

REPORT

Youth Homelessness Prevention Initiative Needs Assessment

Stephen Gaetz | 2023

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Interest in the Prevention of Youth Homelessness	6
Youth Homelessness Prevention Interventions and the Commitment Curve	9
→ Housing First for Youth	12
→ Family and Natural Supports	16
→ Reconnect	19
→ Duty to Assist	22
→ Upstream	25
Summary of Key Findings	28
Conclusion	36

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Introduction

The [Making the Shift - Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab¹](#) (MtS) is dedicated to helping support organizations and community entities to implement effective prevention initiatives. Through a series of demonstration projects over the past six years, MtS has tested and refined several youth homelessness prevention interventions, including Housing First for Youth, Family and Natural Supports, Reconnect, Duty to Assist and Upstream. Through this process, MtS has gained valuable insights into the effectiveness of these interventions and how to provide training and technical assistance to support implementation.

The needs assessment, conducted by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, aimed to:

- Gauge local interest in the implementation of youth homelessness prevention interventions.
- Understand current knowledge of such interventions.
- Determine interest in training and technical assistance to support implementation.

This report provides high-level results of the needs assessment. The knowledge gained will contribute to our collective understanding of community needs, as well as inform both MtS's communications and Training and Technical Assistance marketing strategy. Most significantly, this report gives voice to the youth homelessness sector in Canada and their strong support for moving in the direction of integrating effective preventive interventions in communities across Canada.

Methodology

The project aimed to assess service providers' understanding of youth homelessness prevention and their interest in a range of preventive interventions. A self-administered survey was created for these purposes.

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) distributed the survey through its weekly newsletter and contact lists. The COH and A Way Home Canada promoted it through a series of social media posts and a blog. Participants filled out the survey online through a platform called Qualtrics.

1. The Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab is co-led by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home Canada.

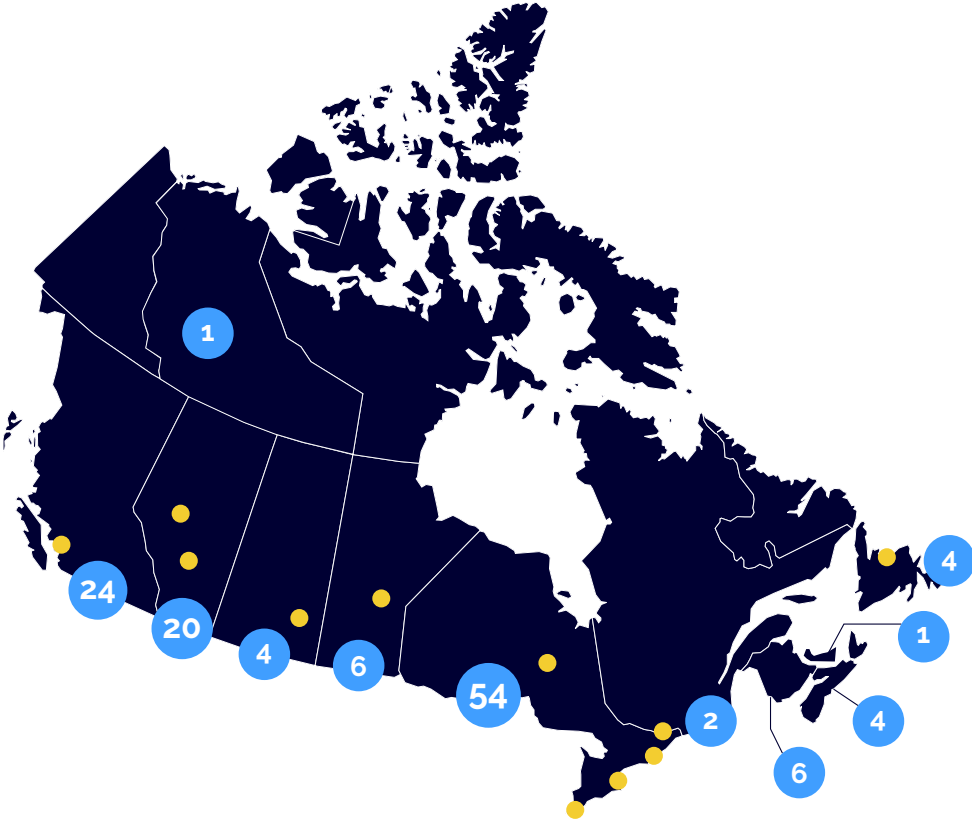
The survey was aimed at organizations in Canada that provide supports to youth experiencing homelessness. The period for distribution of the survey and collection of results was between March 7 and May 11, 2023.

A total of 301 individuals responded to the survey, but only 153 surveys were usable due to incompleteness or other issues. The survey data was exported to SPSS, a statistical analysis software suite, for analysis. Data was analyzed by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.

Who Completed the Survey?

The survey was completed by respondents from across Canada. Respondents were from ten provinces and one territory. The number of respondents from each jurisdiction is indicated in the map below.

Figure 1. Responses to survey by province and territory



Cities and towns with three or more responses (indicated above in yellow) are:

British Columbia

Vancouver (8)

Kelowna (4)

Prince George (3)

Alberta

Calgary (7)

Edmonton (5)

Saskatchewan

Saskatoon (3)

Manitoba

Winnipeg (3)

Newfoundland

St. John's (4)

Ontario

Hamilton (7)

Ottawa (6)

Toronto (15)

Thunder Bay (6)

Windsor (5)

Although there was broad participation from across the country, there was notably very weak participation from Quebec.

Interest in the Prevention of Youth Homelessness

Since the emergence of modern mass homelessness in Canada in the 1990s, the focus of energy and investment in response to the crisis has been in emergency services, such as shelters and day programs, and law enforcement. Over the last ten years, there has been a significant increase in efforts to help people exit homelessness, with the priority being to house chronically homeless individuals with high-acuity mental health and addictions needs through evidence-based interventions such as Housing First.

Until recently, the prevention of homelessness has been an afterthought, far down the list of priorities for governments, communities and organizations. When the Government of Canada launched its homelessness strategy in 2019, it signalled an important shift to prevention. Two of the five mandatory outcomes areas for community entities focused on prevention: 1) a reduction of inflows into homelessness; and 2) for those who have exited the situation, a reduction in returns to homelessness.

While this shift is important, little is known of the interest in preventive interventions at the local level or the capacity to carry them out. While anecdotally, we hear reports from many locally based not-for-profit organizations that they see prevention as important, they need help to get there.

The respondents to this survey were service providers, some working in the area of homelessness, others from allied sectors. In this survey we asked them to comment on a number of questions relating to how they think about the issue of preventing youth homelessness. We were interested in their perspectives on the value of youth homelessness prevention. We also wanted to understand what kinds of things enable the implementation of prevention initiatives, and what presents barriers.

This survey revealed a considerable disconnect between and desire for a stronger focus on youth homelessness prevention and the reality of the lack of support including investment and training and technical assistance to support the shift to prevention. This could be interpreted as a case where the community is moving much faster than government and other funders to prioritize the prevention of youth homelessness. These perspectives are highlighted in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Not sure	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Prevention is necessary to solve youth homelessness.	6.7% (7)	3.8% (4)	0.0% (0)	6.7% (7)	82.7% (86)
I think my organization should do more in the area of youth homelessness prevention.	6.8% (7)	6.8% (7)	13.6% (14)	34.0% (35)	38.8% (40)
I think my community should do more in the area of youth homelessness prevention.	5.8% (6)	1.0% (1)	1.9% (2)	12.5% (13)	78.8% (82)
I have seen a growth in interest in youth homelessness prevention in the last five years.	3.8% (4)	9.6% (10)	11.5% (12)	38.5% (40)	36.5% (38)
We need support as an organization to help shift to prevention.	6.9% (7)	9.8% (10)	18.6% (19)	29.4% (36)	35.3% (36)
We could do more homelessness prevention IF we were provided with dedicated funds.	6.9% (7)	4.0% (4)	7.9% (8)	13.9% (14)	67.3% (68)
We could do more homelessness prevention IF we had access to quality Training and Technical Assistance.	5.8% (6)	6.7% (7)	13.5% (14)	26.9% (28)	47.1% (49)
I think my organization has funding for and interest in TTA on youth homelessness prevention interventions.	29.1% (30)	11.7% (12)	32.0% (33)	17.5% (18)	9.7% (10)

Perspectives on Youth Homelessness Prevention

The results of the survey indicate an incredibly high level of support for the prevention of youth homelessness. Over 82% of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed with the statement “Prevention is necessary to solve youth homelessness” (a combined 89.4% reported “somewhat” or “strongly” agreeing). This response is surprising given the historical lack of investment in this area. **Over 70% indicated that their organization should do more regarding prevention.**

Over 91% felt their community should do more. This percentage is significant because it reinforces viewpoints from the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness (NLCYH). During both the annual meeting of the NLCYH and conversations with service providers at other meetings, service providers consistently indicated that community entities in general are not focused on youth homelessness and often present barriers to implementing youth homelessness strategies.

An equally high percentage—75%—felt that the shift to prevention is underway in their organizations or that there is a growing interest in the prevention of youth homelessness.

What is Necessary to Support the Shift to Prevention?

Respondents also indicated their belief that the shift to prevention will not just happen without support. Over 80% indicated there needed to be dedicated funds to support preventive interventions. Over 75% identified that having access to quality training and technical assistance would be necessary for the successful implementation of preventive interventions. Finally, only a quarter of respondents believed their organization had the resources and interest to invest in training and technical assistance.

The message is clear: service providers strongly believe in preventing youth homelessness, but feel unsupported in terms of funding and training.

Youth Homelessness Prevention Interventions and the Commitment Curve

As part of this needs assessment, a methodology called “Commitment Curve” was used to help us understand the readiness and needs of youth homeless-serving organizations regarding preventive interventions. The Commitment Curve is a tool that assesses people’s knowledge of an intervention, their interest in implementation and the different stages of commitment that one typically follows in adopting new ways of working.

While there is no doubt strong support for prevention within the youth homelessness sector, this survey revealed the extent to which organizations were aware of the actual preventive interventions as well as their level of interest in implementing such interventions.

Over the past six years, the [Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab](#), has played an innovative role in testing out a series of youth homelessness prevention interventions. These include:

- 1. Housing First for Youth (HF4Y)**
- 2. Family and Natural Supports (FNS)**
- 3. Reconnect**
- 4. Duty to Assist (D2A)**
- 5. Upstream**

Below is a diagram charting the different stages of commitment as applied to specific preventive interventions. This methodology is helpful in understanding local interest and capacity-building needs in regard to the prevention of youth homelessness and their openness to explore a range of initiatives.

Figure 2. Making the Shift Commitment Curve



The Commitment Curve helps us understand a number of things:

→ **Knowledge and understanding of prevention interventions.**

The bottom of the curve (levels 7 and 8) identifies how many organizations have poor knowledge of the interventions we have been researching. These results can be compared across all five preventive interventions to determine the most and least well-known. If organizations are lacking a basic understanding of these preventive interventions they are unlikely to consider implementation or require TTA.

→ **Lack of Interest in the interventions.**

Level 6 identifies which organizations have knowledge of the intervention but are uninterested in implementation currently.

→ **Zone of Interest.**

This is, for our purposes, the most important level of understanding. We consider organizations to be in the "Zone of Interest" if they indicate an openness to exploring the possibility of implementation (levels 2–5). The



Zone of Interest is identified by a light-yellow colour, and the figure in the blue box indicates the number and percentage of unique organizations that fit in this category. Such organizations understand that the interventions in question can help their organization achieve its goals, that they are interested in planning for or experimenting with implementation of these interventions, and that they need support in getting there. In the Commitment Curve tables to follow, the Commitment Curve is highlighted.

→ **Full incorporation.**

This identifies those organizations that claim to have implemented the intervention (level 1). It should be noted that across all five interventions, the number of organizations that claim to have implemented any of the five interventions appears to be inflated and may reflect: a) the lack of deep understanding of the interventions, or b) in taking interventions to scale, there is often a lack of fidelity to the program model in question.

Learning and Training Needs

As part of the survey, we also asked respondents to indicate their learning and training needs relative to the five preventive interventions we are reviewing. We wanted to understand the degree to which the organizations we surveyed were looking to build their capacity regarding these interventions. Specifically, we wanted to determine if they:

- Would like to learn more about the intervention in question;
- Are interested in implementing the intervention;
- Were generally interested in Training and Technical Assistance.

In the following pages, we do a deep analysis of community attitudes towards all five interventions.

INTERVENTION 1

Housing First for Youth

As a rights-based intervention for young people (ages 16 to 24) who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) focuses on providing housing and client-centred supports without preconditions in order to provide stability and reduce the likelihood of a return to homelessness. HF4Y is an adaptation of the Housing First intervention, which is considered best practice and is designed to address the needs of developing adolescents and young adults. It does this by providing them with immediate access to safe, affordable and appropriate housing along with necessary, age-appropriate supports that focus on health, well-being, life skills, education, employment and social inclusion. The goal of HF4Y is not simply to provide housing stability but to support young people as youths and to facilitate a healthy transition to adulthood. HF4Y can be considered both an intervention and program model as well as a philosophy guiding a community's response to youth homelessness.

The HF4Y program model has also been adapted as an intervention to support youth transitioning from the care of child protection services. There are also examples of HF4Y designed to meet the needs of Indigenous young people (see more below).

Housing First for Youth and the Commitment Curve

The Commitment Curve diagram below (Figure 3) provides some important information about where youth homelessness service providers across Canada stand regarding the application of Housing First for Youth.

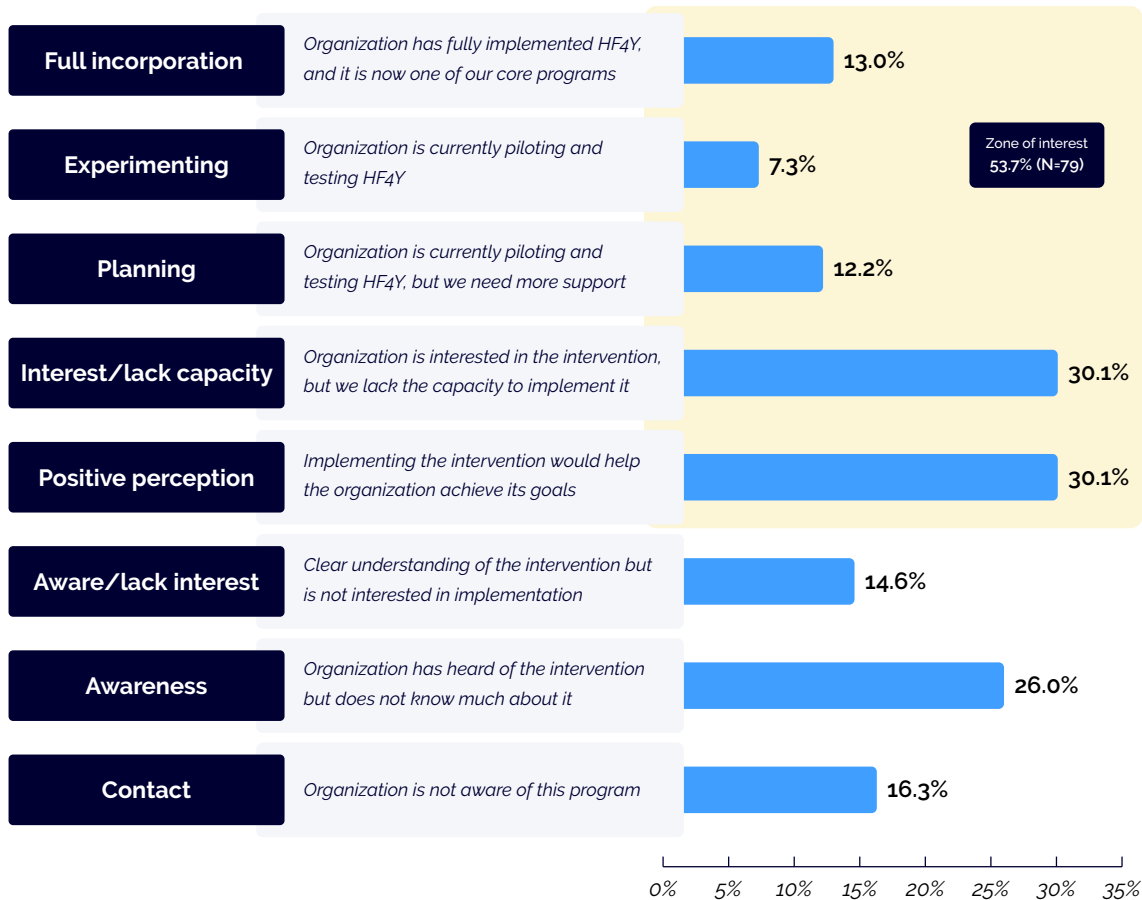
In terms of name recognition and understanding of the HF4Y intervention, a high percentage of respondents seem to have some degree of understanding of what HF4Y is.



THIS is Housing First for Youth:

- [Program model guide](#),
- [Operations manual](#),
- [Tools and Templates](#).

Figure 3. Housing First for Youth—Commitment Curve²



Key findings:

- **Zone of Interest:** A high percentage of respondents (53.7%) asserted that they are aware of and understand HF4Y, are positively disposed regarding it and are interested in implementing it.
- **Lack of awareness:** HF4Y is fairly well known, with only 16.3% identifying they are not aware of the program.
- **Not interested:** 14.6% percent of respondents identified they have a clear understanding of HF4Y, but their organization is not interested in implementing it.
- **Capacity concerns:** 30% of respondents remarked that while they are interested in HF4Y, there is currently a lack of capacity in their organization to go down that road.

2. It should be noted that across the five interventions, the responses indicating Full Incorporation (“We have fully implemented the intervention, and it is now one of our core programs”) are not considered reliable, in that respondents may answer affirmatively to the statement based on a limited or incomplete understanding of what the intervention actually involves. For example, in the discussion of Duty to Assist, eight respondents suggested they had fully implemented the intervention, but we are dubious because we are unaware of any organization or community actively implementing the intervention.

Housing First for Youth—Learning and Training Needs

Table 2. *If your organization has implemented HF4Y or would like to, how would you assess your need for training and technical assistance (TTA)?*

	Yes	No	Not sure
My organization would like to find out more about HF4Y (n=125)	70.5% (n=91)	9.3% (n=12)	20.2% (n=26)
We are interested in implementing HF4Y but need help and support to do that (n=121)	43.0% (n=52)	24.8% (n=30)	32.2% (n=46)
Generally we are interested in TTA but are not sure where we can get it (n=122)	36.1% (n=44)	26.2% (n=32)	37.7% (n=46)

Key Findings:

- **High level of interest in learning more about HF4Y (70.5%)**
- **Interest in implementing HF4Y:** 43% of respondents reported that their organization is interested in implementing HF4Y but that they have capacity issues.
- **Expressed need for training and technical assistance:** Over a third (36%) expressed interest and are aware of the need for training and technical assistance, but they are not sure where to obtain it.

Interest in Housing First for Indigenous Youth

Given our history of colonialism and the ongoing racism against Indigenous Peoples, it is imperative that there be effective interventions that are culturally appropriate and Indigenous led. Endaayaang is an example of an Indigenous-led HF4Y program. It is a collaboration between Making the Shift and the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre, which led the project.

Central to the success of Endaayaang is the importance of cultural connection. Endaayaang helps youth connect with their roots by learning the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada as well as their own family history, which helps young people strengthen their connections to Indigenous communities and facilitates access to ceremonial practices and community events.

Table 3. Interest in Housing First for Indigenous Youth

	Yes	No	Not sure
Would your organization like to find out more about an Indigenous approach to HF4Y?	83.2% (n=109),	7.6% (n=10),	7.6% (n=10)

A clear majority—over 83%—expressed interest in learning more about Indigenous approaches to HF4Y. To take this intervention to scale, communities will need capacity building and training supports.

INTERVENTION 2

Family and Natural Supports

The Family and Natural Supports (FNS) approach begins with the idea that relationships are the basis of a person's sense of self and well-being, which in turn provides the foundation for a person to thrive. Emphasizing the important role that family and adult supports can and should play in all young people's lives, these should be infused into all interventions to support youth experiencing homelessness.

FNS is designed to prevent or end a young person's experience of homelessness by strengthening relationships between vulnerable young people and their support networks so that there is at least one adult—maybe a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling, neighbour, teacher, tutor, or Elder—who is important to them and who cares about them. Strengthening these relationships through counselling, mediation and skill building may be the support that a young person needs to prevent them from experiencing homelessness, keep them connected to community and school and create a network of support they can draw upon throughout their life. When family reunification is not a viable option, finding and strengthening relationships with caring adults outside of the family unit—referred to as natural supports—can be an alternative strategy for achieving housing stability.

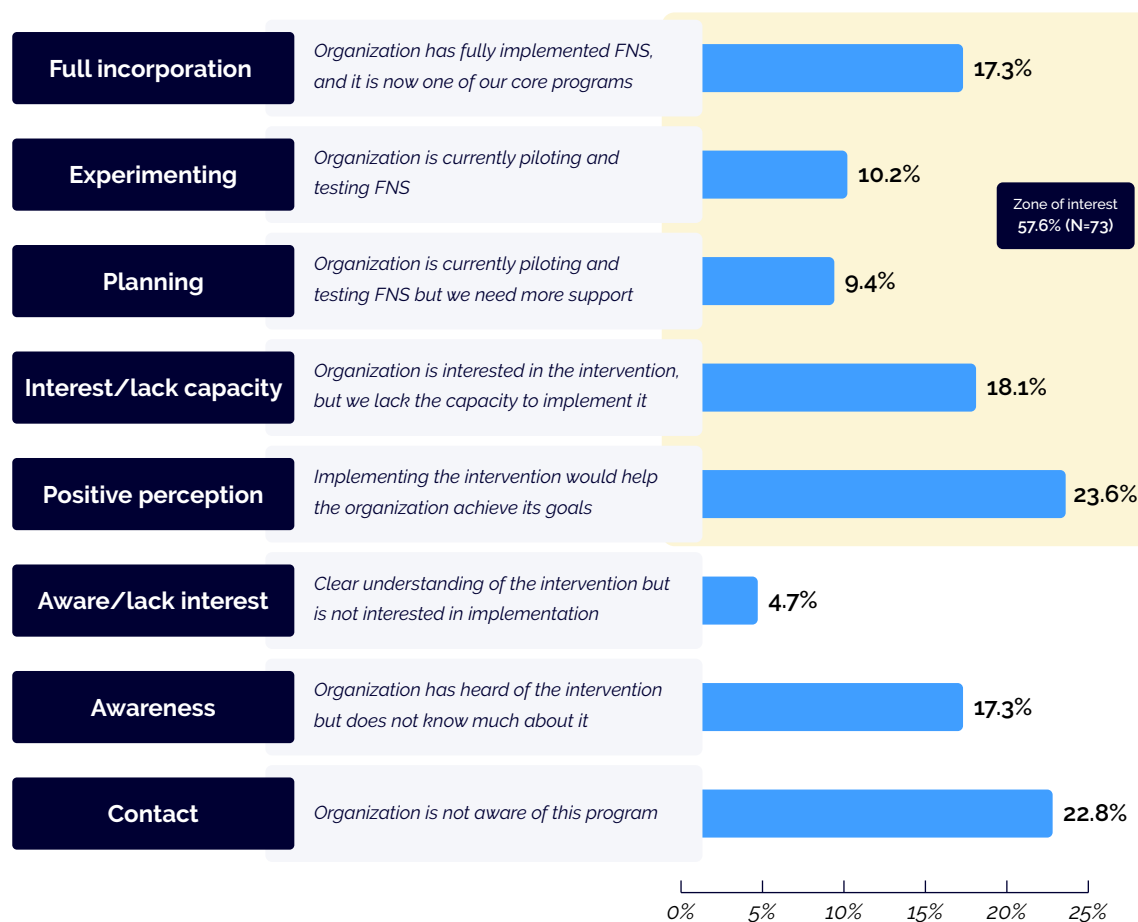
Family and Natural Supports and the Commitment Curve

Similar to HF4Y, FNS has strong name recognition, but almost 40% know little or nothing about the intervention (see Figure 4 below).



[Access Family and Natural Supports: A Framework to Enhance Young People's Network of Support](#)

Figure 4. Family and Natural Supports—Commitment Curve



Key findings:

- **Zone of Interest:** A high percentage of respondents (57.6%) assert that they are aware of and understand FNS, are positively disposed regarding it and are implementing it.
- **Lack of awareness:** Like HF4Y, there is a strong recognition of FNS. Only 40% report knowing little (17.3%) or nothing (22.3%) about the intervention.
- **Not interested:** Only 4.7% indicated their organization is not interested in implementing it.
- **Capacity concerns:** Eighteen percent of respondents indicated that while they are interested in FNS, there is currently a lack of capacity in their organization to implement it.

Family and Natural Supports—Learning and Training Needs

Table 4. *If your organization has implemented FNS or would like to, how would you assess your need for training and technical assistance (TTA)?*

	Yes	No	Not sure
My organization would like to find out more about FNS (n=111)	73.0% (n=81)	9.9% (n=11)	17.1% (n=19)
We are interested in implementing FNS but need help and support to do that (n=121)	46.2% (n=48)	21.2% (n=22)	32.7% (n=34)
Generally we are interested in TTA but are not sure where we can get it (n=122)	45.0% (n=45)	31.0% (n=31)	24.0% (n=24)

Key Findings:

- **Very high level of interest in learning more about FNS (73%)**
- **Interest in implementing FNS:** 46% of respondents reported their organization is interested in implementing FNS but that they have capacity issues.
- **Expressed need for training and technical assistance:** Over a third (45%) expressed interest and are aware of the need for training and technical assistance, but they are not sure where to obtain it.

INTERVENTION 3

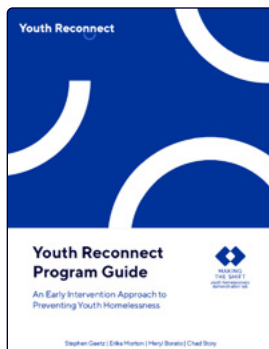
Reconnect

Reconnect is a community-based early intervention program designed to help young people (ages 13–24) at risk or in the early stages of homelessness. Reconnect supports are provided by a community agency that has expertise in working with developing adolescents and their families. Reconnect program staff partner with schools, engage students through assemblies to discuss youth homelessness, and work with teachers, counsellors, coaches, and other school staff. This enables educators and other school personnel who identify that a young person is at risk of homelessness, dropping out or other negative life events and can then work with them to make a warm transfer to the support of the Reconnect team.

The goal of Reconnect is to help address the underlying factors impacting young people while at the same time addressing challenges within the family. The best outcomes are that the young person remains in their community, develops stronger attachments to natural supports (meaningful adults in their lives), stays connected to their family, community and school and their family is strengthened to prevent or reduce the risk of homelessness.

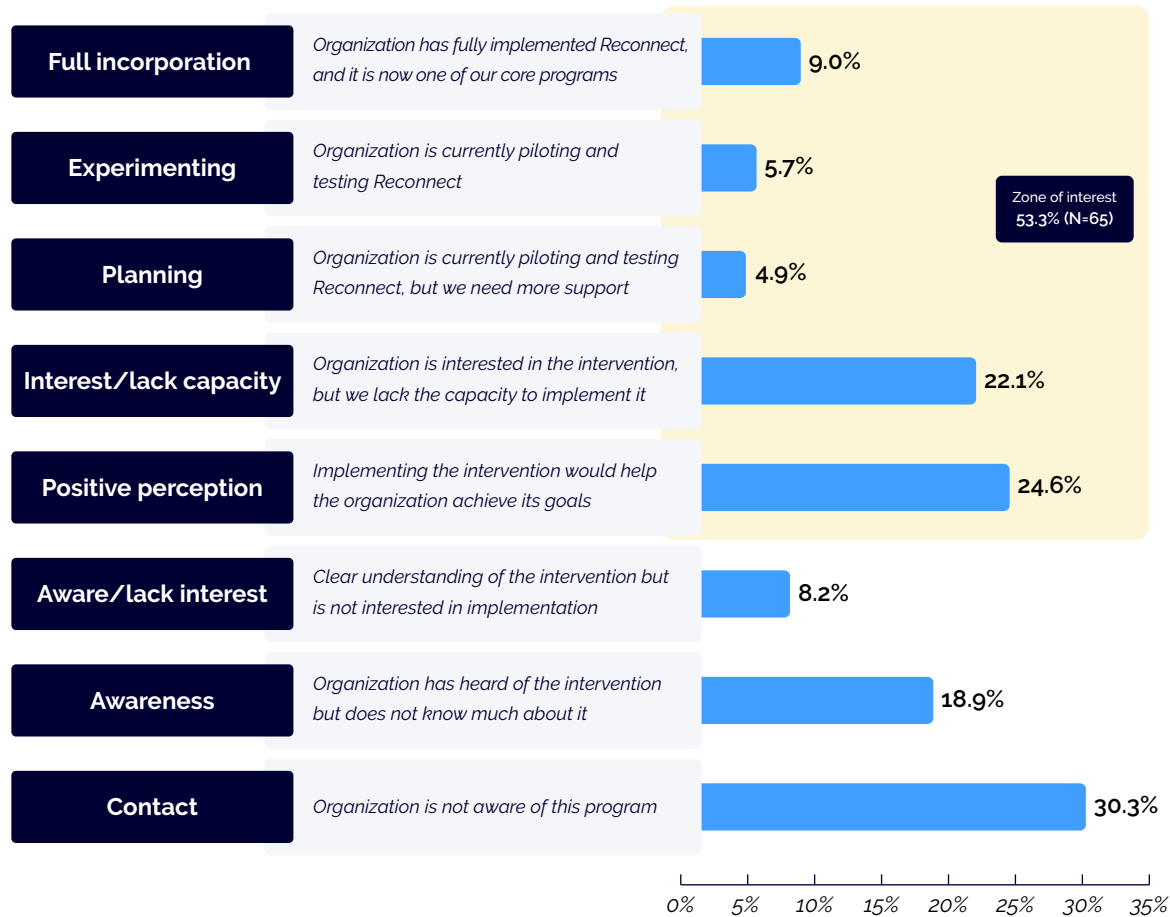
Reconnect and the Commitment Curve

The Commitment Curve diagram below (Figure 5) provides some important information about where youth homelessness service providers across Canada stand regarding the application of Reconnect. Generally, Reconnect has strong name recognition, but 35% of respondents knew little or nothing about it.



[Access the Youth Reconnect Program Guide, An Early Intervention Approach to Preventing Youth Homelessness](#)

Figure 5. Reconnect—Commitment Curve



Key findings:

- **Zone of Interest:** A significant percentage of respondents (53%) reported awareness and positive disposition towards implementing Reconnect.
- **Lack of awareness:** Almost 50% know little (18.9%) or nothing (30.3%) about Reconnect.
- **Not interested:** 8% of respondents indicated their organization is not interested in Reconnect.
- **Capacity concerns:** 22% of respondents remarked that while they are interested in Reconnect, there is a lack of capacity in their organization to implement it.

Reconnect—Learning and Training Needs

Table 5. *If your organization has implemented Reconnect or would like to, how would you assess your need for training and technical assistance (TTA)?*

	Yes	No	Not sure
My organization would like to find out more about Reconnect (n=113)	72.6% (n=82)	14.2% (n=16)	13.3% (n=15)
We are interested in implementing Reconnect but need help and support to do that (n=99)	44.4% (n=44)	28.3% (n=28)	27.3% (n=27)
Generally we are interested in TTA but are not sure where we can get it (n=93)	36.6% (n=34)	35.5% (n=33)	28.0% (n=26)

Key Findings:

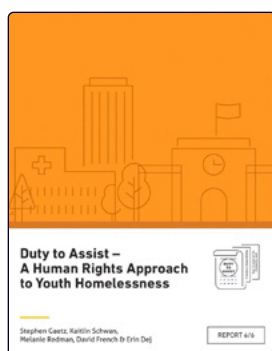
- **High level of interest in learning more about Reconnect (72.6%)**
- **Interest in implementing Reconnect:** 44% reported that they are interested but that they need support with implementation.
- 37% expressed **the need for training and technical assistance.**

INTERVENTION 4

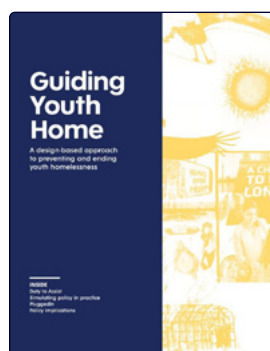
Duty to Assist

Duty to Assist (D2A) originated in Wales, transforming their response to homelessness by hard-wiring prevention into their strategy as a means of strengthening the right to housing. The duty to assist means there is a statutory obligation, or a legal duty, requiring local authorities to make reasonable efforts to end a person's homelessness or stabilize their housing. In practical terms, it means offering people at risk of homelessness or newly homeless meaningful assistance as quickly as possible.

If the person accepts, their experience of homelessness is to be resolved within two months. In 2019, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home Canada partnered with Bridgeable³, a service design consultancy, to explore how a Duty to Assist approach in Canada could be designed to prevent youth homelessness. The project team used a human-centred, design-based approach to prototype and test service elements of the Duty to Assist model. The team concluded that rather than putting the responsibility for Duty to Assist solely on agencies in the homelessness sector, it would be more effective to build supports around the public institutions that young people are more likely to engage with on a regular basis, such as schools, community centres, health care providers and child protection, for instance. Importantly, the burden of solving a young person's homelessness would not fall on these public institutions but would rather require deep collaboration with community-based organizations. These organizations would have expertise in homelessness prevention and offer safe and culturally appropriate assistance to young people in need and their families. Together, the shared duty would be to end the young person's homelessness.



Access [Duty to Assist](#),
A Human Rights
Approach to Youth
Homelessness



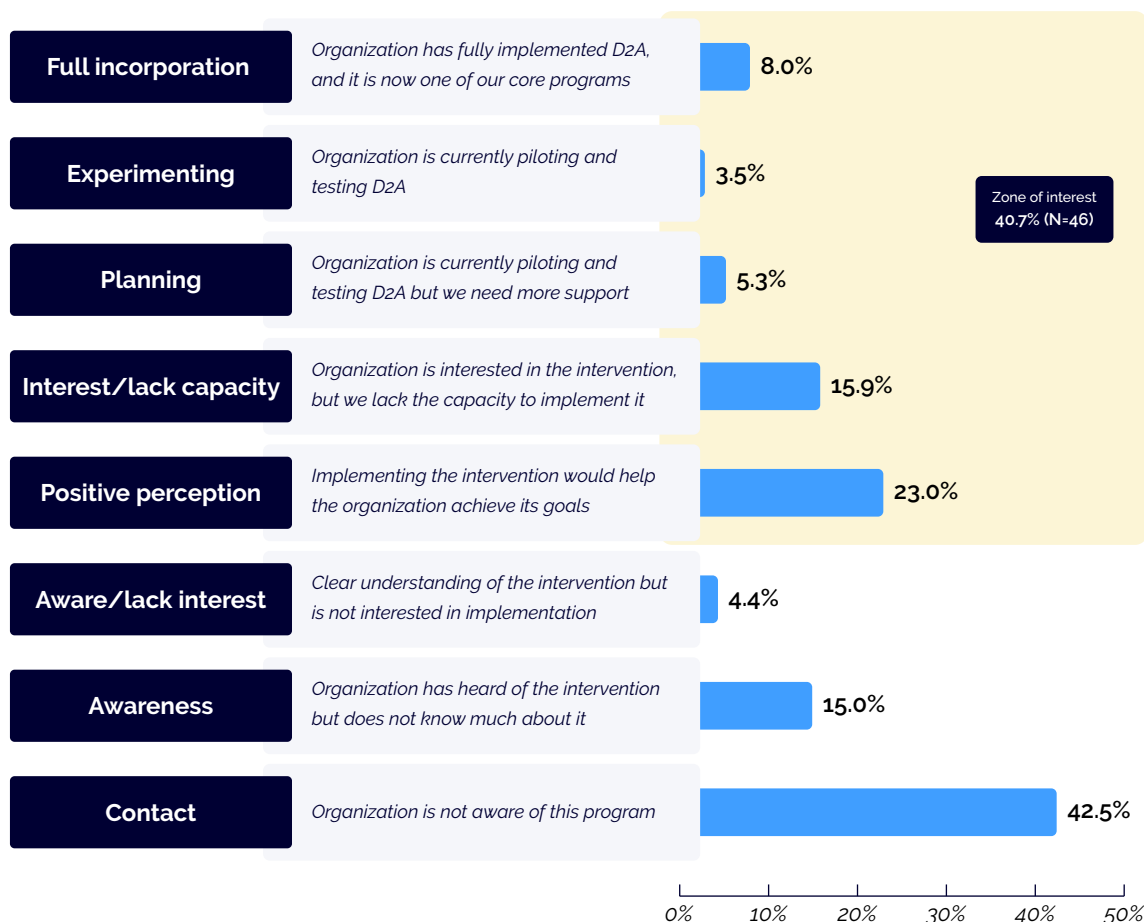
Access [Guiding Youth Home](#), A Design-based Approach to Preventing and Ending Homelessness

3. For more information about Bridgeable, see their website: <https://www.bridgeable.com/>

Duty to Assist and the Commitment Curve

The Commitment Curve diagram below (Figure 6) provides some important information about where youth homelessness service providers across Canada stand regarding the application of Duty to Assist.

Figure 6. Duty to Assist—Commitment Curve



Key Findings:

- **Zone of Interest:** 40% of respondents reported awareness and positive disposition towards implementing D2A.
- **Lack of awareness:** Over 55% percent know little (15%) or nothing (42.5%) about D2A.
- **Not interested:** 4% indicated a lack of interest in D2A.
- **Capacity concerns:** 16% of respondents remarked that while interested in D2A, their organization lacks capacity to implement it.

Duty to Assist—Learning and Training Needs

Table 6. *If your organization has implemented Duty to Assist, or would like to, how would you assess your need for training and technical assistance (TTA)?*

	Yes	No	Not sure
My organization would like to find out more about D2A (n=98)	71.4% (n=70)	10.2% (n=10)	18.4% (n=18)
We are interested in implementing D2A but need help and support to do that (n=93)	48.4% (n=45)	17.2% (n=16)	34.4% (n=32)
Generally we are interested in TTA but are not sure where we can get it (n=86)	34.9% (n=30)	34.9% (n=30)	30.2% (n=26)

Key Findings:

- High level of interest in learning more about Duty to Assist (71.4%)
- Interest in implementing D2A: 48% reported that their organization is interested in implementing D2A but that they have capacity issues.
- 34.9% expressed **the need for training and technical assistance**.

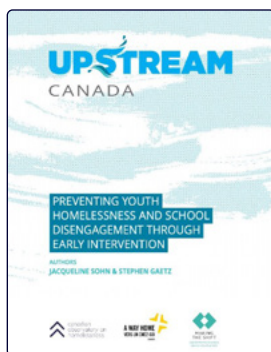
INTERVENTION 5

Upstream

Upstream is a community-based early intervention program adapted from Upstream Australia (previously The Geelong Project)⁴. Upstream is a preventive approach that works to support youth between the ages of 12 and 16 who are identified as at risk of homelessness and school disengagement. Similar to Reconnect, Upstream involves a community of schools and social services. What distinguishes Upstream is the use of a universal screening tool called the Student Needs Assessment (SNA). This confidential assessment is a critical initial step in identifying at-risk youth. Here is how it works.

All students in a school—ideally those in middle grades—fill out a strengths-based survey to identify those students who are experiencing extreme barriers to resiliency and school engagement as well as the potential risk of homelessness. Parents are informed that the survey is taking place and can have their children opt out, but normally over 90% of students participate. Students flagged as at risk are invited to a validation interview to determine what kind of supports they need. If needs are validated, students are offered coordinated supports. If the student agrees, they are provided with wraparound supports, and their families are engaged in the process. The level of support is based on the identified needs.

This prevention-focused intervention promotes access and inclusion while protecting privacy. Upstream offers an accessible pathway to supports that is especially important for students who would not otherwise be identified by educators as needing supports (those who display no outward signs) and who might fear stigma or other consequences related to revealing their circumstances.



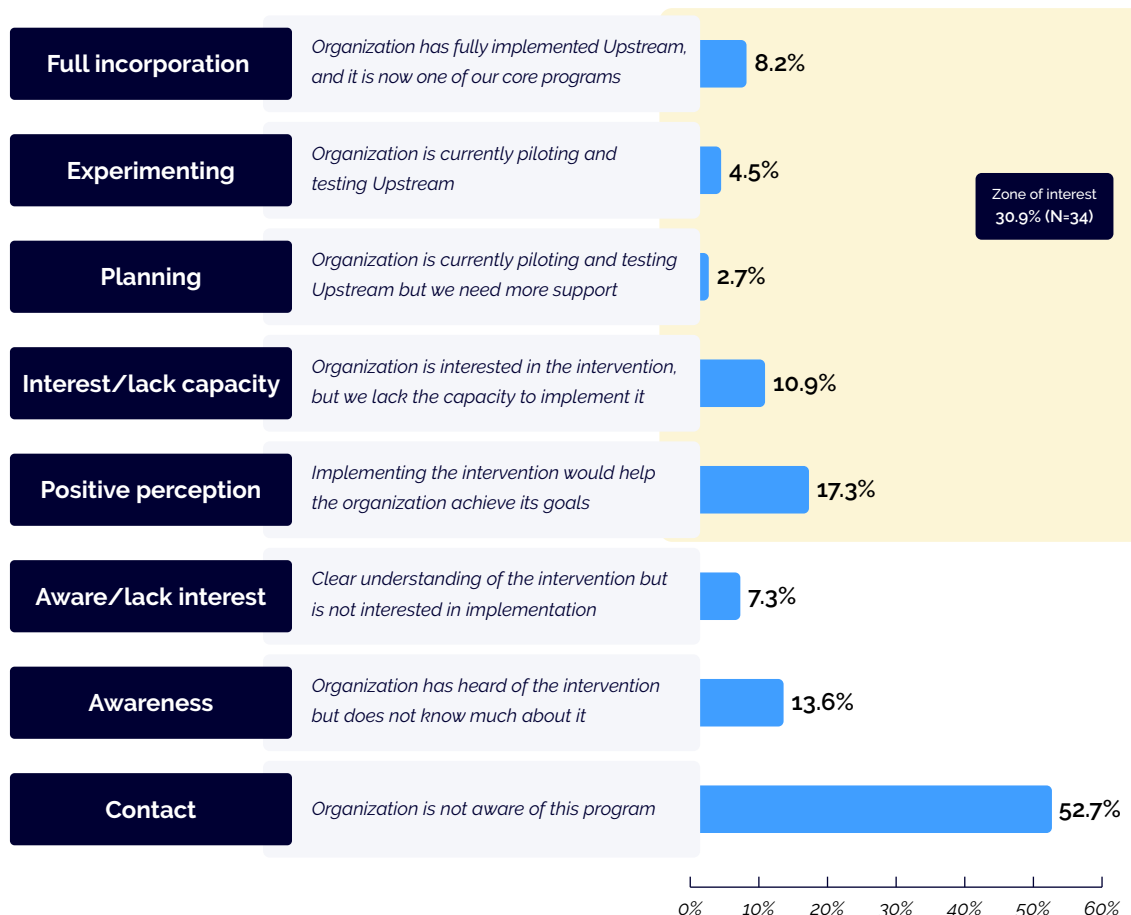
Access the [Upstream report, Preventing Youth Homelessness and School Disengagement Through Early Intervention](#)

4. For more information about Upstream Australia, see its website: <https://upstreamaustralia.org.au/>. See as well the report [The Geelong Project Prospectus](#) available on the [Homeless Hub](#)

Upstream and the Commitment Curve

The Commitment Curve diagram below (Figure 7) provides some important information where youth homelessness service providers across Canada stand regarding the application of Upstream.

Figure 7. Upstream—Commitment Curve



Key Findings:

- **Zone of Interest:** A third of respondents (31%) reported awareness and positive disposition towards implementing Upstream. This is the lowest of all five preventive interventions.
- **Lack of awareness:** Upstream is the least well-known of the interventions. More than 65% report knowing little (13.6%) or nothing (52.7%) about Upstream.
- **Not interested:** 7% of respondents indicated a lack of interest in Upstream.
- **Capacity concerns:** 10% of respondents remarked that while they are interested in Upstream, there is a lack of organizational capacity to implement.

Upstream—Learning and Training Needs

Table 7. *If your organization has implemented Upstream or would like to, how would you assess your need for training and technical assistance (TTA)?*

	Yes	No	Not sure
My organization would like to find out more about Upstream (n=106)	65.1% (n=69)	13.2% (n=21)	15.1% (n=16)
We are interested in implementing Upstream but need help and support to do that (n=95)	35.8% (n=34)	36.8% (n=35)	27.4% (n=26)
Generally we are interested in TTA but are not sure where we can get it (n=93)	30.1% (n=28)	43.0% (n=40)	26.9% (n=25)

Key Findings:

- **High level of interest in learning more about Upstream (65%).**
- **Interest in implementing Upstream:** 36% reported that their organization is interested in implementing Upstream, but that they have capacity issues.
- 30% of respondents expressed **the need for training and technical assistance.**

Summary of Key Findings

The results of this needs assessment speak to the broad support within the youth homelessness sector for significant change in how we address youth homelessness. Over 150 participants from youth homelessness services across Canada largely agreed that there needs to be a shift towards the prevention of youth homelessness. Respondents also articulated the kinds of supports and capacity building they will need to successfully navigate this shift. Below is a summary of key findings.

There is Strong Support for Youth Homelessness Prevention

In the first section of this report, survey results indicated an incredibly high level of support for the prevention of youth homelessness. Over 82% of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed with the statement, "Prevention is necessary to solve youth homelessness" (a combined 89.4% reported "somewhat" or "strongly" agreeing). This figure was certainly surprising given the historical lack of investment and support in this area. Respondents strongly agreed that their organization and their community should do more in this area.

While most organizations have an interest in preventive interventions, they make clear that they lack capacity, resources and access to training and technical assistance.

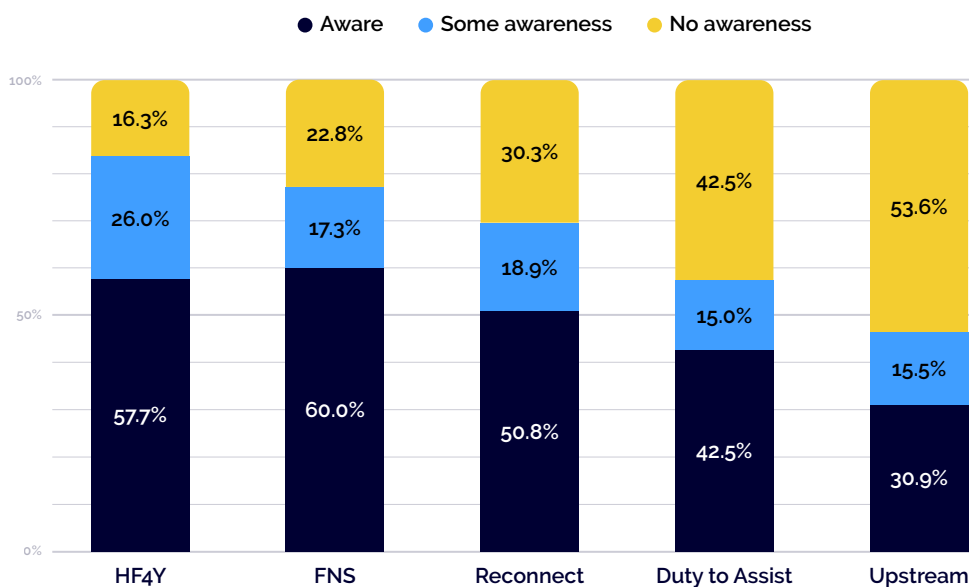
At the same time, research participants also identified a lack of capacity as interfering with their desire for more youth homelessness prevention. Only a quarter of respondents believed their organization had the resources, knowledge and capacity to invest in training and technical assistance. They expressed doubt that the shift to prevention could happen without support. They suggested the following:

- **Need for more information.** Over 65% of respondents indicated they needed more information and training on the five interventions.
- **Need for communities to do more.** A very high percentage of respondents (91.3%) identified that their community needs to do more in the area of youth homelessness prevention.
- **Need for Dedicated Funding.** Over 80% of respondents indicated the need for dedicated funds to support preventive interventions.
- **Need for quality training and technical assistance.** Three quarters of respondents identified that having access to quality training and technical assistance would be necessary for the successful implementation of preventive interventions.

Level of Awareness of Prevention Interventions

For the most part, the survey respondents demonstrated some level of awareness of the outlined prevention interventions. The results in Figure 8 below are drawn from the first two questions in the Commitment Curve that ask whether respondents agree with the statements: a) they are not aware of the preventive intervention in question, or b) they are aware of it but don't know much about it. The table also uses data from the remaining questions that indicate some level of awareness.⁵

Figure 8. Level of Participant Awareness of Selected Youth Homelessness Preventive Interventions



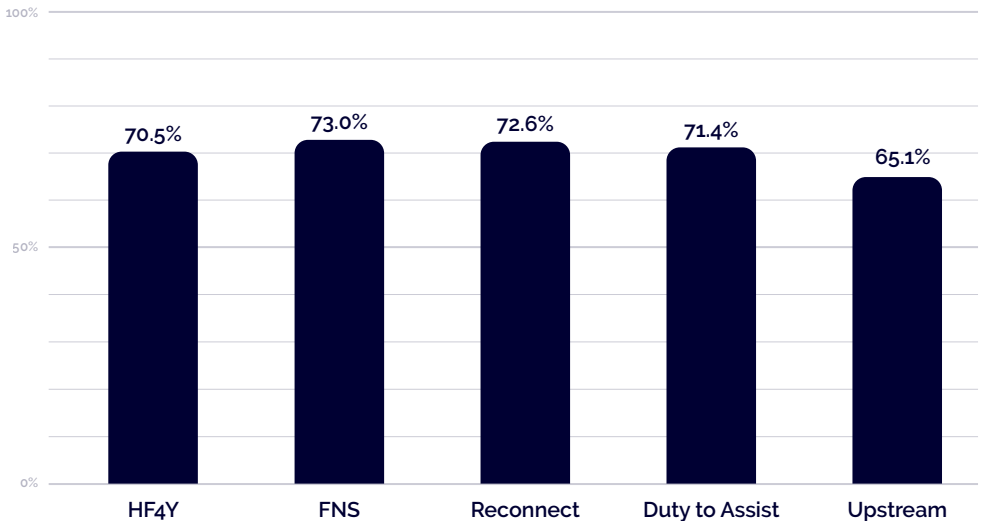
From Figure 8, it is evident that respondents showed greatest awareness of the interventions HF4Y, FNS and Reconnect. The interventions with the highest number of respondents who claimed they were “not aware” of them are Upstream (61.8%) and Duty to Assist (42.5%), in comparison to HF4Y (16.3%), FNS (22.8%) and Reconnect (30.3%). The lack of awareness about Upstream could be because MtS has not actively promoted it while waiting for the pilot projects to advance further. Additionally, no legitimate example of Duty to Assist in Canada exists.

5. Note that the data indicating awareness includes positive responses to the question “Organization has a clear understanding of (the intervention) but is not interest in implementing it”.

Room for Growth

It's encouraging to note that many people are eager to learn more about these interventions. According to Figure 9, the interest level in all five interventions, including Upstream and Duty to Assist, ranges from 65% to 73%. This represents a significantly higher level of interest in learning more than the percentage of respondents who claim to have little knowledge of these interventions or indicate that their organization is not interested in implementing them.

Figure 9. Percentage of organizations indicating that they would like to find out more about the interventions.



Of note is the very high level of interest (over 83%) who expressed in learning more about adapting HF4Y to meet the needs of Indigenous youth, particularly in designing and supporting an Indigenous-led approach to HF4Y.

Commitment Curve—Zone of Interest

When using the commitment curve in facilitating transformation, we can determine the degree to which an organization or community knows an intervention and is interested in implementing it someday. As interest increases, respondents move through these key steps:

- Identifying that a particular intervention will help their organization achieve their goals.
- Stating their interest in implementing a particular intervention, although they currently lack capacity.
- Actively planning to implement but need more support.
- Currently running a pilot of the intervention.
- Implementing the intervention as one of their core programs.⁶

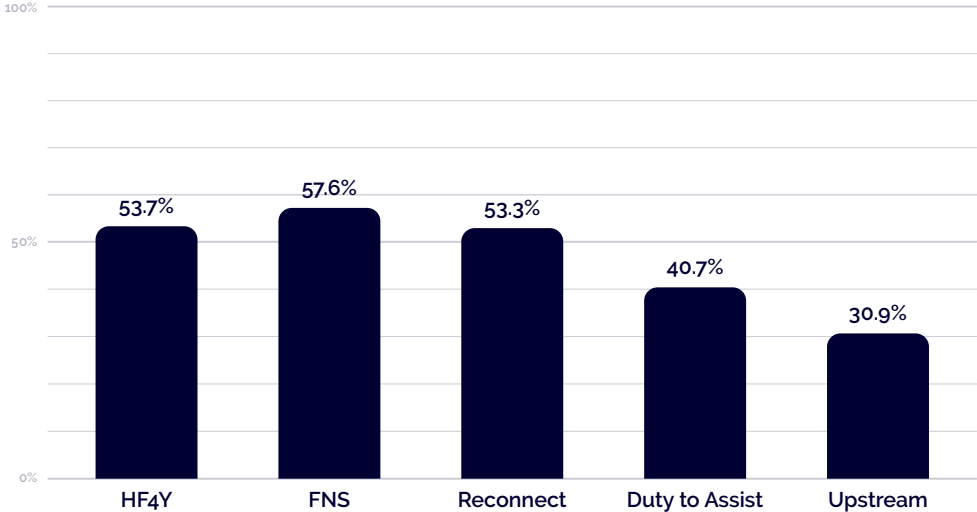
Organizations that affirm one or more of these factors along the commitment curve are in the “Zone of Interest” in that with the right capacity building and support, their intention is to implement one or more of the five preventive interventions.

A high percentage of respondents—62.7%—were in the Zone of Interest for at least one of the five identified prevention interventions. Figure 10 below breaks down those in the Zone of Interest by intervention.

The interventions that show the most interest and readiness are Housing First for Youth, Family and Natural Supports and Reconnect, though there is a significant level of interest in all five interventions.

6. A word of caution regarding the commitment curve's zone of interest: While the results give a rough indication of awareness and interest, respondents' degree of knowledge and understanding regarding how these interventions work in practice is unknown. For potential commitment curve exercises conducted in the future, scaled responses (ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”) will be used to get a better sense of the knowledge and understanding of these interventions.

Figure 10. Zone of Interest - Percentage of respondents who are inclined to implement the interventions



Organizational Capacity Building and Support

Throughout this report, the importance of capacity building and support has been highlighted. Many organizations are interested in preventive interventions. According to the Child Welfare League, “organizational capacity” refers to the resources needed for successful implementation of policies, programs, and practices. These resources include “financial assets, processes, institutional knowledge, leadership, and relationships.”⁷ We define capacity building as including a range of practices, such as:

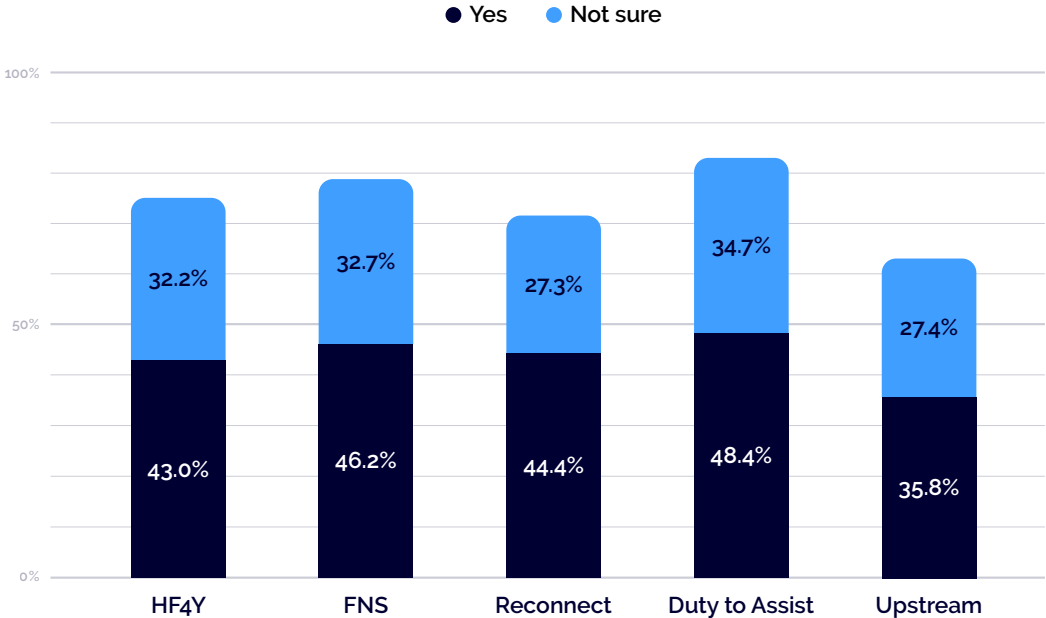
A high percentage of respondents —62.7%—were in the Zone of Interest for at least one of the five identified prevention interventions.

- **Enhancing understanding through knowledge development.** This includes helping organizations (including their boards, leadership, management and frontline workers) to deeply understand a specific preventive intervention and to utilize and mobilize the principles, concepts and practices of organizational capacity building.
- **Building organizational infrastructure and commitment** to utilize and mobilize the principles, concepts and practices of organizational capacity building.
- **Securing resources to support implementation**, including stable funding.
- **Holding staff trainings**—ranging from one-off events, to multiple events.
- **Offering technical assistance**—ongoing support and troubleshooting to assist organizations with the details of implementation.
- **Forming communities of practice**—building the sector's capacity to learn from each other.

Innovation and transformation cannot occur without the right organizational capacity. Figure 11 highlights the intersection of organizational desire and commitment to embrace any of the five interventions detailed in this report, along with acknowledging the necessity of building their organizational capacity to deliver on implementation.

7. See the [Child Welfare League's website](#).

Figure 11. Percentage of organizations interested in implementing the interventions but that need help and support to do that.



In total, 55.8% of organizations (73 unique organizations) expressed interest in implementing at least one of the five preventive interventions and identified they needed support. Depending on the intervention, between 35.8% and 46.2% of service providers expressed this view.

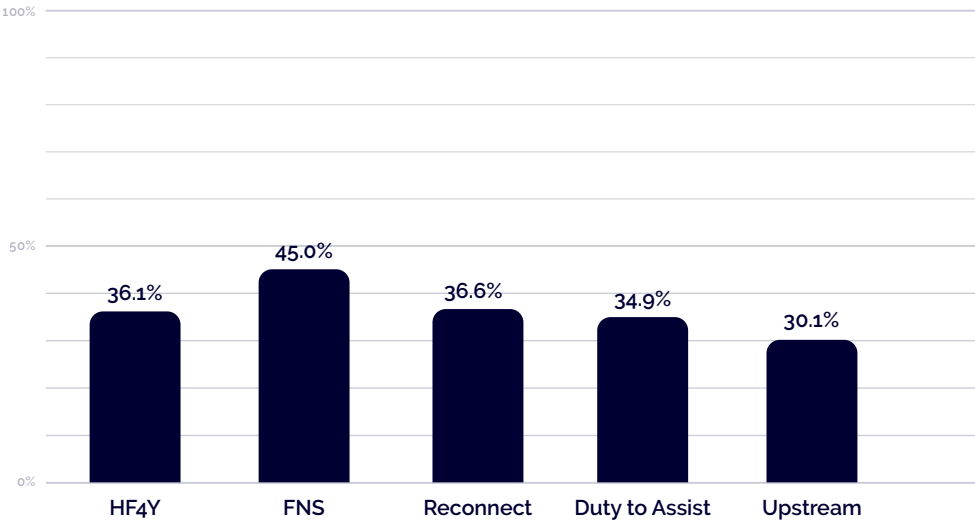
Many respondents expressed interest in more than one intervention, including 11.0% identifying two, 12.3% identifying three, 19.2% identifying four and 26% expressing interest in implementing all five.

Having identified a need for support, many organizations see their need for capacity building as focusing not only on receiving more information but also on training and technical assistance. A significant challenge is their lack of knowledge regarding where to find the appropriate support.

Interestingly, a sizeable number of service providers answered “not sure” of whether they were interested in implementing any of the interventions. While this indicates they are not ready to commit now, with the right information, engagement and support, many could eventually change their opinion to supporting implementation and obtaining training and technical assistance.

Figure 12 below identifies those organizations that are interested in implementation but are not sure where they can access training and technical assistance. The range of those identifying the need for TTA goes from 30.1% for Upstream to 45% for Family and Natural Supports. What is important is that across most of the interventions, the desire for TTA is over one third.

Figure 12. Percentage of organizations interested in training and technical assistance for the interventions but are not sure where to access it.



For those interested in implementing any one of these five preventive interventions, it is evident that a lack of understanding of where to access TTA becomes an important barrier to implementation.

Conclusion

This Youth Homelessness Prevention Needs Assessment aims to evaluate the level of understanding and support within Canada's youth homelessness sector for youth homelessness prevention. The assessment involved a thorough analysis of five preventive interventions that MtS has developed and refined over the last six years. These interventions include Housing First for Youth, Family and Natural Supports, Reconnect, Duty to Assist, and Upstream. A total of 153 youth homelessness service providers participated in the survey from various regions across Canada, and this report represents their collective voice on the need to support a shift to the prevention of youth homelessness. Overall, the results of this research lead us to the following conclusions:

→ **The sector is very supportive of youth homelessness prevention.**

The strong support for the idea that prevention is key to ending youth homelessness has implications for the work of youth homelessness serving organizations, community entities and all orders of government across Canada. Almost 90% of respondents agreed with the statement "Prevention is necessary to solve youth homelessness", suggesting that MtS' efforts to educate on this front have been convincing.

→ **There is a need for a targeted communications strategy focusing on preventive interventions.**

While the sector is on board with the idea of youth homelessness prevention, there is strong support among service providers for more information about specific preventive interventions. This includes not only those organizations that know little or nothing about such interventions, but also those that currently have some degree of knowledge and understanding. Depending on the intervention, between 65% and 73% of respondents positively indicated they would like to find out more about them.

Organizations are very likely to support these preventive interventions once they have a clear understanding of them.

Moreover, the percentage of respondents who are inclined towards implementing the interventions Housing First for Youth, Family and Natural Supports and Reconnect, as determined through the Commitment Curve, was between 53% and 58%.

All of this suggests the need for a more robust communications strategy or campaign specifically focused on and highlighting the specific interventions. Rather than one-off reports, MtS should carefully design and implement intervention-specific communications strategies that present new and practical content on an ongoing basis.

As indicated in the Zone of Interest in the Commitment Curve, MtS should prioritize its capacity-building efforts to support those interventions with the greatest degree of readiness. This means Housing First for Youth and Family and Natural Supports should be prioritized in the short and medium term, and Upstream and Duty to Assist in the medium and long term.

Additionally, MtS, working with the Government of Canada, should focus more on engaging and supporting community entities in implementing youth homelessness prevention, as in the context of Reaching Home's prioritization of "maximum flexibility" there has clearly not been sufficient positive investment in this area.

→ **Organizational Capacity Building is necessary.**

While a stronger communications strategy can help more organizations move up the commitment curve, it is also true that most organizations identified a lack of capacity and support for the implementation of preventive interventions. In Table 1, research participants agreed with the following statements:

- We need support as an organization to help shift to prevention (64.7%).
- We could do more homelessness prevention if we were provided with dedicated funds (81.2%).
- We could do more homelessness prevention if we had access to quality training and technical assistance (74% with over 47% "strongly agreeing").

Significantly, only a quarter felt their organization has funding for and interest in TTA on youth homelessness prevention interventions. In terms of capacity building, this means not only are resources needed, but organizations also need support in building their commitment to going in the direction of youth homelessness prevention.

Additionally, 91.3% identify that their community needs to do more in the area of homelessness prevention. As noted above, this latter point goes along with what we hear from youth homelessness serving organizations that their local community entities do not sufficiently prioritize either youth homelessness or prevention.

The fact that many organizations want training and technical assistance but do not know where to go is a significant insight from this report. Given the overwhelmingly resounding call for more support by the youth homelessness sector, it is recommended that the Government of Canada, working with provincial and territorial partners, invest in capacity building, and training and technical assistance to support the broader implementation of youth homelessness preventive interventions.

This report reflects the voice of the youth homelessness sector in Canada. The sector is interested in moving in the direction of more youth homelessness prevention. However, as they have made clear, they will need help to get there.