviewing input and theme analysis from the information that was gathered.
 - Youth facilitators were supported in their leadership roles by both the project team and the staff at Foundry.
- Conducting community stakeholder consultation with partners
 - This involved hosting guided interviews with key stakeholders and applying theme analysis to the feedback received for comparison to survey data.
 - Preparation of draft report encompassing consultations and baseline information to solicit key stakeholder review and input
 - This involved distribution of the draft report to key stakeholders and hosting facilitated, feedback sessions with members of both the working group and youth representatives to receive their feedback and input regarding next steps and recommended implementation strategies
 - Produce and submit a final report with analysis and implementation strategy for submission to key stakeholders.

Ensuring Youth Voice

A small group of interested youth, some of whom had been previously involved in the Youth Engagement Strategy (YES), were convened to assist with the project design and survey development. They provided validation of the importance of addressing youth homelessness, one of the original pillars emerging from the work of the YES project. With the input of youth, a Project Charter was created to articulate the core values of the project and the processes which would be honoured. (Appendix B). This core group were also convened to review preliminary data and suggested strategies for moving forward to address youth homelessness.

Peer Support Workers with Foundry were also instrumental in supporting youth engagement. In particular, Melisa Edgerly and Honor Hollman, provided invaluable support with interviewing youth, survey distribution and design, and ongoing feedback.

Stories and Numbers

Understanding the first hand, lived experience of youth in our community who have been or are homeless was considered vital information necessary to assuring the integrity of this project. Stories from youth have been highlighted throughout this report. Their stories present an intimate and authentic portrait of some of the people who are living in Penticton and who have experienced homelessness, remain in precarious housing, and/or have found some measure of stability in their housing situation.

Guided interviews were conducted with five youth, all under 24, who were referred to the project team by community agencies. Prior to the interview, the intent of the project was explained to each person, how their confidentiality would be protected, and their consent was obtained to speak with them for the purposes of including their anonymous experiences in the report. The interviews were conducted by the Peer Support

Workers at Foundry Penticton with support of the project team. Hosting the interviews at the Foundry also provided an opportunity to introduce the youth to the resources available there if they weren't already familiar with them. As a result of this strategy, some of the youth interviewed made their first, vital connection to the centre. This connection provided access to warm clothing and footwear, food, and an opportunity to make appointments for medical care and counselling all available at Foundry.

Each individual's story is a representation of the pathways to homelessness discussed in Chapter 2. Trauma and abuse, substance misuse, a lack of emergency housing, systemic poverty, and unstable family situations are all recorded in these accounts.

The Impact of COVID

Immediately after the contract was awarded to the consulting team, the COVID-19 pandemic escalated as a consuming and emergent threat in the world. As in other communities, the restrictions imposed to protect public health have continued to present barriers for youth in accessing resources, inhibiting face-to-face communication, and requiring ongoing and dramatic alterations to the delivery of vital community services. As a result, both the project timeline and aspects of the proposed methodology had to repeatedly pivot. This meant that some of the hoped for events to bring youth together did not occur. As well, physical access to local agencies to meet with youth was blocked, and participating members of the collaborative working group were reckoning with constant juggling of shifting service delivery priorities demanded by the pandemic.

Survey of Youth

A survey was developed to create a profile of the experience of youth regarding homelessness in Penticton. The survey breaks new ground in compiling detailed, baseline information on this age cohort to inform the development of community led strategies.

The roll out of the community survey of youth was also delayed because of the pandemic. Initial distribution of the survey was supported by the Foundry and local community agencies. Access to the schools, considered a vital point of connection for youth, required a more formal process.

Project team members were first invited to make a presentation to Mayor and Council who unanimously endorsed the survey content. A written request from the City of Penticton was made to the Board of Education of School District 67 to allow the survey to be promoted amongst youth in the local schools. The Board of Education also reviewed the survey. Permission to promote the survey in schools was received in early 2021 and youth were then invited to submit their feedback until mid March.

Ethical considerations with respect to the survey were proactively managed. The survey was anonymous, and all results were kept confidential. Respondents used a QR code, or could go to an on-line link, to complete the survey. The completed surveys could not be traced back to the individual and there was no tracking of IP addresses. If a person required or requested a paper survey to complete, no identifying information was included in their response.

The report prepared provides only aggregated data with detailed analysis of subcategories restricted to cell sizes of at least 10 youth. Participation in the survey was expressly stated as voluntary. This was explained to the youth who accessed the survey via community partners and was included in the pre-amble to the survey distributed in the schools.

To build the survey, research was conducted on other data gathering projects involving youth for both content and style. Specific questions were included to align with data that is being gathered for the Foundry in order to provide comparative information. Plain language principles were applied along with vocabulary aligned to

reflect the cohort of youth who were completing the survey. Both the project working group and youth advisors reviewed the survey and provided feedback into the questions.

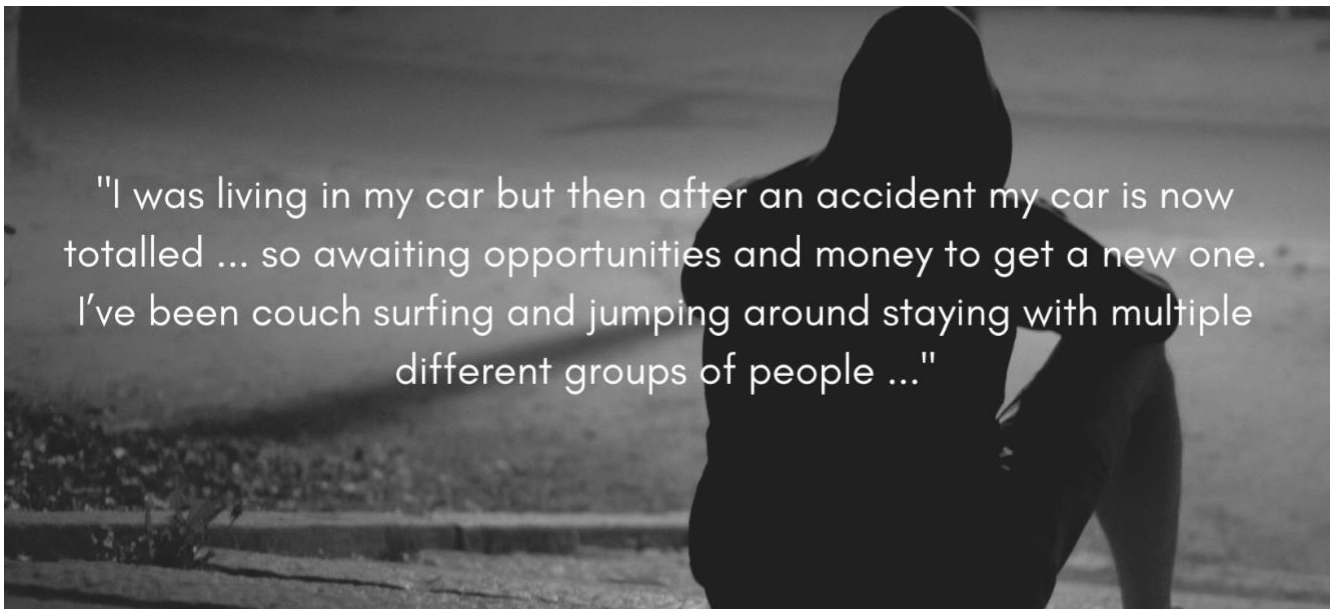
The data was securely stored in the cloud on an account owned by WRH Consulting for the duration of the data collection period. Once the survey closed, the data was downloaded to a secure password protected file on Dr. Warren Helfrich's computer for analysis. Once the analysis was completed, the data files used were destroyed along with the original data files stored on the cloud.

Project Reference Group

Throughout the project period, a working group of community organizations and services provided advice and supported access to distribute the survey where possible. Representatives from the following organizations met regularly throughout the project term:

- School District 67
- South Okanagan Women in Need
- Foundry Penticton
- OneSky Community Resources
- South Okanagan Brain Injury Society
- Interior Health
- City of Penticton
- South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services
- Penticton Indian Band
- Oonkane Friendship Centre

Their interest in the experience of homeless youth, contributions to the project, and desire to support community change is deeply appreciated.



“I did things I didn’t want to have to do to have somewhere to sleep...”

This young woman was housed in the Transition House when we met her. Prior to securing a bed in this resource, she had been living on the street for three months. We learned, however, that her story of housing insecurity started much earlier.

Violence was part of her life prior to being on the streets. She recounted experiences of physical harm at home at the hands of an older sibling so severe she ended up in the hospital with her face badly bruised. At 16, she was kicked out of her family home. Shortly thereafter, her family was evicted from their residence. She took refuge at a friend’s house, couch surfing in their apartment. This arrangement lasted two months falling apart over conflict with her friend’s boyfriend. Without money or family support, she was alone, unhoused, and forced to take care of herself.

She spent three nightmarish months living on the streets. During this time, she had no contact with her family members, was not in school, and didn’t have a phone to communicate. More poignantly, no one was checking up on her. “My mom wasn’t checking up on me....she didn’t look for me once.”

Drugs became a way of coping. Scared to fall asleep on the streets, she used drugs to stay awake instead of sleeping. When asked where she would eat, she replied “I wasn’t”. She went two weeks during this time without eating, drugs filling the emptiness in her stomach and staunching the constant fear. It is also noteworthy that her burgeoning substance use was occurring in the midst of the opioid crisis in our province. She told us about “a friend who has overdosed three times, been revived at the point of near death, and is still alive.” The need to numb outweighed the risks she was taking.

She gravitated to the local shelter during this time, however, did not qualify for their services as she was under 19. To survive, she tearfully told us that “I did things I didn’t want to do to have somewhere to sleep”. Harassment from predatory men was a constant source of fear.

At the time of our conversation with her, she had recently reconnected with a family member who helped her obtain a bed at the Transition House. She has cautiously returned to school; receiving support from a counsellor who has been gently encouraging her to complete her education. She is also working to manage her substance use. When asked what people reading this report should know in order to create opportunities for change for youth, she said, “they could have helped me, but chose not to. Youth need safe places to live.”

Chapter 2: Community Consultations

Conversations with Service Providers

A scan of local, community organizations and affiliated services was conducted to assist with developing a profile of youth who are at-risk or homeless, and to develop estimates of their numbers. Guided interviews were conducted with a wide variety of local informants. These included:

- community service providers, including those with services specifically supporting First Nations persons,
- school district and college personnel,
- RCMP, and
- affiliated government partners in mental health, emergency care, housing, and child serving ministries.

The interviews were conducted over the phone and explored the following topic areas:

- their organization's connection with youth homelessness,
- if and how they collect quantitative data on numbers of youth experiencing homelessness,
- their opinions regarding the causes of youth homelessness, and,
- recommended strategies to prevent and address youth homelessness.

A total of 21 interviews were conducted. (see Appendix C for list of the organizations who were interviewed) The information was analyzed to extract themes from the input received.

Resources for Youth Who are At Risk or Homeless

All of the organizations interviewed are engaged to varying degrees with youth in Penticton. The scope of their involvement ranged from providing direct services including counselling, mental health supports, educational supports, arranging youth agreements, attending court appointments, etc. through to more tangential contact such as school liaison, food security, and settlement services. These services are vital to the health and wellbeing of youth in our community, and essential as both prevention and intervention supports.

Under the leadership of the Community Foundation of the South Okanagan/Similkameen (CFSOS), over a 6 year period from 2013-2019, the YES project galvanized youth voices in Penticton to identify issues impacting youth and champion the creation of supports that would assist. The biggest and most significant issues impacting youth were identified as:

- mental and physical health
- drugs and alcohol
- poverty
- lack of resources including social, health, housing, and recreational options.

A core issue identified at the outset of the YES project was the need for both emergency beds and permanent, supportive housing options for youth to provide stability, safety, and life skills needed for future success.

A successful, multi-year fundraising campaign, conducted by the CFSOS, led to the purchase of a building in downtown Penticton and the creation of the Youth Centre which opened in 2019. In partnership with OneSky Community Resources, who are the lead agency for Foundry Penticton, a constellation of youth services have been co-located in this building. The addition of this resource, and the partnership of the many organizations

who work as a collaborative alongside Foundry Penticton, mean that young people ages 12-24 can access mental health and substance use support, primary care, peer support, and social services.

Shelter and Emergency Beds

Currently Penticton has only two options for youth who are at risk of or homeless. The South Okanagan Women in Need Society has two emergency beds available which have been designated for youth. These are co-located within the Society's emergency shelter with provisions in place to separate the youth from the adult women also staying there. These two beds are in constant use, and only available for individuals who identify as women. Individuals can self-refer to this resource or be referred via the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD) or through community agencies.

Compass House, is an emergency shelter operated by the Penticton & District Society for Community Living and limited to individuals over the age of 19. Outside of these two options, youth reported that they are couch surfing, living on the streets, or in tent encampments.

The Ministry for Children and Family Development funds *Youth Agreements* which provide a monthly allocation of \$1,250. The same Ministry also has a program called *Agreements with a Young Adult (AYA)*. If a young adult has been in foster care or previously had a Youth Agreement, they may qualify for this program to help cover the cost of things like housing, childcare, tuition, and health care while they attend school or do job training, or attend rehabilitation, mental health, or life skills programs. The maximum allocation under this program is \$1,250 per month which is expected to cover rent, food, living expenses, childcare, etc.

To apply for an AYA agreement, a young person must be between 19 and 26 years old, and on their 19th birthday be in **one** of the following care arrangements:

- The custody of a director or permanent custody of the Superintendent
- The guardianship of a director of adoption
- The guardianship of a director under the Family Relations Act
- A Youth Agreement

In either funding arrangement, the allocation serves to barely sustain youth and the costs of living in Penticton. The CMHC Rental Market Report for 2020, highlighted that there are fewer places to rent in Penticton than in previous years and that the cost has increased year over year, currently averaging \$1,070.00 per month.¹ Vacancy rates remain low at 1%, and new affordable housing is slow to come available. Predictions from CMHA indicate that the rental costs will continue to climb for Penticton. Compounding the issues of affordability and scarcity of rental accommodation, is the discrimination youth typically experience to securing tenancy based on their age and incomes. As a result, youth are often required to share accommodation with others; situations that can significantly increase their vulnerability depending upon who they are living with.

What are the numbers?

While all those interviewed are engaged with youth and the issue of youth homelessness, only two were able to provide any data on the incidence of homelessness. For a one year period spanning 2019 to 2020, South

¹ Rental Market Report. 2020. Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. <https://assets.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/sites/cmhc/data-research/publications-reports/rental-market-reports/2020/rental-market-report-69720-2020-en.pdf?rev=936ca622-a6c5-4cbc-b937-d29b1d63cc14>

Okanagan Women in Need counted an average of 49 bed use days/month.² Compass House recorded 29 youth between the ages of 19-24 accessing their emergency shelter in the period from June 2019 to September 2020. Compass House staff emphasized that a large number of shelter stays were counted for persons just outside this age group.

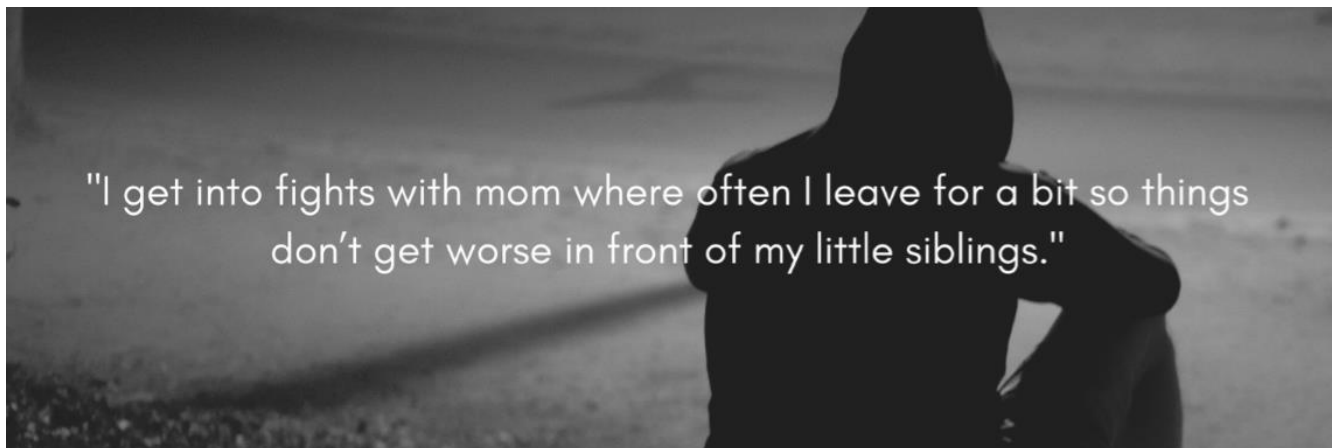
Point in Time Count

In spring of 2018, the Province of British Columbia funded homeless counts in 12 B.C. communities. The count occurs over the course of one day and provides a 24-hour snapshot. This does not easily or accurately factor into account the numbers of individuals who experience transient homelessness, changes in individual situations that perpetuate cycles of homelessness, or those who leave the province. As well, those who are couch surfing, living in cars, and so on, are often not counted – they constitute the hidden homeless.

The Homelessness Services Association of BC, Urban Matters, and the BC Non-profit Housing Association coordinated these counts and combined the results with available data from 12 additional counts and shelter's usage to prepare their report.

In 2018, a total of 7,655 individuals were identified as experiencing homeless in BC. This included 219 children under the age of 19 and accompanied by a parent or guardian. Individuals spanned the age range with 20% aged 55+ years of age, and 15% under 25. 29% indicated that they had been in foster care, a youth group home, or under a youth agreement. Disturbingly, 51% of all respondents reported experiencing homeless for the first time when they were under 25 years of age.³

Penticton's 2018 Point in Time count identified 108 persons and more individuals who identified as men than those who identified as women. 12 youth, under 25, were identified in the count. The planned count for 2020 was postponed due to the pandemic. A count occurred on April 20th of 2021; the results for Penticton are not yet available for comparison to the 2018 numbers.



² SOWINS counts each day a bed was used per person. Bed use dramatically increased in the months of July, August, and September.

³ The Homelessness Services Association of BC, Urban Matters, and BC Non-Profit Housing Association (2018). 2018 Report on Homeless Counts in B.C. Prepared for BC Housing. Burnaby, BC: Metro Vancouver. www.bchousing.org

PATHWAYS TO BEING UNHOUSED

INFORMATION FROM THE INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNITY AGENCIES AND SERVICES IDENTIFIED PATHWAYS TO HOMELESSNESS WHICH ARE CONSISTENT WITH RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS.[3] [4] THESE PATHWAYS OFTEN INTERSECT AND OVERLAP, THEREBY INCREASING THE LIKELIHOOD OF A YOUTH BECOMING HOMELESS.

HISTORY OF TRAUMA

- GENERATIONAL EXPERIENCES DUE TO SYSTEMIC RACISM AND COLONIZATION
- EXPERIENCE OF TRAUMA IN THEIR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
- SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION
- EXPERIENCE OF AND/OR WITNESSING VIOLENCE

UNSAFE HOME SITUATIONS

- FAMILY VIOLENCE & SUBSTANCE MISUSE
- PARENTAL NEGLECT, ABUSE & ABANDONMENT
- CHILD ABUSE
- FOOD INSECURITY
- HOUSING INSECURITY
- POVERTY: GENERATIONAL AND CHRONIC
- VICTIMIZATION AS A RESULT OF GENDER IDENTITY
- EXPLORATION AND/OR BEING LGBTQ2

ADDITIONAL BARRIERS

- LACK OF YOUTH FRIENDLY HOUSING
- CHALLENGES ACCESSING SERVICES
- DISCRIMINATION & STIGMA
- LACK OF WIFI OR PHONE
- NOT FINISHING HIGH SCHOOL
- LACK OF AFFORDABLE, SAFE CHILD CARE

UNMET NEEDS

- FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER/PRENATAL OPIOID EXPOSURE
- MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS
- ATTACHMENT DISORDER
- PERVASIVE DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDER
- LEARNING DISORDER(S)
- SUBSTANCE USE AND MISUSE

NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS WITH GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES

- FOSTER CARE
- AGING OUT OF YOUTH AGREEMENTS

[3] MCPARLAND, K. FROM MARGINALIZED TO MAGNIFIED: YOUTH HOMELESSNESS SOLUTIONS FROM THOSE WITH LIVED EXPERTISE. 2020. [HTTPS://RCYBC.CA/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2020/02/FINAL.FROM-MARGINALIZED-TO-MAGNIFIED.PDF](https://rcybc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/final.from-marginalized-to-magnified.pdf)

[4] GAETZ, S. O'GRADY, B. KIDD, S., & SCHWAN, K. WITHOUT A HOME: THE NATIONAL YOUTH HOMELESSNESS SURVEY. 2016. CANADIAN OBSERVATORY ON HOMELESSNESS PRESS: TORONTO.

History of Trauma

Organizations working with youth, highlighted the deep impact of trauma as a significant wounding experience for youth. This trauma may be generational, as in the circumstance of First Nations persons who have survived residential schools, systemic racism, and continued trauma in their contact with colonial structures and institutions. The trauma may also be a result of having witnessed or experienced violence in their home or community, sexual abuse, and sexual violence. When left unaddressed, trauma has the potential to lead to self harm, substance use, increased vulnerability and exploitation, and mental health issues.

Unsafe Home Situations

It would be a fallacy to believe that youth leave home for the insecurity and danger of life on the streets because their family home is stable and safe. They are rarely simply “rebellious” against parental restrictions and rules. Too often they are fleeing from a variety of hard, painful experiences including family violence, parental neglect, sexual and physical abuse, and abandonment. Youth report witnessing their parent’s substance misuse and the chronic challenges with food and housing security that are often a by-product of this. Poverty, including the crushing type experienced even by parents who are working full time, places extra stress on the home. Youth also report being kicked out of their family home when they take the enormous risk of coming out as gay, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning their gender identity.

In research from the National Youth Homelessness Survey in 2016, 40.1% of their respondents reported that they were under the age of 16 when they first experienced homelessness. Their findings indicated that youth who leave home at an earlier age, not only experienced very difficult conditions that precipitated their homelessness, but that they also experienced greater hardship once they were on the streets. In addition, early homelessness can lead to bullying, exploitation, poor quality of life, attempts at suicide, and chronic homelessness.⁴ Overall, youth who are living rough have an extremely fragile sense of belonging. To address the need for belonging, attachments are instead formed with pets, with other homeless youth, and sadly often with those who will exploit them further.

Unmet Needs

Youth who live with unmet needs that impact them cognitively, physically, and socially are at greater risk of experiencing alienation and mistrust that makes them cautious about accessing services and at risk of isolation. If their needs are chronically unmet and/or undiagnosed, their lived experience becomes one of continual failure, the “outsider”, and the stigmas associated with those identities. Not being able to access appropriate resources to both assess their needs and respond to them, can lead to dropping out of school, problems with literacy and processing information, poverty, and using substances to cope.

Negative Experiences with Government Ministries

Involvement with the child welfare system, including child protection services, is a recurring theme in the experiences of youth who become homeless. For those who need child protection services, they have already experienced trauma in their family home. This can often be compounded by the experiences of foster care and the aftermath of aging out of that service at 19. Eligibility and accessing the Agreement with Young Adults program is equally difficult. Data compiled by the Representative for Children and Youth⁵ highlights higher rates of homelessness, lower educational attainments, less success in the workforce, poverty, and poorer mental health among youth leaving care. These are vastly more significant issues for First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous youth who are disproportionately overrepresented in the child welfare system. As the

⁴ Gaetz, S., O’Grady, B. Kidd, S. & Schwan, K. Without a Home: the National Youth Homelessness Survey. P. 5.

⁵ The Representative for Children and Youth supports children, youth, and families who need help in dealing with the child welfare system, and advocates for changes to the system itself.

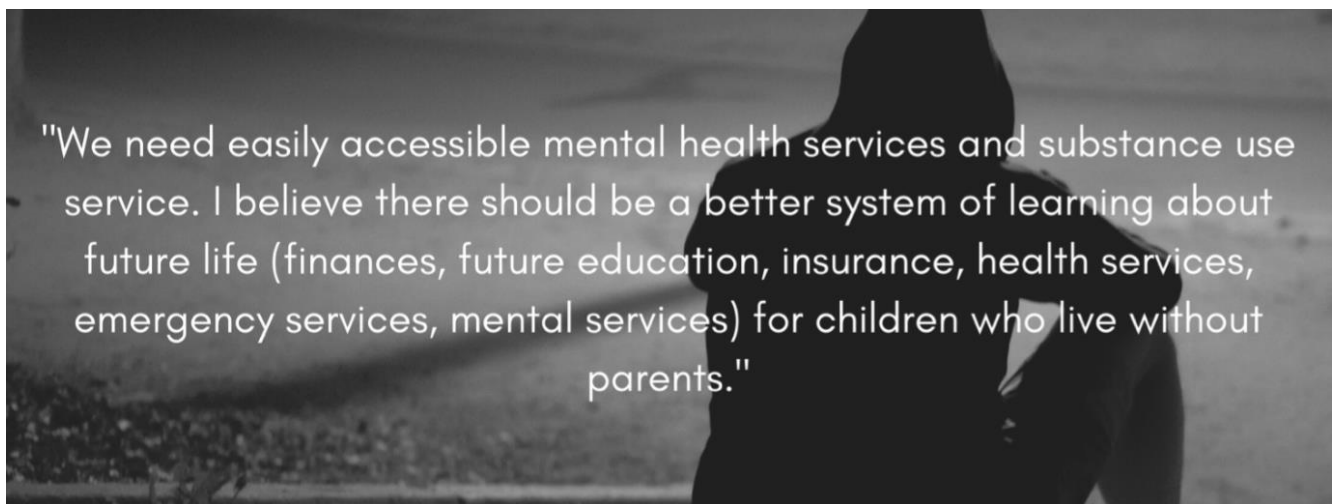
Representative so clearly states, “youth homelessness is an issue of systems failures, not the failings of the young people experiencing it.”⁶ The scant funding associated with Youth Agreements of either type, makes a challenging time in any young person’s life, as they transition to adulthood, significantly harder. As the Representative so eloquently states, “research over decades has repeatedly confirmed that poverty is a major predictor for everything difficult that happens to a person in the course of a life. Yet our own system of care for B.C.’s most vulnerable children and youth virtually shapes a life of poverty for them.”⁷

The Representative continues to advocate for extending and improving transition planning, and the development of a province-wide system of dedicated transition workers through community agencies to provide systems navigation and case management support, as well as adult guidance, for these young people up to the age of 27.

Additional Barriers

Community interviews highlighted a host of additional barriers which act as a pathways to homelessness for youth. There is a dearth of youth friendly, affordable housing options in Penticton and many young people face considerable discrimination in their attempts to rent based on age, appearance, and lack of rental history to use as a positive reference. Finding services and knowing how to access them successfully, can be a steep and daunting learning curve. The cost of WIFI and a cell phone, now considered essential to access information, may be beyond the financial means of a youth on their own. If they are also young parents and trying to work and/or finish high school, accessing safe, affordable, and flexible childcare is extremely difficult.

The pathways to homelessness discussed above, echo themes confirmed by other advocates and researchers. Our research, including the interviews conducted with youth, verified these issues are impacting the lives of young people in Penticton.



⁶ Representative for Children and Youth. A Parent’s Duty: Governments Obligation to Youth Transitioning into Adulthood. December 2020. https://rcybc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/RCY-A-Parents-Duty_FINAL.pdf

⁷ Ibid.

“It’s not the Hilton, but it feels safe...”

This youth grew up in an abusive home; both parents struggled with alcoholism. At times, the youth would leave his home to stay at his biological father’s house, but this parent was also abusive. He found ways to survive his home life, isolating himself in his room to avoid abuse. He left home at sixteen but had contemplated leaving home as early as twelve or thirteen. He identifies as non-binary.

Once he left home, a school counsellor helped him get on a youth agreement. In the process of applying for the youth agreement, there were times he had nowhere to go. Thankfully, he had a girlfriend where he could spend many of his nights. He has also had the support of a youth worker with one of the local agencies who he has bonded with and who has gone over and above to support him. “She has been amazing – is even there on weekends to help.” This is in contrast to his experience with Ministry social workers who are busy with other cases and rarely contact him. He felt “demonized” in his experiences with the world of child protection.

He relayed that he has stayed at the Penticton Hostel twice and has also had to sleep outside because he had nowhere to go. He told us he has friends who “literally sleep outside”.

Since he has been able to obtain a youth agreement, he has “no anxiety about going home or fear. It’s not the Hilton but it feels safe.” He reported feeling that he is growing as a person and becoming more responsible. The financial support he receives just barely covers his rent however - there is only \$50 to cover other living expenses.

He also told us his relationship with his mom has improved. When asked what he needed that he didn’t have throughout the challenge of leaving his abusive home, he highlighted the need for “alternative housing options, a youth shelter, emergency beds....anything to offer a last resort. It fucking sucks to not be able to feel safe in your home.”

He harbours a chronic fear about losing what little stability his youth agreement has provided. “If things fell through tomorrow, I would have nowhere to go”. He is equally fearful of being unhoused once he ages out of care of the Ministry. Homelessness is an ongoing fear, further elevated without immediate family he can rely upon.

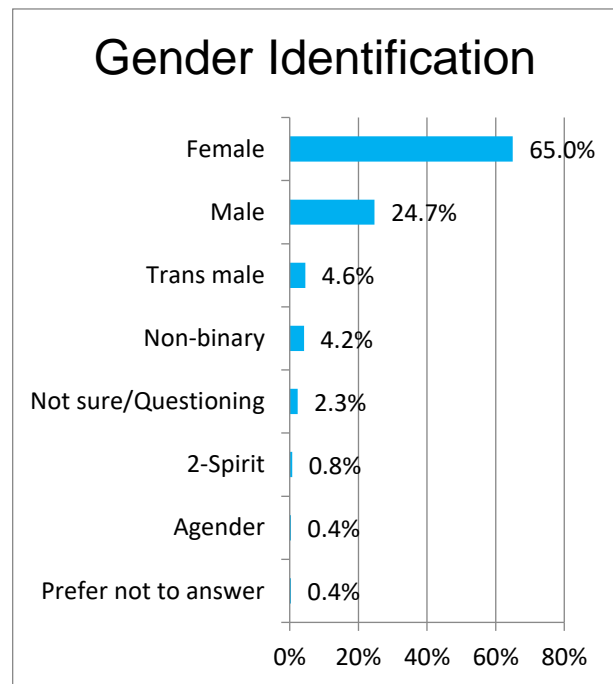
Chapter 3: What the Survey Revealed About Youth in Penticton

In order to understand the reality of youth homelessness in Penticton, and in the absence of data being collected by agencies, a survey of young people was conducted over a several month period from the fall of 2020 and concluding in the spring of 2021. The survey questionnaire was developed in conjunction with youth advisors and with advice from the working group. Many of the questions mirrored ones already used as part of a Health Survey collected during a youth's first visits to Foundry in Penticton. The youth survey was administered through staff at Foundry, community organizations, and eventually through local schools. As mentioned previously, there was some delay in getting the survey into schools due to the process required to get approval. The survey was accessible both through a dedicated iPad at Foundry and through scanning a QR code so it could be completed on the youth's own device.

The survey was anonymous, with all responses gathered electronically. The following highlights the results and includes comparisons with data gathered on Foundry's Health Survey (n=41) where available.

A total of 264 young people took part in the survey. The average age of respondents to the survey was 15 and ranged in age from 13 to 26.

Figure 1



Profile of Youth

Two thirds of youth participating in the survey identified as female, with another 1 in 4 identifying as male. Trans male (4.6%) and non-binary (4.2%) were the next most common responses regarding gender identification. Although the sample reflects a relatively large proportion of youth that identify as female, this mirrors the typical population of youth seeking services that attends Foundry Penticton. A recent data report from Foundry covering a six month period between September 2020 and February 2021 found that 57% of those seeking services were female, 27% identified as male, 5.7% identified as trans male and 4.1% identified as non-binary. According to Interior Health's Local Health Area (LHA) profile for 2019, approximately 18.8% of the general population is between the ages of 15 and 24, with 8.5% being female and 10.3% being male. Male youth appear to be less likely to seek services in general and less likely to show interest in participating in these types of surveys.

Figure 2

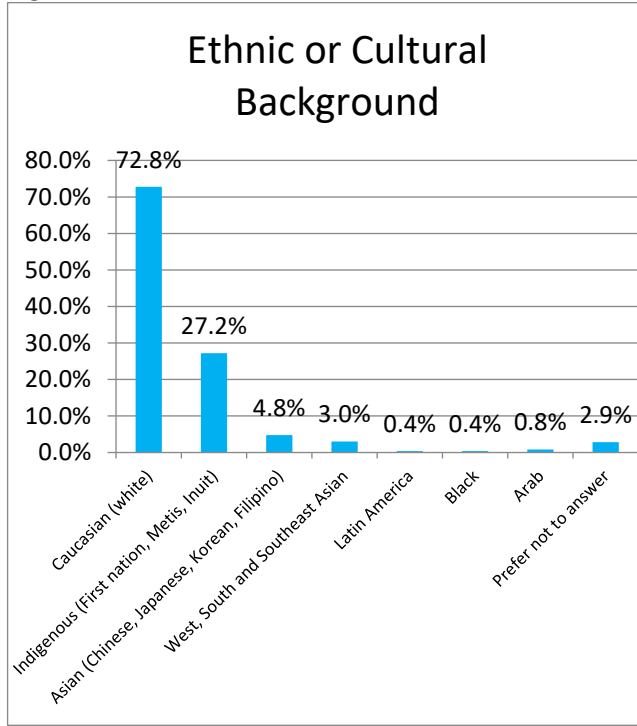
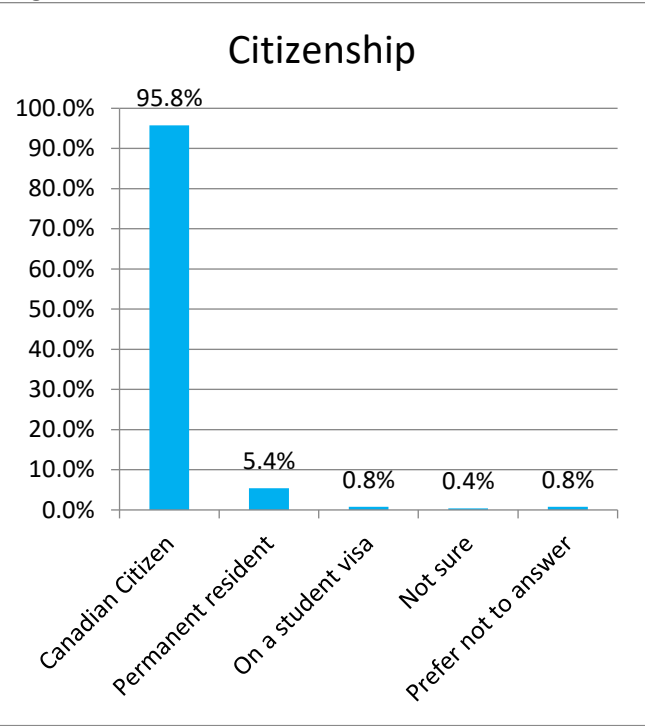


Figure 3

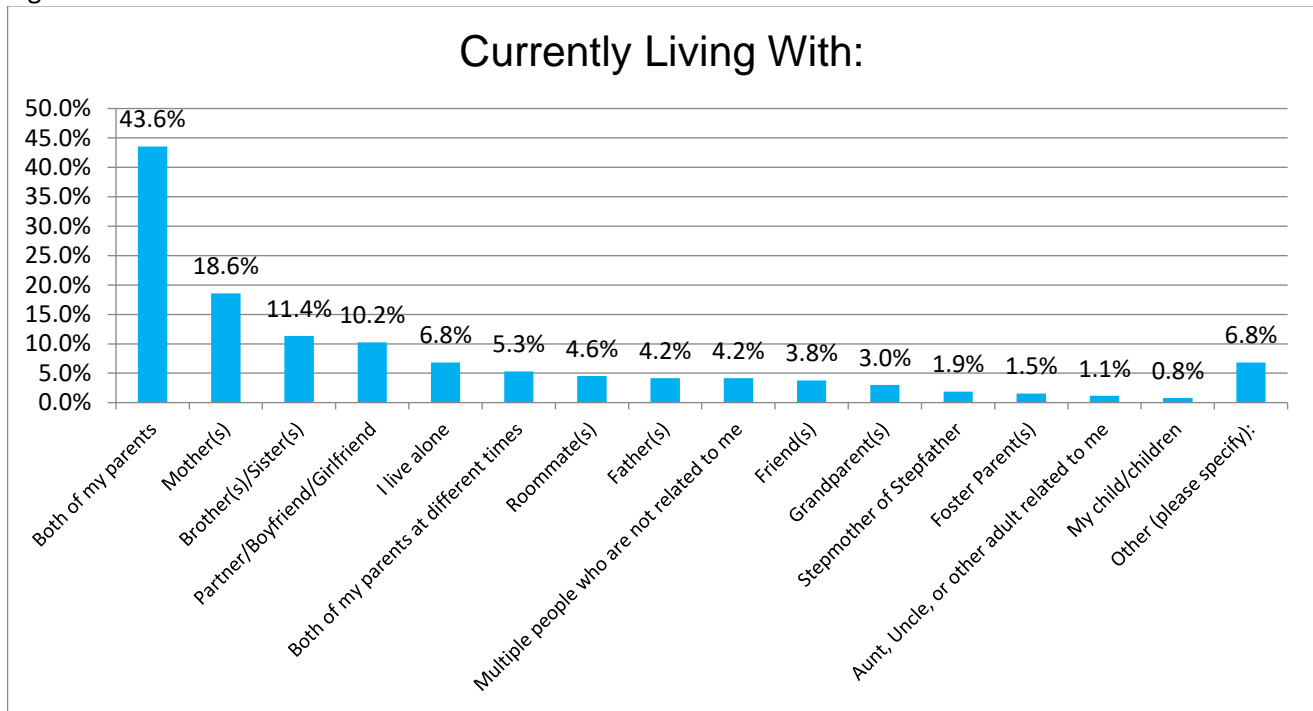


Nearly three out of four young people participating in the survey identified themselves as Caucasian/white (72.8%). The next most common identification was Indigenous (27.2%), with a near even split between those identifying as First Nations (42%) and Metis (45%). Again, this is similar to data provided by Foundry on those seeking services, where 84% identify as Caucasian/white and 22% identify as Indigenous. While the population of Indigenous persons in BC is significantly younger than the rest of BC’s population, the sample for this survey likely has an overrepresentation of Indigenous young people given that persons identifying as Indigenous make up less than 7% of the general population of Penticton (Source: Statistics Canada). It is worth noting that the population of individuals that identify as a visible minority in Penticton’s general population is also approximately 7%. The proportion of individuals responding to this survey that identified as a visible minority appears to be consistent the general population of Penticton.

The vast majority (95.8%) of respondents to the survey were Canadian citizens. 14 of those surveyed identified themselves as permanent residents (5.4%) while two indicated that they were on student visas (0.8%).

Living Circumstances of Youth

Figure 4



The youth participating in the survey identified a variety of living situations. The most common living situation identified by youth was with both parents (43.6%), followed by living with their mother (18.6%). Roughly 1 in 10 said that they were living with brother or sister (11.4%) or with their partner, boyfriend, or girlfriend (10.2%). Of those surveyed, 18 (6.8%) indicated that they were living on their own. The same number of individuals indicated “other” as their living situation. A review of responses to “other” found a wide range of circumstances, including some that were precarious (e.g., couch surfing, living in a spare room of an ex-partner, and living with random people). Four youth (1.5%) indicated that they were living with foster parents.

Figure 5

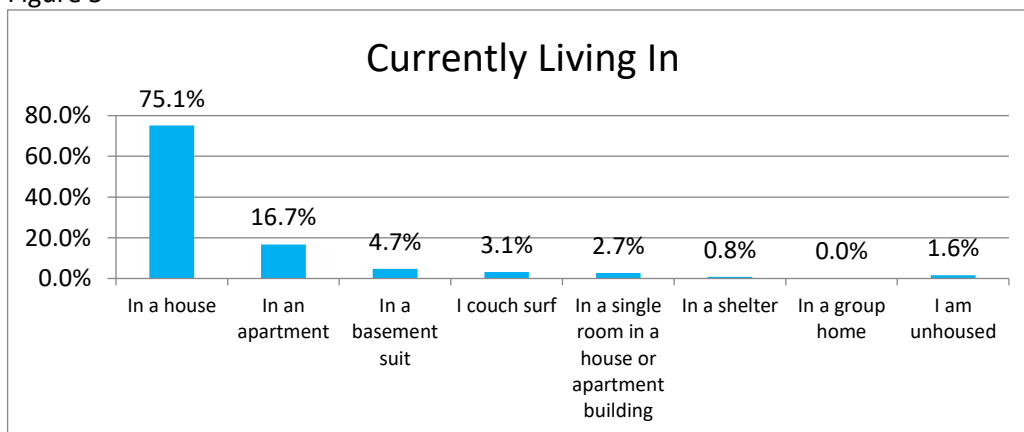


Figure 6

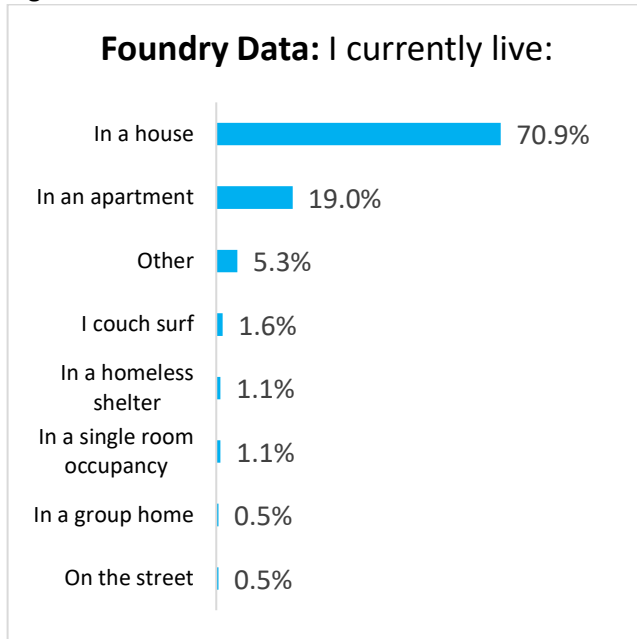
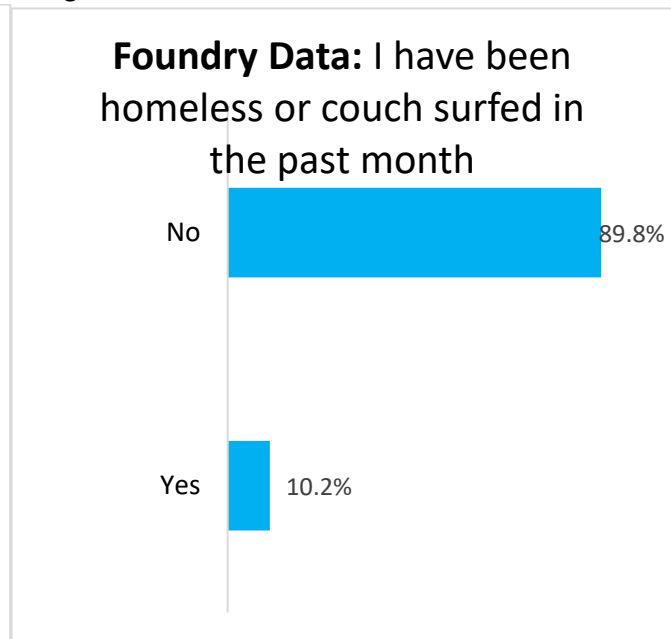


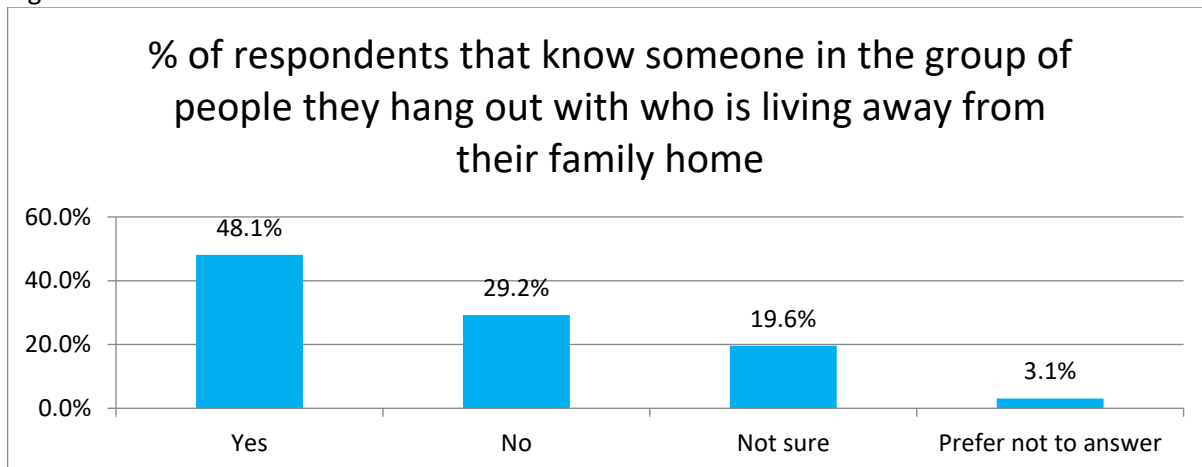
Figure 7



One in twenty youth surveyed (12 individuals – 5.5%) identified being in a precarious housing situation, which included couch surfing, living in a shelter, and being homeless. This closely matches data gathered in Foundry’s Health Survey, where 4.4% of respondents were precariously housed (i.e., couch surfing, in a shelter, in an SRO, or on the street). The data provided from Foundry’s Health Survey also indicated that one in ten youth (10.2%) had been homeless or had couch surfed in the past month.

3 out of 4 respondents (75.1%) were living in a house, while 17% indicate living in an apartment and 5% lived in a basement suite. On average, youth that responded to the survey indicated that they had been living in their current situation for just under 10 years, with a range of a few months to their whole life.

Figure 8



Roughly half (48.1%) of respondents indicated that they know someone in their group that they hung out with who was living away from their family home. On average, young people reported knowing 4 people in this situation, with a range from 0 to 13. The most common (modal) response was 2.

Housing History of Youth

Figure 9

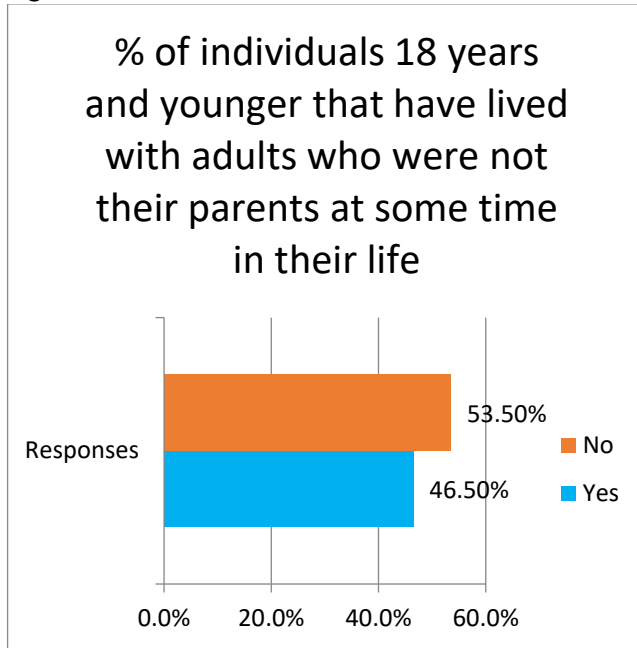
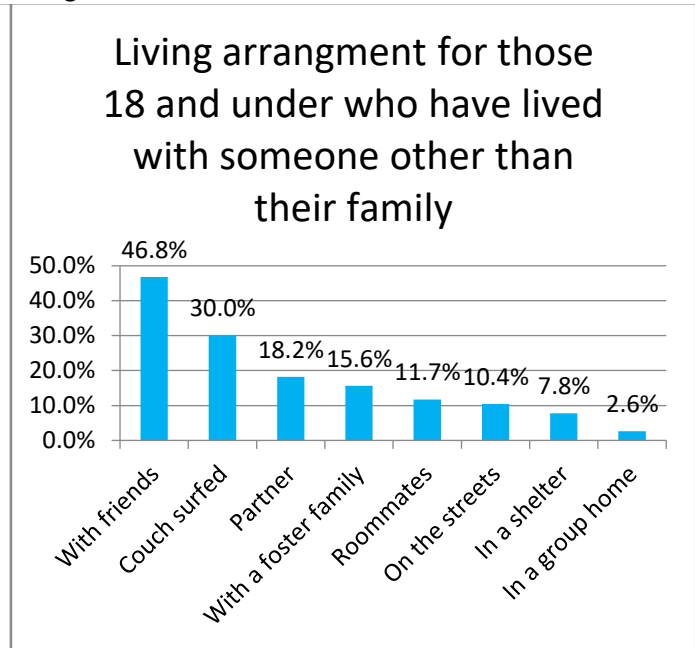
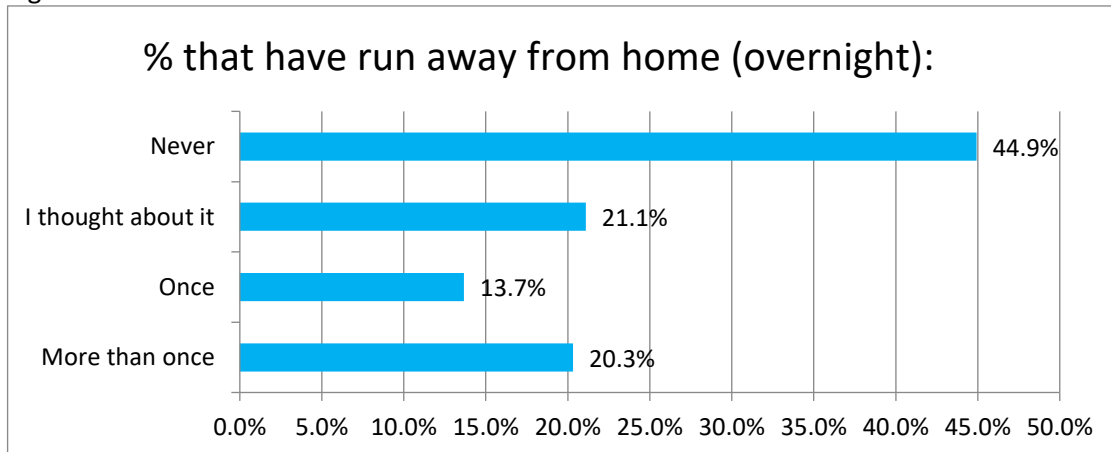


Figure 10



Half of those surveyed (49.6%) indicated that they had lived with adults who were not their parents at some time in their life. Of those 18 years old and younger at the time of the survey, the results remained stable with 46.5% (87 individuals) indicating that they had lived with someone other than their parents. Of those 18 and younger that had lived with someone other than their family, nearly half (48.2%) had been homeless or precariously housed, including 30% that had couch surfed, 10.4% that had lived on the streets, and 7.8% that they had lived in a shelter. Nearly 1 in 10 (18.2%) of those 18 years and younger had lived in Foster Care or a group home at some point in their life. 1 in 3 respondents indicated having run away from home at least once.

Figure 11



Supports Available to Youth

Figure 12

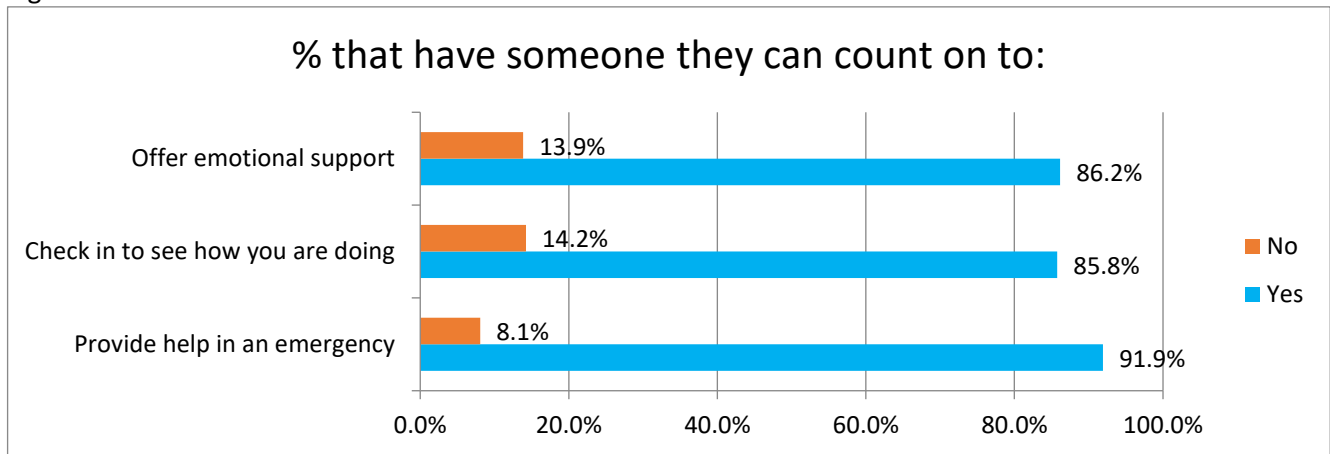
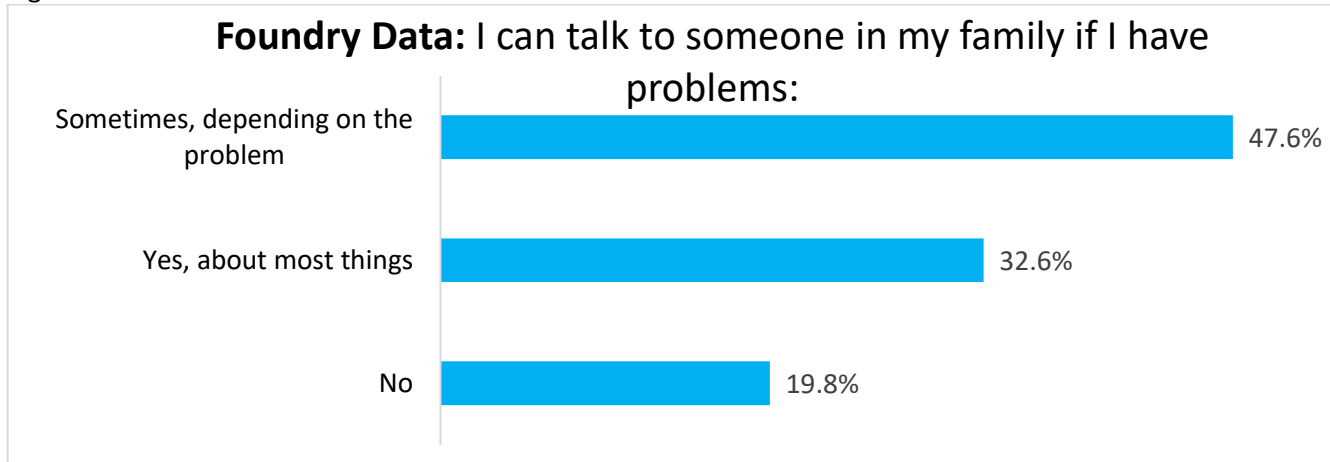


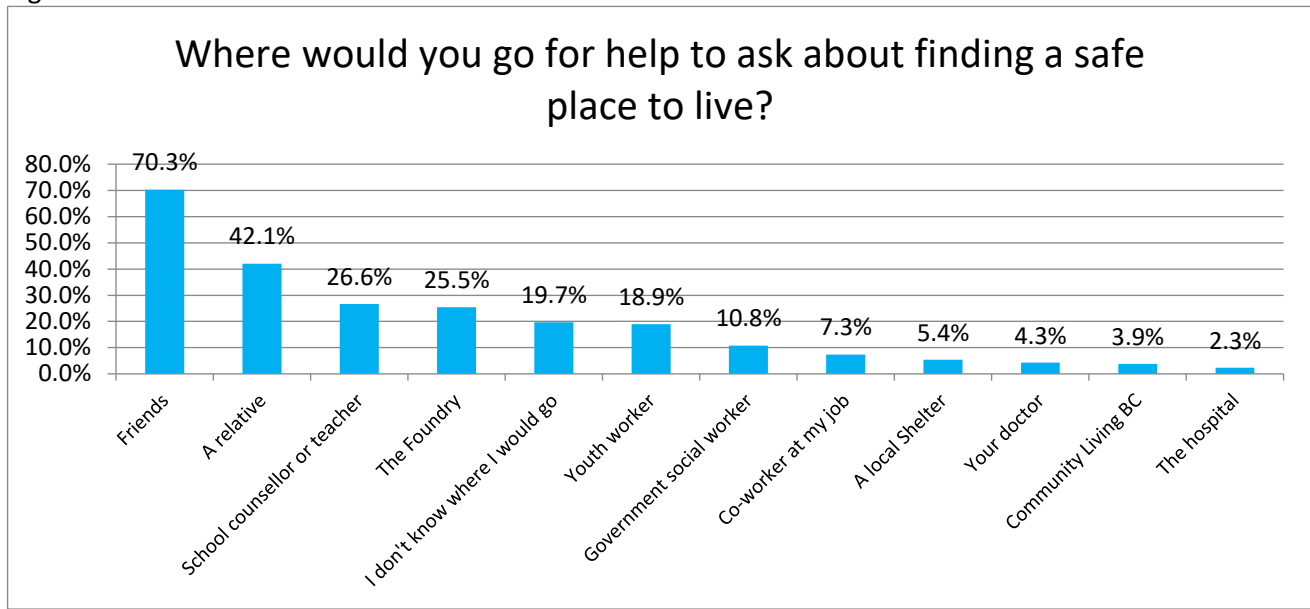
Figure 13



The overwhelming majority of youth indicated that they had someone they could count on to offer emotional support (86.2%) and provide help in an emergency (91.9%). Most also indicated having someone that they could count on to check in to see how they were doing (85.8%). This is similar to results from the Health Survey completed by youth when they attend Foundry, where the majority of youth indicated having someone they could talk to in their family if they had problems.

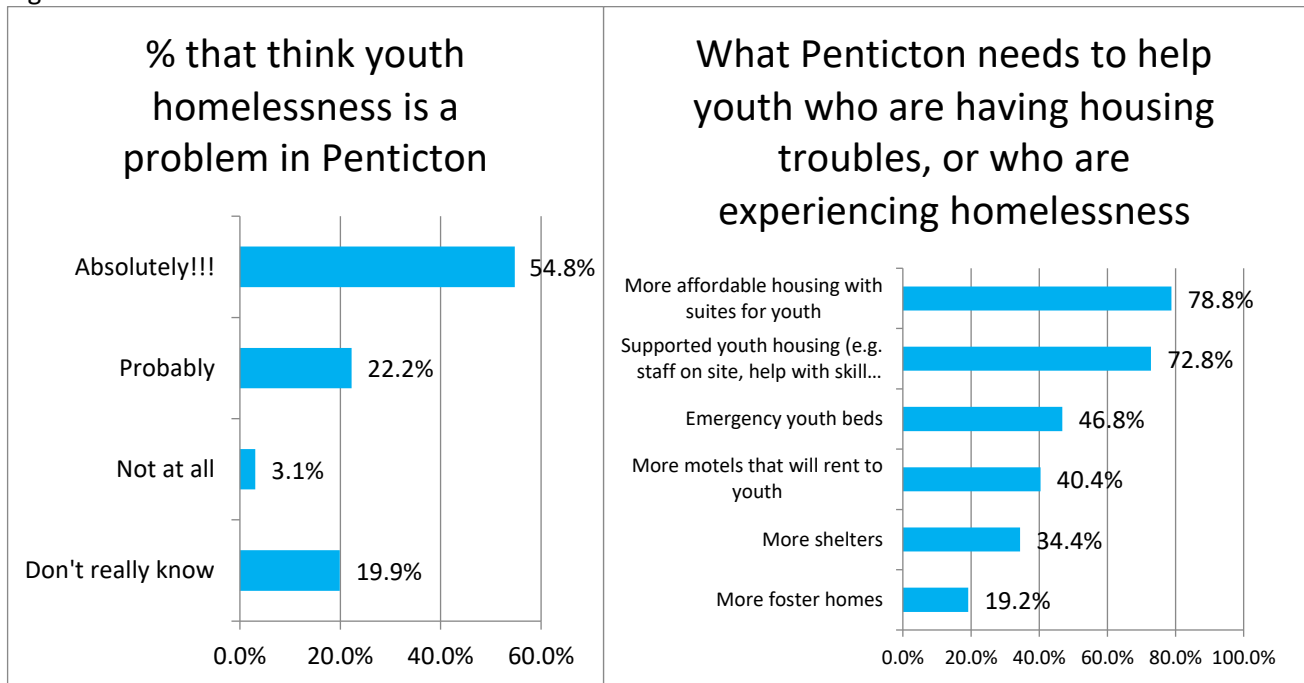
In contrast, one in five youth (19.7%) indicated not having anyone or anywhere they would go to to ask for help to find a safe place to live. Of those that indicated having someone/somewhere, the most commonly identified options were friends (70.3%) or a relative (42.1%).

Figure 14



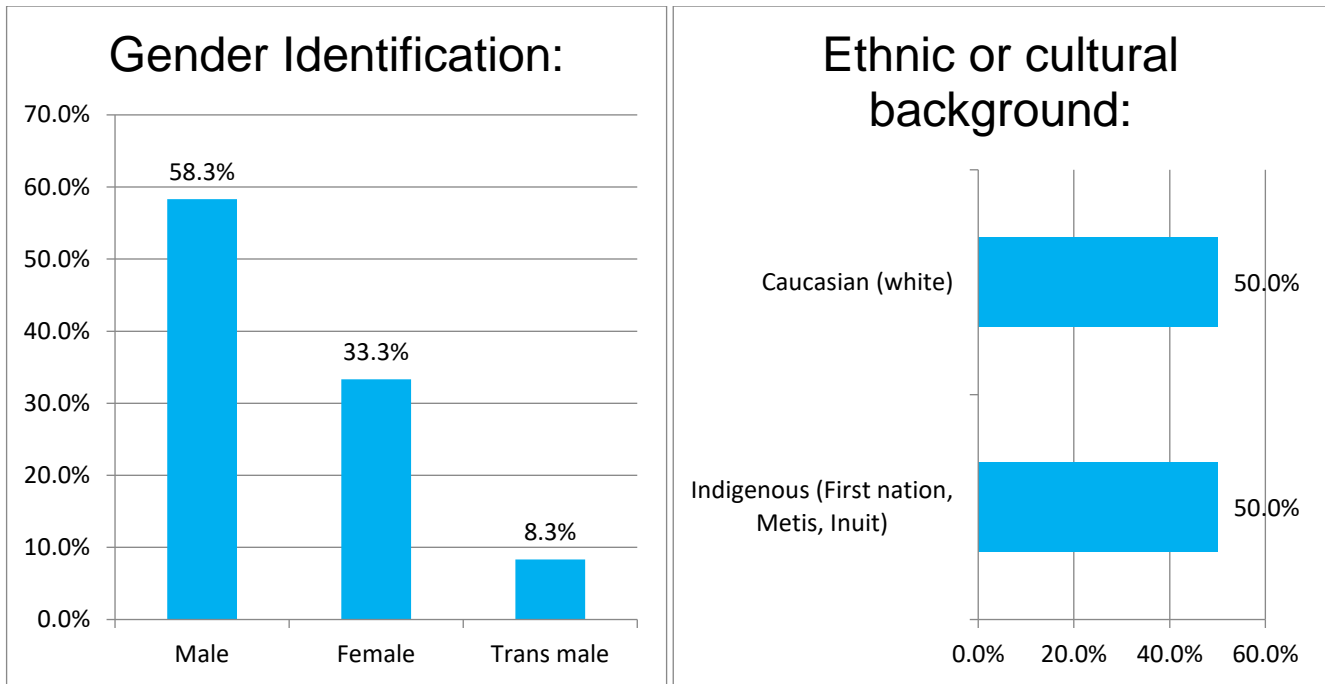
Youth Perspective on Homelessness in Penticton

Figure 15

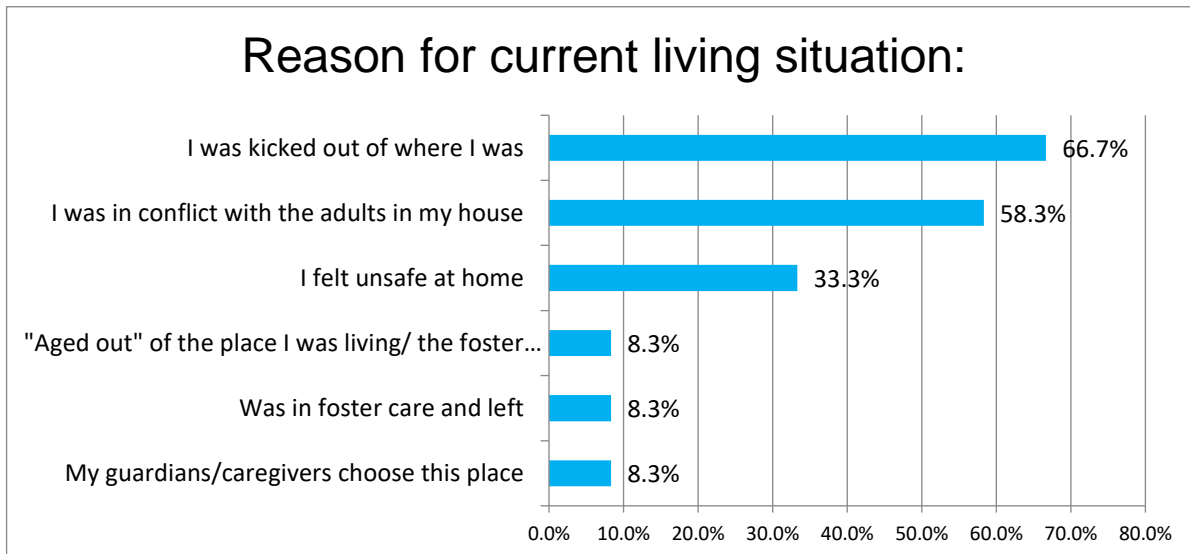


Most youth believe that homelessness is absolutely (54.8%) or probably (22.2%) a problem in Penticton. The vast majority of youth felt that Penticton needed more affordable housing suites for youth (78.8%) and more supported housing (72.8%). Emergency beds (46.8%) and hotels that will rent to youth (40.4%) were also noted by many youth as a need.

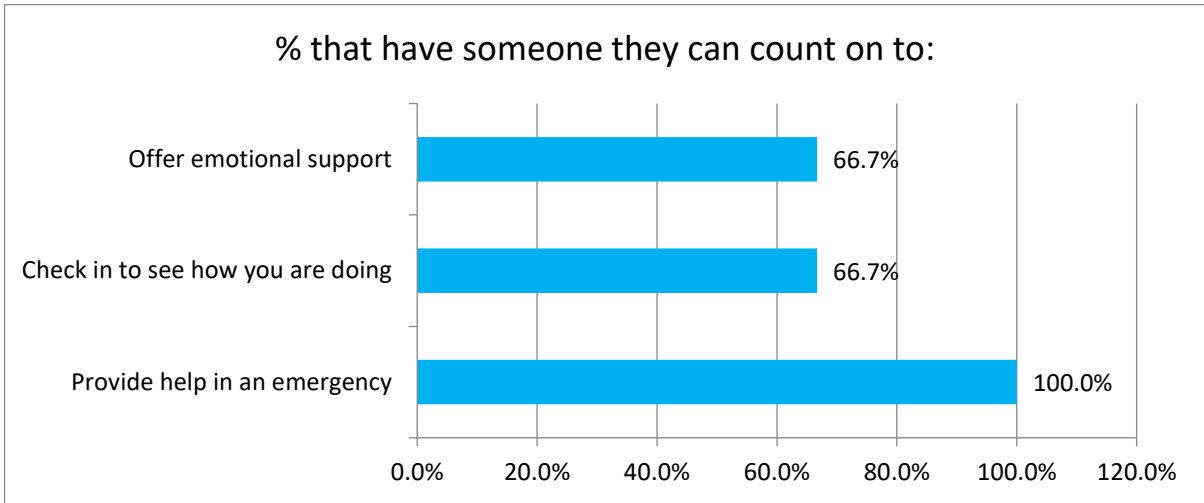
Youth that are Homeless/Precariously Housed



Compared to all youth surveyed, youth that were homeless or precariously housed were twice as likely to be male (58.3% compared to 24.7% for the overall sample) or trans male (8.3% compared to 4.6% for the overall sample). Youth were also nearly twice as likely to identify as Indigenous (50% compared to 27.2% in the overall sample). All youth identified themselves as Canadian citizens. On average, youth had been living in this situation for 3 months, with a range of 1 to 8 months.



The majority of youth indicated that their current living situation was because they were kicked out of where they were or were in conflict with the adults they were living with. One in three indicated not feeling safe at home.



While all of the youth that were precariously housed indicated having someone that they could count on to provide help in an emergency, only two thirds indicated having someone that they could count on to offer emotional support or to check in to see how they were doing.

Discussion

The results discussed above provide important insight into the current housing and homelessness situation facing youth in Penticton. The findings suggest that as many as 1 in 20 youth between the ages of 12 and 24 may be experiencing homelessness at any one time in Penticton. A generous inflation of that ratio to 1 in 40 would mean that there are 135 to 140 youth in Penticton between the ages of 12 and 24 that are homeless or precariously housed at any one time in Penticton, based on an estimated general population of roughly 5500 youth in that age range. Further, nearly half of youth surveyed knew someone in their peer group that was living away from home and as many as 1 in 10 youth that accessed services at Foundry identified having been homeless or couchsurfing in the past month. Youth that were homeless or precariously housed were more likely to be male, trans-male and Indigenous. Most youth in the survey reported having someone that they could count on for emotional support, to provide help in an emergency or to check in on them. However, those that were homeless or precariously housed were less likely to have someone that they could count on for emotional support or to check in on them.

Limitations

The youth that participated in the homelessness survey conducted as part of this project or that accessed Foundry and completed Health Survey are not fully representative of the general youth population in Penticton. While effort was made to get as diverse a sample as possible, those that participated in either of these data collection activities were more likely to be female and Indigenous compared to the general population. There may have been other important differences not reflected in the data on participant characteristics that were gathered. While the results are a reflection of the true picture of housing and homelessness for youth in Penticton, caution should be used in generalizing these results.

“I didn’t know how to find someone to help me...”

This young person is currently living on their own and has been for 10 months having been able to secure funding via an Agreement with Young Adults. She is pregnant.

Her story of housing insecurity began at fourteen when she ran away from her abusive home. That initiated a period of transience where she moved back and forth between Penticton and Kelowna, finding shelter at Transition Houses, the youth shelter, and sometimes staying with family and friends. These were not easy or safe times. “I got into physical fights at some of the places I stayed at. I didn’t know how to find someone to help me.”

Her mother passed away when she was 16, reducing her small circle even further and adding more trauma to her story. It was during a stay at the Transition House that she received support to help her get on a Youth Agreement. She believes that she “would not have gotten a youth agreement without the help of the staff at the Transition House. I am really scared of aging out without this support.”

When asked what would have helped her navigate the challenges she faced, she said “more emergency youth beds and more safe, affordable housing. Some of the places that are cheap are not the best or safest places.”

There also needs to be “easier access to social workers...ones who take her seriously and want to help her.” After several less than ideal contacts with child welfare, she now has what she considers “a very helpful social worker” – one who is supportive and listens to her.

Asked what would support youth, she described the ideal solution as a youth shelter in Penticton that provides “easy access to supports, laundry, and showers.” She reinforced that if you need to flee an unsafe situation, you need “a solid plan, you have to have some money, and a safe place to go. You need a decent support system, family, and friends who care about you.”

Chapter 4: Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This research project was initiated to conduct a community-led youth homelessness assessment and develop a strategy to mitigate and ultimately work to eliminate youth homelessness in the City of Penticton. The project had four primary deliverables:

- Completing community consultations to assess the size of the challenge, ensuring that the voices of youth are privileged;
- Convening the collaborative input of a collective of community service providers;
- Development of a draft implementation strategy for review, analysis, and endorsement by project partners, and;
- Completion and submission of a final report.

The project work was also intended to enhance local understanding of the issues precipitating youth homelessness, establish a baseline of numbers of at-risk and homeless youth, assess existing community capacity to respond, and support planning and decision-making with respect to the implementation of solutions and future, strategic investments of resources.

The project began in 2020 just prior to the onset of the worldwide COVID 19 pandemic. The project coordinators regularly revised the project activities and timeline in response to changing restrictions and access protocols, shutdowns of schools and in-person gatherings, and community capacity.

The research validated the generalized concern and perception among service providers and others that youth homelessness in Penticton is a significant issue. The experience of housing insecurity and homelessness among youth was not well quantified, and data was not being collected in a consistent manner to support planning. A fixed point of responsibility, or coordination strategy, had not been established to address the problem. Service providers, in partnership with school-based counsellors and teachers, were responding to the need through informal networking relationships. Foundry Penticton, a critical addition to the local service network, has provided an invaluable access point for youth and their families to address health and wellness. However, current resources are not adequate to address all of the identified needs.

Housing options for at risk or homeless youth are currently limited to two beds for individuals, and only available to persons identifying as women. Concurrent issues facing at risk or homeless youth include, but are not limited to, the potential for substance use, trauma and abuse, challenges attending and completing their education, unemployment, and poor health associated with irregular access to health care and food insecurity.

Steps Forward

In order to construct a pathway to address youth homelessness, a series of facilitated focus groups were convened by WRH Consulting with the key participants of the project. An initial session with the Youth Advisory group involved a presentation of the survey findings and recruiting their input on solutions. Two facilitated sessions were held with the project working group to garner their feedback on the draft report and generate strategies to move forward. The sessions were all held via Zoom due to the ongoing challenges of COVID and the restrictions on in-person gatherings.

Themes from the three groups were analyzed by the consulting team and synthesized into ten objectives. Ideas generated through the focus groups were sorted into proposed specific actions and sorted into short, medium, and long term categories for priority. The ten objectives and proposed actions were reviewed by the

members of the working group for their feedback and revised accordingly. They are listed in the graphic below and described in more detail in Appendix E.

Steps Forward

When we met with the youth advisory group and youth service providers, there were clear messages. Things can not continue the way they are in Penticton. There needs to be both safe emergency beds and long term housing options in this community in order to address youth homelessness. Housing is a basic human right and helps ensure safety and future success for youth.

As a community, we will end youth homelessness in Penticton by working to achieve these objectives:

- ① Meaningfully engaging youth voice (decision-making, development of solutions)
- ② Creating and maintaining a strong, community leadership structure
- ③ Implementing effective prevention strategies
- ④ Creating a continuum of housing options for youth
- ⑤ Increasing intra-partner collaboration
- ⑥ Educating and enhancing awareness
- ⑦ Implementing evidence-based and trauma-informed practices
- ⑧ Increasing access to a range of services and supports
- ⑨ Increasing support for families with at-risk youth
- ⑩ Using data and evaluation to inform our actions

The working group discussed the need to determine a community leadership structure to act as a point of responsibility in moving forward on the pressing issue of youth homelessness and tackling further refinement of the proposed actions and assignment of responsibility for those actions. Consensus was reached that the most appropriate entity to do so is the working coalition “100 More Homes”, under whose community action mandate the next steps to address youth homelessness will live.

“It’s a do or die situation...”

This young woman, who identified herself as an Aboriginal person, has had poverty and precarious housing shadow her entire life. “I have been in and out of transition homes since I can remember.”

First on her own at the age of 15, she was able to get on a Youth Agreement at 16 which ended when she turned 19. Despite all the challenges associated with this funding arrangement, during these years she was working to complete high school while holding down an almost full-time job. When she turned 19, she lost her housing because the landlord knew she would no longer be receiving money from the government. “I wasn’t working enough for people’s liking”. She is now on social assistance.

Prior to losing her housing, she felt she was doing comparatively well. With nowhere to go, she⁸ returned to live with her family in supported housing in another part of the province. She described these circumstances as “not good. It was under construction, workers intruded in my space...there was no privacy,” She shared this space with her brother, sister and her mom – all trying to survive on social assistance.

After leaving that arrangement, she moved into her current housing describing it as a solution to a “do or die situation”. She found the place on Facebook and while the situation is volatile and abusive in this shared accommodation, she continues to live there to avoid being homeless. “The housing market is ridiculous – no one wants to rent to a kid!”

Her current living situation has become tangled and exploitative. She is sexually involved with her landlord who demands her social assistance cheques. “He knows I am on welfare and he expects it. He makes me go to the bank, deposit my cheques, and give the money to him.” Realizing that this is an unsafe situation, she has tried to leave often. There are few options for her, however. She has slept in her car on the side of the road, in a tent, and found shelter at the Transition House twice. She always ends up returning to the unsafe situation as she had nowhere else to go. To add to the exploitation, her landlord has withheld personal items, her cat, important documents, and other things as a means to control her and keep her staying with him. She has called the police a number of times to help him get her things back so she can leave for good, but she has not had any luck. When asked if she had somewhere else to live would she still be living there, she replied “no”.

Her difficulties are compounded by substance use which has attracted the attention of MCFD who have given her ultimatums about getting treatment or risk losing financial supports. She told us she wished there would have been some type of youth housing to help with ageing out of care, managing addictions and substance use, and mental health issues. Asked how serious a problem youth homelessness is, she replied “it’s a dire situation and it has been here for too long. They say children are our future, but do they really care that much if they are letting this happen? There are kids out here, kids that are dying. They are not being murdered; they just cannot simply sustain life without more supports”.

⁸ Update on this story: This young woman moved out of the living arrangement described in the interview but has been unable to retrieve her belongings. She is living in a single bedroom apartment with three adults. Her own substance use has gotten a lot better, however she is surrounded by substance use in her living situation.

She has entered a work skills program and has really taken strides forward in her life to get things to where she wants them to be. She is participating in counselling and says “she is managing”. She told us she often feels like she is “grasping at straws, but I will not admit defeat to the system we are trying to change”.

Appendices

Appendix A

Youth Homelessness Project Survey

What is this survey asking about: We are trying to understand the experiences of Penticton youth, **ages 12 – 24**, with homelessness and housing problems. We hope you will consider completing the survey because your information and ideas are important to creating solutions. You only have to answer the questions you feel comfortable with.

This survey collects anonymous information to assist with our inquiry. Precautions have been taken to protect you. Your feedback cannot be traced back to you.

1. What is your age? _____

2. I identify as:
 - Male
 - 2-spirit
 - Trans female
 - Agender
 - Prefer not to answer
 - I don't identify with any of these options (please specify) _____
 - Female
 - Non-binary
 - Trans male
 - Not sure/ questioning

3. I would describe my ethnic or cultural background as:
 - Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, Inuit)
 - Chinese
 - Japanese
 - Latin American
 - Black (e.g. African, Haitian, Jamaican)
 - West Asian (e.g. Afghan, Iranian)
 - Caucasian (white)
 - Filipino
 - Korean
 - Arab

- Southeast Asian (e.g. Indonesian, Vietnamese)
- South Asian (e.g. East Indian, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sri Lankan)
- Prefer not to answer

I don't identify with any of these options (please specify)_____

4 If Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, Inuit) selected, please tell us if you are:

- Metis
- Inuit
- First Nations
- Unsure

5. I am a:

- Canadian citizen
- Visitor to Canada
- Permanent resident
- Refugee claimant
- On a work visa
- On a student visa
- Not sure
- Prefer not to answer

6. I live with: (check all that apply)

- Both of my parents
- Both parents, at different times
- Mother(s)
- Brother(s)/ sister(s)
- Father(s)
- Friend(s)
- Partner/boyfriend/girlfriend
- Grandparent(s)
- Stepmother or stepfather
- Roommate(s)
- Foster Parent(s)
- I live alone
- My child/children
- Aunt, uncle, or other adults related to me
- Multiple people who aren't related to me
- Other (please specify)_____

7. I currently live:

- In a house
- in a basement suite

- In an apartment
 - In a single room in a house or apartment building
 - In a homeless shelter
 - In a group home
 - Other. If you chose "other", please tell us what your current living situation is:
-

- I couch surf
- I am unhoused

8. I have been living in this type of housing for: _____ years or _____ months

9. I get along with the people I live with:

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

10. My current living situation is because:

- I have always lived here
 - I felt unsafe at home
 - I was in conflict with the adults in my house
 - The rules at home were too strict
 - "Aged out" of the place I was living
 - I am on a Youth Agreement
 - I felt that I was old enough to leave home
 - Other reason(s): please tell us why
-
-

- I am happier now
- I was kicked out
- Was in foster care & left

11. At some point in my life, I have lived with adults who were not my parents.

- yes
- no

If you answered yes, who did you live with?

- with friends
- with foster family
- couch surfed
- in a shelter

- in a group home
- other family member
- partner
- on the street
- roommates
- other _____

12. I have run away from home:

- never
- once
- thought about it
- more than once

13. Do you know anyone in the group of people you hang out with who is living away from their family home?

- Yes
- Not sure
- No
- Prefer not to answer

14. How many in the group you hang out with are worried about their housing and not in a safe or secure place?

15. Do you have someone you can count on to:

Provide help in an emergency? Yes No

Check in to see how you are doing? Yes No

Offer emotional support? Yes No

16. Where would you go for help to ask about finding a safe place to live?

- friends
- school counsellor or teacher
- the Foundry
- your doctor
- the hospital
- a local shelter
- I don't know where I would go
- youth worker
- government social worker
- Community Living BC
- co-worker at my job
- a relative

17. What does Penticton need to help youth who are having housing troubles or who are homeless? (check as many as apply)

supported, youth housing (e.g. staff on site, help with skill building, safety precautions)

more affordable housing with suites just for youth

more motels that will rent to youth

more shelters

emergency youth beds

more foster homes

Other (please provide us with your ideas)

18. Do you think that youth homelessness is a problem in Penticton?

Absolutely!!!

Probably

Not at all

Don't really know

If any of the questions in this survey has triggered stress, anxiety, or worry for you, **PLEASE** contact:

the Foundry at 501 Main Street at 778-646-2292, or,

the Kids Help Line at 1-800-668-6868.

Support is available and free of charge.

Appendix B

PENTICTON YOUTH HOMELESSNESS ASSESSMENT & STRATEGY 2020

What we value and believe:

1. The lived experience of youth must be central to our process; we each bring a unique perspective to understanding the issues and creating solutions. Our voices must be heard and respected in order to achieve the best possible outcome.
2. Safety must be protected so that everyone can participate. We will model respect for individual identity including gender identity, cultural safety, and celebration of diversity.
3. We are deeply grateful to be on working and playing on the ancestral, traditional, and unceded territory of the Syilx Nation. Our interactions will be based on recognition of the impact of colonization, our responsibility to uphold the principles of truth and reconciliation, equity, and respect for Indigenous voices.
4. The meaningful participation and sustainable involvement of young people, in shared decisions on matters which affect their lives and those of their community, is essential to creating viable solutions and supports they are needed now and others may need in the future.
5. Thoughtful decision-making, considering multiple perspectives and best practices, will help guide our solutions. Solutions will emerge from a good understanding of the scope of the issue and thinking together about our community.

In practice, this will look like:

- Making sure the voices of youth mirror the diversity of our community.
- Working to reduce barriers to participation including meeting people in the places that feel safe for them.
- Conveying information and ideas in ways that include all participants and respect their ways of learning and processing information.
- Acknowledging that trauma is likely part of the experience for many youth experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. We resolve to do no further harm in our interactions and to apply a trauma-informed lens.

- Taking individual and collective responsibility for supporting a shared experience that demonstrates respect for one another, welcomes opinions and ideas, and seeks to understand rather than judge.

Appendix C

List of Organizations Interviewed

RCMP Liaison Officers

South Okanagan Women in Need Society

Pathways Addictions Resource Society

United Way

School District 67

Interior Health

Ooknakane Friendship Centre

ASK Wellness Society

South Okanagan Similkameen Brain Injury Society

Penticton & District Society for Community Living

Foundry Penticton

South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services Society

Ministry for Children and Family Development

Okanagan College, Penticton Campus

Okanagan Boys and Girls Clubs

Bridge Youth and Family Services

OneSky Community Resources Society

BC Housing

Away Home Kelowna

Away Home Kamloops

Canadian Mental Health Association

WE NEED YOUR HELP

We are trying to determine how many youth are struggling with homelessness or who have difficulties finding some where safe to live

If you live in the Penticton area and are age 12-24 please take our survey below

Survey is open until December 31st 2020

Please use this QR code to find the survey:



You can also find the survey through this link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BPTWRJH>



Thank you for your help to address youth homelessness in Penticton

Next Steps

As a community, we will prevent and end youth homelessness in Penticton by working to achieve these objectives:

- Meaningfully engaging youth voice (decision-making, development of solutions)
- Creating and maintaining a strong, community leadership structure
- Implementing effective prevention strategies
- Creating a continuum of housing options for youth
- Increasing intra-partner collaboration
- Educating and enhancing awareness
- Implementing evidence-based and trauma-informed practices
- Increasing access to a range of services and supports
- Increasing support for families with at-risk youth
- Using data and evaluation to inform our actions

Meaningfully engaging youth voice (decision-making, development of solutions)	
Proposed specific actions	
Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Create real opportunities for youth voice in all initiatives and activities – ensure seats at decision-making tables and/or other ways that youth want to participate · Support youth to design and deliver presentations to local, regional, & provincial government entities and other organizations, about the gaps in services and needs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Provide honoraria for all forms of youth participation in collaborative work
Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Create opportunities for youth to develop skills that support their capacity and success (employment, housing, accessing services, etc.). This could include initiatives such as a speakers' bureau and writing support.
Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Develop and implement strategies to ensure self determination for youth in making their housing decisions including targeted mentoring supports

Creating and maintaining a strong, community leadership structure	
Proposed specific actions	
Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Establish leadership on youth housing & homelessness within 100 More Homes structure · Establish a youth homelessness table within the 100 More Homes structure to inform decision making across partners, including the City of Penticton, School District 67, and Provincial agencies and ministries confirming leadership structure for reporting and decision making responsibilities. · Embed a collective impact approach, including providing training to the community partnership to apply the elements of this social action approach
Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Engage local and regional MCFD leadership to meaningfully participate in future planning with respect to initiatives to address youth homelessness and housing insecurity · Work with City of Penticton to develop a role focused on youth and youth homelessness · Establish process for regular reporting to City Council, other governments, and broader community on progress on youth homelessness initiatives
Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Work with the City of Penticton to develop a social policy framework for Penticton inclusive of youth homelessness as well as other social issues and needs.

Implementing effective prevention strategies	
Proposed specific actions	

Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Engage in collaborative, school based prevention initiatives with School District 67 and community agencies (such as the Upstream Project) · Create and implement school presentations to educate and enhance awareness for students on community based resources to support safety and well-being, including housing security · Enhance awareness among school based partners on identifying signs of students who may be at-risk
Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Create and implement a shelter diversion strategy · Explore the expansion of the “rent bank” for youth

Creating a continuum of housing options for youth	
Proposed specific actions	
Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Identify short term solutions for youth needing emergency housing · Update the City of Penticton’s Official Community Plan (OCP) using a youth housing and homelessness lens
Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Develop a specific plan and pathway to create a continuum of housing for youth, prioritizing emergency housing as the first step · Identify and engage potential funding sources for support for long term housing plan (e.g. Orange Door, Catalyst Funding, BC Housing) · Identify and engage local developers for support for long term housing to address youth housing needs and options · Research expertise from other communities in developing plans for Penticton (e.g. Okanagan Boys and Girls Clubs, Away Home Kelowna, Away Home Kamloops)
Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Work with City of Penticton to ensure that new housing projects include options for youth

Increasing intra-partner collaboration	
Proposed specific actions	

Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Create a coordinated access table and triage system that all organizations and community resources have access to · Educate front line staff and organizations, bylaw, and RCMP about how and where to direct at risk and homeless youth · Establish a Youth-By-Name List to maintain real time information on individuals who are at risk of or homeless · Develop a MOU between agencies and other partners, including an information sharing process, to support youth
Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Activate broad based engagement with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o local, multicultural organizations and community groups to provide information about available supports for at risk and homeless youth o School District 67 o Interior Health o First Nations Health Authority <p>to support the development of partnerships on behalf of youth and access to services/supports</p>
Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Strengthen linkages with youth homelessness initiatives throughout the interior, province, and nationally (e.g. Away Home Canada and provincial tables) · Partner with First Nations communities to support culturally relevant supports for at risk youth · Initiate personal support network building project to support at risk youth

Educating and enhancing awareness	
Proposed specific actions	
Short Term and ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Initiate and implement ongoing community awareness and understanding regarding the issue of youth homelessness in Penticton (e.g. reports, news articles, promotional campaigns, presentations) · The City of Penticton should work with local youth to send this report to all applicable Provincial Ministers, Ministries and agencies outlining the community's youth homelessness and housing priorities

Implementing evidence-based and trauma informed practices

Proposed specific actions	
Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand harm reduction strategies targeted to meet youth needs Establish mentor program for youth at risk or experiencing homelessness Explore implementation of a local Duty to Assist framework ^[1]
Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement a plan to ensure all staff involved in providing services to youth who are or at risk of homelessness, have access to training on trauma informed practice Develop and implement a peer support system for professionals working in intervention services Utilize the Housing First for Youth (HR4Y) ^[2] model in planning
Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that housing options available for youth are low barrier (e.g. do not exclude youth who are using substances, have multiple complex needs, and have required supports available to them)

^[1] More info:

<https://awayhome.ca/2019/10/23/experiments-in-paradigm-shifting-how-service-design-can-inform-the-duty-to-assist-policy/>

^[2] More info:

<https://www.homelesshub.ca/HF4Y>

Increasing access to a range of services and supports	
Proposed specific actions	
Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map existing services and identify gaps where additional services are required
Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for expanded resources to increase access to mental health supports available through Foundry Penticton Identify social work/case management process to follow and support youth (e.g. key contact or case manager) Enhance availability of peer support workers targeted to at risk youth and youth who are homeless

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Develop an afterhours outreach team and/or responsive process to connect with youth on the streets to provide emergency supports · Establish designated youth emergency housing · Develop process for informing youth about how help is available to them before their housing is no longer safe or available · Provide training to teachers and others that work closely with youth to ensure they know where to send youth when students are in a housing problem · Work together to recruit and retain staff providing consistent training opportunities for their interactions with youth who engage with their supports and services
Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Develop and implement skills development programming as part of the continuum of supports and services for youth · Establish interagency methods to provide follow up supports and facilitate transitions into adulthood

Increasing support for families with at-risk youth	
Proposed specific actions	
Short Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Map out current supports for families and identify gaps/needs for additional supports · Continue to promote available family support services throughout the community
Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Seek funding for training for service providers on engaging family and natural supports · Advocate for more funding for family support programs

Using data and evaluation to inform our actions	
Proposed specific actions	
Medium Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Develop a homelessness data collection and analysis plan · Provide honoraria to youth when they are asked to provide data or participate in data collection · Embed OCAP principles in data collection · Create data sharing agreements between organizations and common consent forms for sharing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Develop appropriate data collection tools aligned with the data collection plan and guided by input from youth · Design and implement methods for receiving and managing data on a regular schedule.
Long Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Create a repository for non-identifying data that can be accessed by community partners for advocacy and ongoing planning · Explore formal partnerships with academics who are conducting research supportive of initiatives to address youth homelessness.

I