Transforming Our Response to Youth Homelessness Through Social Innovation

Five Critical Lessons from the Making the Shift Demonstration Projects

MAKING
THE SHIFT
youth homelessness
demonstration lab

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Acknowledgment

The Making the Shift Demonstrations Lab project is a true act of Collective Impact. Countless communities, organizations, and individuals have made this work possible through their hard work, wisdom, courage, and commitment to preventing and ending youth homelessness.

Thank you to the staff at the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home Canada for demonstrating true leadership when stewarding this project forward. The members of our research, program, and Indigenous advisories have brought passion and insight into this initiative and we are grateful for their ongoing expertise.

Finally, we would like to recognize and thank our community partners across the country, not only for the work that they do in supporting vulnerable young people, but for their dedication to Making the Shift.

Artwork provided from participants in the MtS DEMS sites of Calgary, Grand Prairie, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat.

canadian observatory on homelessness

A WAY HOME
VERS UN CHEZ-SOI
CANADA

Canada

From Shelter to Home

SHANNAH'S STORY OF RECONNECTION

Shannah's[1] parents, who have been separated for a while now, live in different cities. She gets along with her mom, but her partner — Steve — he's a different story. She just can't see eye-to-eye with him. Lately, things have been more heated than usual; she wants out. Without a relationship with her dad, her only option was the shelter, where she's been living for a few weeks now.

Barb, her family support worker, has been trying to get Shannah to reconnect with her paternal grandmother — who happens to live nearby. They have even been exploring the idea of Shannah moving in with her.

It hasn't been all smooth sailing. Shannah has not always been on board with the strict rules her grandmother has put in place. She feels restricted and like other people are trying to control her. While her grandmother is loving and supporting, she will not waiver on the boundaries she's set, and so Shannah has had to learn how to adapt to her new living situation.

When tensions run high between Shannah and her grandmother, Barb is able to step in to calm the situation. She's taught them how to diffuse heated situations, recognize and manage emotions, and how to have tough conversations without fighting.

It's been a few months now and things are getting better. Shannah's working on her goals: she's back at school, stopped drinking, and has built a nurturing and loving relationship with her grandmother. There's a lot more work to do, but Shannah feels like she has a future.

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1. This story is based on one youth's journey in Alberta. Any identifying information has been removed to protect their privacy.

On Campus for the First Time

MO'S JOURNEY BACK TO SCHOOL

Near the end of first year in university, Mo is kicked out of his home because of conflict with his parents, namely that his parents — who immigrated to Canada when he was young — do not support his career or social choices (e.g., drinking). He does not have the means to afford residence or rent an apartment. When he is no longer able to find friends' couches to sleep on, he starts sleeping in an adult shelter. Unable to keep up with coursework, he drops out of university. While staying in the shelter he is introduced to hard drugs and develops an addiction. Shortly into his stay he finds a rehabilitation program and completes a 30-day detox.

At exit, he has nowhere to stay and is trying to avoid the adult shelter at all costs to avoid relapse and easy access to drugs. The rehab program he graduated from connects him to some youth workers who get him on waitlists for programs. Because he is 20 turning 21, though, he is ineligible for many of the youth-specific supports and is on long wait lists for the few programs that exist for ages 21–25.
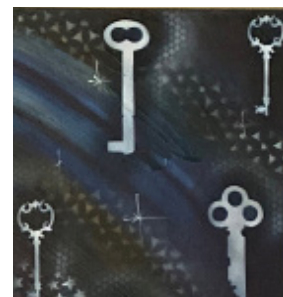
When Mo connects to the Housing First for Youth program, he is spending his nights sleeping in empty buildings at the local university, friends' couches, and a part-time youth shelter. Shortly after being connected to the program, Mo meets with his case manager weekly. The case manager helps him to find an apartment and enroll in employment programs.

Within the first year, Mo completes a co-op work program, which involves in-class work and placement at an autobody workshop. Following his placement, he starts full-time work in a mechanic shop. While working, his case manager assists him to apply to college. Now, Mo is living in a shared apartment with his friend and is currently completing his first semester for a two-year business diploma program. He works part time at a restaurant while in school and hopes to pursue his dream of starting his own business one day.
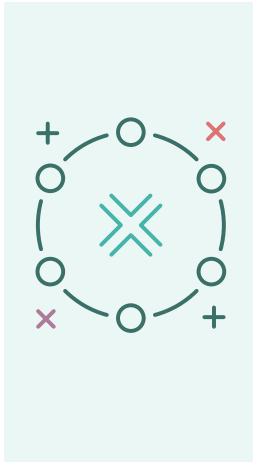
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PART 1
Charting a new path forward

USING SOCIAL INNOVATION TO DRIVE CHANGE

What does change look like? When it comes to preventing and ending youth homelessness, it looks a lot like the new relationship and stable housing Shannah has with her grandmother. For Mo, change looks like stable housing and stepping back onto campus for the first time.

These are the stories of change. Some are big, some are small, but each are successes in their own way and lead to the best possible outcomes for young people and their families—outcomes in the areas of well-being, social inclusion, education, employment, and housing stabilization.

ON A MISSION FOR CHANGE

Over the last three years, we have been on a journey of change and transformation in pursuit of a fundamentally different response to youth homelessness. We have called this collective work, "Making the Shift." It represents a paradigm shift in terms of our current response to youth homelessness: from crisis, that condemns young people to a life of hardship, to a prevention approach in which we meet young people (13 – 24 years old) where they are, providing service supports and access to stable, affordable, and appropriate housing to improve their overall quality of life and well-being.[2]

At the heart of this work is a commitment to the promises of social innovation: a practice and approach to social impact that channels knowledge, wisdom, local resources, and effort towards addressing complex social problems, such as youth homelessness. These so-called wicked problems demand a Collective Impact approach. To that end, we have assembled a coalition of individuals, communities, and organizations that represent the intersection of policy, practice, planning, and research.

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

As part of the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation lab, we have focused on three distinct demonstration projects, each representing a form of prevention as defined in *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*, including early intervention, housing stability, and sustained exists from homelessness:

1. Youth Reconnect (YR): A community-based early intervention and prevention program, YR provides supports for young people aged 13 to 24 years (and their families) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Young people are engaged through schools or other community services, in an effort to meet them "where they are at." The goal of Youth Reconnect is to help young people stay connected to their family, community and school, and strengthen connections to natural supports in order to reduce the risk of homelessness. Our demonstration project in Hamilton is helping to transform the youth homelessness system to focus on younger youth and their families at the point of crisis, thus preventing them from entering the youth homelessness shelter.

2. Housing First for Youth (HF4Y): A rights-based intervention for youth who are experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, HF4Y focuses on providing housing and client centred supports without preconditions in order to enhance stabilization. It is an adaptation of the adult Pathways Housing First model, with added provisions for the specific needs of developing adolescents and young adults. We have three Housing First for Youth demonstration projects. The Ottawa project has a special focus on youth with moderate acuity. In Hamilton, the project is Indigenous-led for Indigenous youth, and includes important programmatic elements focused on cultural reconnection and healing. The Toronto Housing First for Youth project focuses on youth exiting care.

3. Enhancing Family and Natural Supports (FNS): Emphasizing the important role that family and adult supports can and should play in all young people's lives, FNS is a program and/or intervention designed to prevent or end a young person's experience of homelessness through strengthening relationships between vulnerable young people and their support networks, including family. We have seven FNS projects across Alberta and one in Toronto. In each community the program is adapted for the local context and homelessness system (or lack thereof). The Toronto project is unique in that it works in partnership across the whole youth homelessness system to ensure that every young person that touches the system is offered these important supports.

Demonstration projects have been implemented in 12 sites in 10 communities across Alberta and Ontario (expanding to British Columbia and Newfoundland/Labrador in subsequent phases).

LOCATION	COMMUNITY LEADS	PROGRAM MODEL
Ottawa	Youth Services Bureau (YSB) in partnership with John Howard Society and The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)	Housing First for Youth
Toronto	WoodGreen Community Services	Housing First for Youth
Hamilton	Hamilton Regional Indian Centre (HRIC)	Housing First for Youth
Hamilton	Good Shepherd Centres	Youth Reconnect
Toronto	Covenant House Toronto	Family and Natural Supports
Calgary	Boys and Girls Club of Calgary	Family and Natural Supports
Lethbridge	Wood's Homes	Family and Natural Supports
Edmonton	Homeward Trust	Family and Natural Supports
Fort McMurray	Stepping Stones, Wood's Homes	Family and Natural Supports
Grande Prairie	Sunrise House, Grande Prairie Youth Emergency Shelter Society	Family and Natural Supports
Medicine Hat	Medicine Hat Community Housing Society	Family and Natural Supports
Red Deer	McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association	Family and Natural Supports

The delivery of services as well as the research and evaluation of these demonstration projects is funded by the Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) as part of the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS); it is led by A Way Home Canada (AWHC) and the Canadian observatory on Homelessness (COH); and powered by countless individuals working in policy, planning, research, and practice who have committed their careers to improving the well-being of youth. Using design thinking to expand our knowledge and understanding of innovative approaches to preventing and ending youth homelessness, our collective work has allowed us to identify, co-create, test, evaluate, and mobilize promising innovations in policy and practice. This work is ultimately about transforming systems to reduce youth homelessness and ensure the best possible outcomes for young people.

This collective work is challenging to say the least. At a minimum, it demands new approaches to collaboration, but also, and perhaps most importantly, a closer relationship between research and practice — using data and evidence to inform the adaption and adoption of new practices. It is at this intersection — between research and practice — where we believe change is possible.

MAKING THE CASE FOR A NEW APPROACH TO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Young people who are homeless are amongst the most vulnerable and marginalized populations in Canada and face incredible barriers to participation in the labour force and engagement in education. The first national study on youth homelessness, *Without a Home* (2016), identified that 40 percent of currently homeless youth had their first experience of homelessness before the age of 16. There are also links between poverty, disability, and homelessness. The Center for Justice and Social Compassion estimates that 45 percent of all people experiencing homelessness are disabled or diagnosed with a mental illness.[3] For youth, disability can often go unaddressed when accessing services.[4] However, failing to acknowledge and/or support young people who are living with a disability can contribute to further marginalization. For example, baseline results from the Ottawa HF4Y demonstration site show that 15 percent of the sample of youth report mental health as the main reason for unemployment.[5] This study found that 53 percent of homeless youth in Canada have dropped out of high school. Moreover, 50.5

3. Coplan, I. (2014). Myths of homelessness [Website]. Retrieved from *https://homelesshub.ca/blog/infographic-wednesday-myths-homelessness*

4. Stephanie Baker Collins, Ann Fudge Schormans, Lisa Watt, Becky Idems & Tina Wilson (2018) The invisibility of disability for homeless youth, Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless, 27:2, 99-109, DOI: 10.1080/10530789.2018.1480892

5. Making the Shift Demonstration Lab. Housing First for Youth (HF4Y): Ottawa Site Baseline Data Report presented at the HF4Y Community Partners Meeting, Ottawa Ontario.

percent are not in employment, education or training (NEET), a rate more than three times higher than the national average for young people 15–24 (12–14 percent).[6] Data from the Making the Shift *Housing First for Youth demonstration project* in Ottawa shows that more than 50 percent of young people experiencing housing instability entered the study without a high school education and only 17 percent reported some type of employment. Yet, these rates do not reflect young people's desire or motivation to engage, as 98 percent of young people who were not employed or enrolled in school indicated that they would like to find employment.[7] In other words, despite their circumstances, young people want to move forward.

The key point is that the lack of participation in employment and/or education is not a result of lack of motivation, but rather the broader effects of social and economic exclusion.

For any young person, *housing stability* is a necessary precondition for successful and ongoing labour force participation: "Being healthy, having adequate shelter, safety, food, and transportation, all make holding down a job easier by providing structure, security, and the ability to rest and recover so that one can get up and go to work day in, and day out."[8] Unfortunately, neither our response to homelessness in Canada, nor traditional approaches to supporting youth to engage in employment or education is able to meet the needs of young people who experience homelessness.

6. Stephen Gaetz, Bill O'Grady, Sean Kidd & Kaitlin Schwan. (2016). Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

7. Making the Shift Demonstration Lab. Housing First for Youth (HF4Y): Ottawa Site Baseline Data Report presented at the HF4Y Community Partners Meeting, Ottawa Ontario.

8. Stephen Gaetz & Bill O'Grady. (2013). *"Why Don't You Just Get a Job? Homeless Youth, Social Exclusion and Employment Training"* in Gaetz, Stephen, O'Grady, Bill, Buccieri, Kristy, Karabanow, Jeff, & Marsolais, Allyson (Eds.) (2013), Youth homelessness in Canada: Implications for policy and practice. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

In the past, the Canadian response to youth homelessness has relied on a patchwork of emergency supports that, in reality, commonly leave young people exposed to trauma, criminal exploitation (including sex trafficking), and problematic drug use, and these supports are rarely accessible to young teens, who are at great risk for school disengagement and homelessness. In this context, traditional approaches to engaging homeless youth in training, education, or employment have generally not been effective because the underlying factors that enable anyone to engage and sustain participation are absent.[9] Further, research shows that youth who are experiencing homelessness require more than just housing to improve their quality of life.[10]

CONNECTING HOUSING, EDUCATION, AND EMPLOYMENT TO YOUTH WELL-BEING

To achieve better outcomes for young people, we need to think about well-being holistically, which necessarily includes access to affordable, appropriate, stable, and safe housing. For example, the ESDC Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) acknowledges the need to work with young people where they are in life and provide flexible and holistic services to develop the skills and work experience to successfully transition in the labour market. In particular, the YESS addresses barriers to youth employment by prioritizing services for youth experiencing homelessness or precarious housing, Indigenous youth, youth who have left high school early, recent immigrant youth, youth who are members of visible minority groups, and single-parent youth, among others.

The underlying assumption of Making the Shift Demonstration Lab is that young people need to have their basic needs met before they can focus on longer-term goals, such as education, employment, and social integration. Through our social innovation approach, we are testing program models that recognize the importance of meeting young people where they are at (geographically, emotionally, culturally, etc.) and offering supports that are tailored to their needs. These programs provide access to interventions and supports that will allow youth to acquire the skills, learning experiences, and opportunities they need to stabilize their housing, enhance their well-being, and make progress in education, employment, or training.

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9. Ibid., p.244

10. Jeff Karabanow, Alexa Carson, & Philip Clement (Eds.) (2010). Leaving the Streets: Stories of Canadian Youth. Winnipeg: Fernwood. See also Naomi Thulien, Denise Gastaldo, Stephen Hwang & Elizabeth McCay. (2018). "The elusive goal of social integration: A critical examination of the socio-economic and psychosocial consequences experienced by homeless young people who obtain housing." Canadian journal of public health 109(1). DOI: 10.17269/s41997-018-0029-6

These programs will lead to better outcomes, and we are already seeing promising stories of youth re-engaging in education and employment. For example, since launching the Housing First for Youth program in Ottawa just over a year and a half ago, six young people have been supported to enroll in post-secondary education, one young person is enrolled for the winter semester, and two more young people are exploring registering. That is nine young people who identified completing their post-secondary education as a goal they wanted to achieve, and who are now working to accomplish that goal.

LEARNING OUT LOUD

Showing your work, so to speak, can be uncomfortable for organizations who are accustomed to sharing only success stories with community partners and funders. However, the research to practice work that we have engaged in over the past three years has instead focused on reflexively modifying practice based on lessons learned on the ground, as well as through research and evaluation, which requires a fundamental shift in the way we approach the intersection of research and practice.

FROM	TO
Evaluating programs intermittently for short-term goals	Co-developing and refining programs by asking what works and how
Focusing exclusively on empirical evidence	Balancing the need for empirical data with practice-based knowledge
Publishing findings only when they have been peer reviewed	Sharing stories and outcomes regularly to contribute to the continuous improvement of the program
Finding the "right" answer	Being open to a variety of solutions that may change over time and according to context.
Standardizing and codifying practice	Reflexively adapting practice based on lessons learned on the ground

We have referred to this style of working as "building a plane while in mid-flight", which demands that project partners are able to tolerate a degree of uncertainty and ambiguity that they may have historically avoided. Working collectively, researchers and practitioners iteratively modify programmatic interventions according to feedback received from frontline staff and youth. Evaluations of each of the interventions is carried out to identify best practices that can in turn be scaled to other jurisdictions and contexts.

We are making progress towards understanding what kinds of programs and practices lead to better outcomes for young people who face barriers to education and employment.

We are tracking progress in the following outcome areas:

Housing stability: This domain encompasses obtained housing, maintained housing, enhanced knowledge and skills regarding housing and independent living, as well as reduced stays in emergency shelters, in order to prevent or reduce the risk of a return to homelessness.

Health and well-being: This domain refers to enhanced access to services and supports, improved physical health, obtained food security, improved mental health, reduced harms related to substance use, enhanced personal safety, improved self-esteem, healthier sexual health practices, and enhanced resilience.

Education and employment: This domain includes established goals for education and employment, enhanced participation in education, enhanced educational achievement, enhanced participation in training, enhanced labour force participation, and improved financial security.

Enhanced essential skills: This domain includes improvements in reading, document use, writing, numeracy, oral communication, digital literacy, and collaboration with others.

Literacy, numeracy, and essential skills: This domain encompasses established personal goals, improved life skills, increased access to necessary non-medical services, and addressed legal and justice issues.

Connection to community, family, and social inclusion: This domain includes built and/or reconnected with natural supports, enhanced family connections, enhanced connections to communities of the young person's choice, strengthened cultural engagement and participation, and engaged in meaningful activities.
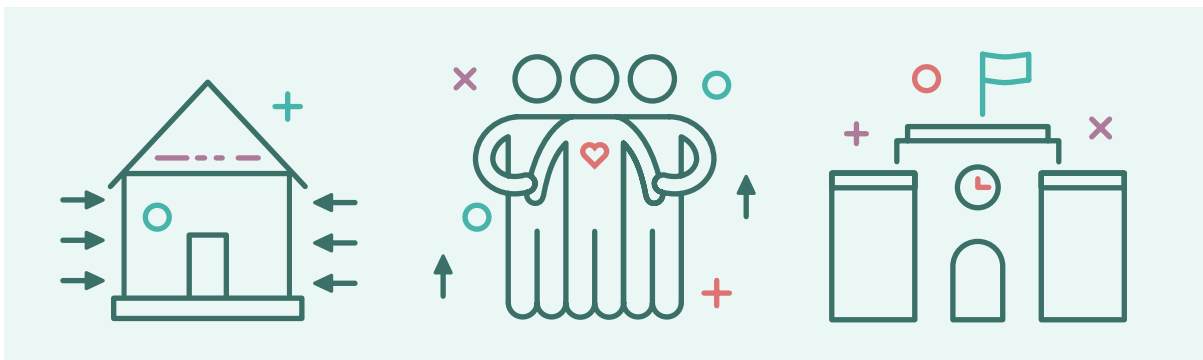
The interventions appear to be improving outcomes for young people in a variety of areas, including housing stability, health and well-being, connection to family and natural supports, and participation in the labour market, as well as increases in educational attainment.

70% of young people have strengthened family relations, with 71% having strengthened community relations

74% of youth involved in programming have improved health and well-being

96% of youth involved in the program are employed or self-employed and/or have returned to school

78% of youth who have participated in programming have achieved housing stability
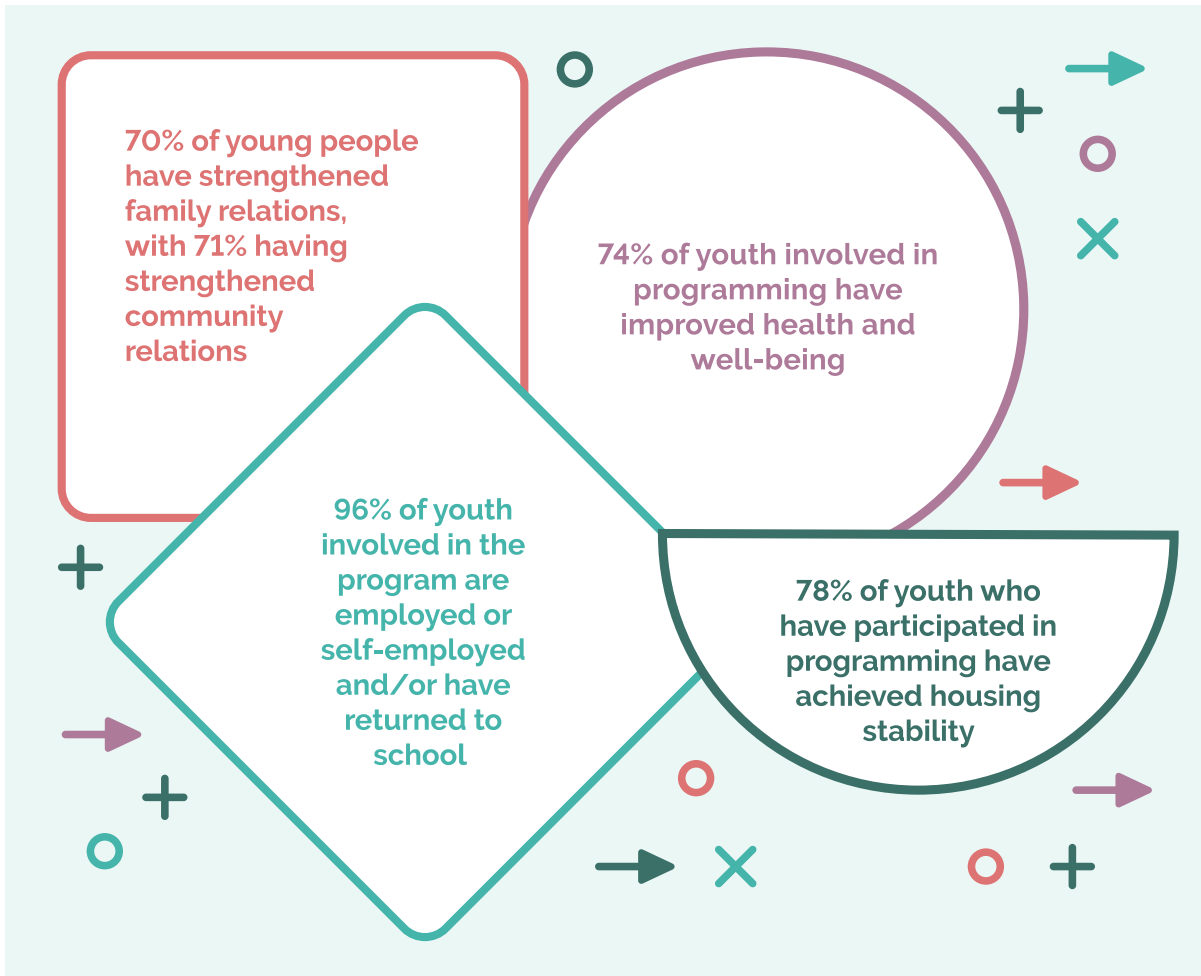
Participant level outcomes as reported by participating MtS DEM sites.

We've also learned a lot about how to do social innovation by working with community partners who are delivering MtS programs in local communities across Canada. Now that we have been doing this work for three years, we've learned some important lessons.

PART 2 Five Lessons Learned

What follows are five lessons that emerged from the project that highlight how to do this work well. Over the past three years, we've learned the importance of developing and refining emerging program models from the ground up, what it takes for communities to do Collective Impact, the great appetite out there for technical and training assistance, how to navigate system and structural rigidity, and finally, how to foster a different kind of leadership.
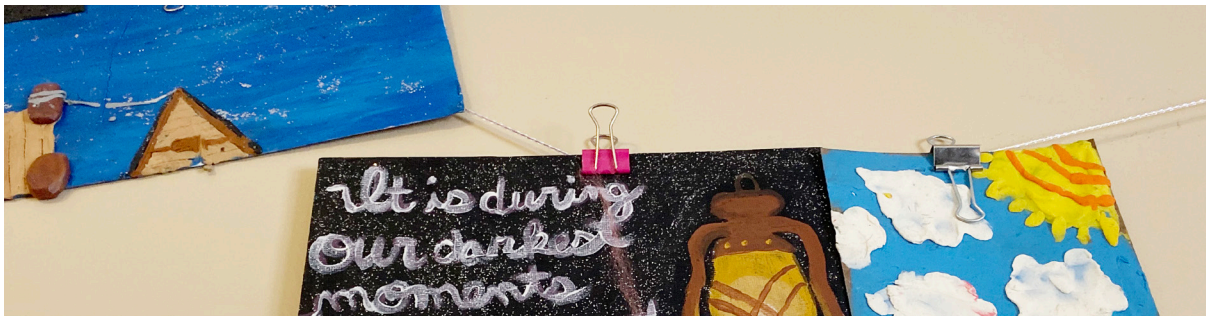
1. DEVELOPING AND REFINING PROGRAM MODELS

The programmatic elements of each of the demonstration projects are based on existing research and promising practices in Canada and across the globe, including the *At Home/Chez Soi Housing First study*, *the Housing First for Youth Program Model Guide* (developed in consultation with practitioners and youth with lived experience in Canada, Australia, the United States, and Europe) as well as Reconnect and Family and Natural Supports programs in Canada and Australia. However, we did not anticipate the degree to which we would have to invest significant resources in articulating and operationalizing program models according to the needs and dynamics of each participating community.

Three themes emerged from this work of local adaption and interpretation that are important to consider when doing this work in the future:

1. Respecting, identifying, and adapting local practices: We worked with local community partners to identify gaps in training, knowledge, and practice that would need to be addressed to maximize the effectiveness of interventions. This included the creation of operation manuals, case management tools, the development of technical training curricula, and in-person training. During this process, we learned that some demonstration sites had developed their own practices in the form of tools, techniques, and approaches to case management that they had inherited from programs they had worked on in the past or developed in response to perceived gaps in the program model.

The challenge is that these resources and practices had not necessarily been designed with youth in mind. There was some initial resistance to the idea of adopting new tools and practices, even if they were more closely aligned with the philosophy of the model being employed. The lack of consistent case management tools and practice posed challenges for the research team when evaluating and measuring program success.

2. Mobilizing technical and training resources to enhance local practice and improve community and staff literacy of the program models: In response to the need for program consistency, while at the same time remaining open to ongoing program iteration, we mobilized our internal technical and training resources to create case management tools and training that were designed specifically to operationalize the values of HF4Y. The practice and research teams created opportunities for program leads and staff to provide constructive feedback on tool updates, while at the same time making the case for the need for consistency. At the time of writing, we are undertaking a similar process to update, streamline, and improve the effectiveness of Family and Natural Supports and Youth Reconnect case management tools.

3. Finding a common language is essential for nurturing and building a community of practice: The introduction of program guides, manuals, and in the case of HF4Y, consistent case management tools, was essential for establishing a common mental framework of each program. Program teams and researchers were able to speak the same language and support one another in a more meaningful way because their work was now connected even though they were in different communities. In addition, the adaptations for the specific subpopulations were integrated into standardized tools. The intent was to ensure that we were not dictating, but instead collaborating with those that were leading the work in their own communities, knowing best what youth and families need.

What this means going forward: It cannot be overstated – trust is a vital currency when it comes to social innovation. If we had not built relationships early on in the process it would have been difficult to implement the necessary changes to bring greater consistency to program models. Community partners had to trust that we would carefully consider their feedback and, where appropriate, incorporate this feedback. As we look to the next phase of this work, we are working to enhance our technical training and assistance to address the needs of Youth Reconnect and Family and Natural Supports sites.

2. SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES
TO ACHIEVE COLLECTIVE IMPACT

When launching Making the Shift, we intentionally took a Collective Impact approach. This meant working alongside community partners to identify opportunities for them to contribute according to their strengths. These relationships proved invaluable when selecting demonstration sites and preparing them for implementation. This on-the-ground work has taught us the importance of ensuring communities are ready for the work that is required to enable implementation.

Learning to mediate long-standing local relationships, alliances, and tensions that have emerged over time: Prior to the launch of Making the Shift, communities were engaged in work to address youth homelessness. Over time, a variety of committees, working groups, and formal and informal governance structures have emerged to coordinate, support, and shepherd this work. The legacy decisions made by these coordinating bodies often dictate how local organizations work together on joint projects. The introduction of new initiatives that are intended to disrupt the status quo can inadvertently disrupt existing relationships or, in other cases, reactivate long-standing local grievances. Our unique roles as a funder, program experts, and researchers, has meant that we have had to facilitate and mediate conflicts between local organizations as they work together to make decisions about how to administer, coordinate, and manage the demonstration projects.

Knowing when and how to push against the status quo is essential for seeding the ground for innovation: Introducing new approaches to work and practice can seem threatening for organizations and individuals who may be accustomed to particular ways of working. Our job has been to celebrate the hard work at the front lines, while at the same time pushing community partners to watch out for opportunities to promote "better practices." Practically, this has included hosting open and generative forums, such as monthly community of practice calls for program staff to discuss challenges they are experiencing in their day-to-day work. The topics discussed in these conversations have been invaluable for identifying opportunities for innovation. For instance, several of the organizations participating in Making the Shift include unionized environments which can make providing 24-hour support challenging. Such instances require creative thinking and an ability to challenge the way things have historically been done. It also means working with senior management within partnering organizations to help them reconsider long-standing policies, re-activate and/or nurture inter-agency relationships, and adopt strategic priorities that align with each of the program models.

Articulating a common understanding of "readiness" could help identify opportunities to prepare communities prior to implementation: Getting community buy-in to host a demonstration project was the first step in preparing communities for implementation. However, we have since learned that having a common definition of "readiness" is also necessary. This could take the form of a common checklist that addresses the following questions: Is the community willing to support the program and recommend the services being offered to other community partners? Is there a common understanding of the program model and underlying philosophy? Does the agency have the internal capacity and resources to support staff in launching the program? Is the host organization willing to adapt its policies and practices in order to ensure fidelity to the prevention program model? How does the program model fit within the homelessness serving system (in communities where there is one) and its existing tools and norms?

For example, some communities initially believed that they were already delivering HF4Y programing. However, evaluations of each program identified gaps in service delivery that contravene the principles of HF4Y, such as not employing a harm reduction approach or discharging young people from the program. We have since worked with these organizations to build out action plans to support them in bringing their programs into alignment with the program model.

What this means going forward: Nurturing, sustaining, and operationalizing a community of practice will be key to replicating and scaling this work. Program staff and senior leaders need to feel confident that they can rely on the advice, mentorship, and support of like-minded professionals. In the next phase of Making the Shift, we have prioritized enhancing linkages between our efforts to build a community of practice and technical training and assistance.

3. ENABLING TECHNICAL TRAINING AND ASSISTANCE TO BUILD CAPACITY

Supporting youth and families using new program models requires a huge shift in the way organizations and staff operate. In order to do the work well and ensure program model fidelity, communities requested greater technical training and assistance from the Making the Shift staff.

The following themes emerged from this learning:

Organizations need support implementing policies and practices that allow programs to thrive: Organizations had to adapt their policies and procedures to reflect a trauma-informed approach and create environments with fewer barriers for young people so that programs run smoothly. For example, in the case of Housing First for Youth programs, finance departments had to understand the need for speedy processing of rent supplements so that young people could secure housing in a difficult market.

This type of service delivery is new and different, requiring extensive support for supervision and case consultation: At an organizational level, many leaders and program managers were new to this type of service delivery. As a result, there were a range of topics that staff wanted training and support on, such as youth choice in practice, harm reduction, peer support supervision, family mediation, financial literacy, etc. that the organization may not have been familiar with or supported. In addition, there may not have been clarity or a deep understanding at the front line or management level about how the program model works. There was also a great need for designing case management documentation and protocols that MtS Demonstration Projects had to fulfill, such as intake and assessment forms, case notes, safety protocols, staff supervision, in addition to case consultations about difficult situations. Part of this effort to support a shift to a new way of working has included helping program staff understand how to interpret and operationalize the concept of youth choice. This has required striking a delicate balance between intervening to reduce harm, while at the same time, offering youth a range of clear options to choose from when it comes to their health and well-being.

Staff turnover in the sector means training has to be done differently:
With turnover in the sector a common reality, trainings cannot be one off, but rather are needed on an ongoing basis to ensure new members of the team are trained and equipped with the education needed to support youth in the best ways possible. As a result, MtS needed to become more innovative and create trainings that could be available to individuals online. We also tailored trainings so that they can be delivered by a program lead, known as "Train the Trainer," so that agencies have the means to train their staff internally.

What this means going forward: While organizations and communities required more support than we had initially anticipated, twelve demonstration projects across Ontario and Alberta are now delivering higher quality services through our collective efforts. This would have been impossible without the input of each community site and the reciprocal nature of these relationships. Two heads are better than one, as the saying goes, and our community of practice has leveraged the expertise of many towards solving the complex problem of youth homelessness. Moving forward, we will continue to facilitate conversations around practice "hot spots" in our communities of practice and deliver trainings on program models.

4. OVERCOMING SYSTEM AND STRUCTURAL RIGIDITY TO SUPPORT SOCIAL R&D

So much of what has come to define our response to youth homelessness is a by-product of legacy systems, processes, practices, and unnecessary bureaucracy. At times we have stumbled over and butted up against these barriers. However, we have also worked closely with community and funding partners to find mutually beneficial solutions.

Some system rigidity that we have encountered includes:

Government identification requirements remain a persistent barrier to accessing services: Young people report being asked to provide government-issued ID when signing up for programs. For a range of reasons, accessing this documentation has proven difficult for young people with lived experience. We also know that lacking this identification can make navigating between service agencies and between systems challenging. We have encountered similar barriers within our work.

Young people were asked to complete a Personal Identification Form (PIF) as part of the program registration process. The form asks youth to provide their social insurance number — necessary information for tracking outcomes. For demonstration sites, however, the PIF serves as a reminder of the many structural barriers young people face when accessing supports. Getting youth to provide a SIN number has proven difficult as many do not have formal government identification. A completed PIF is not a precondition for program participation; but when it comes to tracking outcomes, the experiences of youth without a PIF may not be accurately represented within government-managed outcomes data. We have worked with ESDC and local partners to identify workarounds to this challenge, including the consideration of eliminating the PIF as a requirement for subsequent phases of this project. The MtS research team is implementing a mixed-method evaluation process to ensure we are capturing the experiences of youth involved in the program, regardless of the government identification they possess.

Regional differences in cost of living requires creative approaches to finding and accessing affordable housing: Across Canada there is a lack of affordable housing. In large urban communities, in particular, finding housing that does not exceed 30 percent of a youth's income (the percentage that is recommended in the HF4Y program guide) has been challenging. Of the units that are available, landlords are reluctant to rent to young people because they view them as "risky" tenants. As a consequence, finding housing has taken up a large percentage of case counsellors' time. For those organizations who do not have access to a housing worker, they have had to quickly acquire the skills needed to navigate a competitive rental market. In some cases, they have taken steps to strengthen relationships with landlords, such as educating them on why housing is a human right. In Hamilton, for instance, the Endaayaang program administered by the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre (HRIC) has worked with a local landlord to renovate a large house to accommodate eight youth. The house has also been modified to allow for onsite programming and case management. Other sites have explored partnerships with private developers.

What this means going forward: An "all-hands-on deck" approach is needed to address systems barriers and the current lack of affordable housing in Canada, meaning both the private and public sectors have a role to play. More work needs to be done to support local communities in better connecting with landlords and real estate agents to find secure housing for young people.

5. FOSTERING A DIFFERENT KIND OF LEADERSHIP

We are a funder, practice leaders, and researchers: This project has given us the opportunity to be flexible and challenge our assumptions about leadership. The project is co-led by A Way Home Canada and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, comprised of practice experts and researchers. We are also acting in the role of the funder to local demonstration site project partners. Through this process we have created close relationships that enable authentic, transparent conversations and which allow communities to move and reach for the best outcomes for youth and their families. At the same time, we have taken a step back to allow programs to make adaptations to their service delivery as long as the programs are staying true to the program models, outcomes, and core principles.

Indigenous research and practice has to be led by Indigenous peoples and knowledge: We are honoured to partner with the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre and support them in their efforts to adapt Housing First for Youth for Indigenous youth, known as Endaayaang. From the beginning, we knew that this program could not be evaluated using the research method of a randomized controlled trial and that any evaluation of the program would need to look different than our other HF4Y projects. To that end, Making the Shift convened an Indigenous Advisory Group to ensure that the research framework was in line with Indigenous knowledge and research protocols and in February 2018 partnered with the Waakebiness Bryce Institute for Indigenous Health at the University of Toronto to oversee this work. The Waakebiness Bryce Institute has developed an evaluation framework using mixed-methods design that emphasizes co-construction and meaning-making in context and is grounded in Indigenous knowledges and ethics. Still, the process has not always been easy. There has been some discussion about the best way to embed researchers in programming, including nurturing relationships between researchers and youth, while at the same time, fulfilling the need to conduct rigorous research.

What this means going forward: In our manifold role as funder/practice leader/researchers we have had to do a lot of internal reflection to identify gaps in our skills and acknowledge the limits of our expertise. This introspection, though, has proven useful in identifying community organizations and individuals whose skills, knowledge, and experience strengthens and enhances our collective efforts. There is no place for ego in this work. In addition, we've grown to understand that ALL of the program models and our collective efforts are enhanced by adopting Indigenous ways of knowing into our work.

MOVING FORWARD

As we have learned over the past three years of seeding and supporting social innovation, it demands strong relationships, a willingness to get it wrong, and a commitment to working reflexively to adapt practice in response to lessons learned, research, and evaluation. The primary objectives of Phase One of the Making the Shift Demonstration Projects (2017–2020) were focused on setting up the project as a Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab, supporting communities to implement the program models as demonstration projects, wrapping rigorous research and evaluation around the projects, and supporting community partners to get the best possible outcomes for young people and their families.

Phase Two of the Making the Shift Demonstration Projects (2020–2023) will focus on working with communities to ensure the sustainability of their programs beyond YESS funding. We're working with funders and policy makers in other orders of government to enable buy-in and support. In addition, we'll be launching enhanced training and technical assistance and communities of practice for demonstration project partners and other community partners working to implement these models. In the coming months we will have much to report out on regarding the data our researchers are collecting.

Making the Shift is a living example of how to employ the principles of social innovation to address complex social issues. The knowledge and evidence developed through this work will contribute to the systems transformation necessary to truly prevent and end youth homelessness, thus ensuring the best possible outcomes for young people – including attachment to employment and education – and their families.