

Action Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Rural Wellington County

January 22, 2015

PREPARED FOR



**community
resource centre**

OF NORTH AND CENTRE WELLINGTON



PREPARED BY



TaylorNewberry
CONSULTING

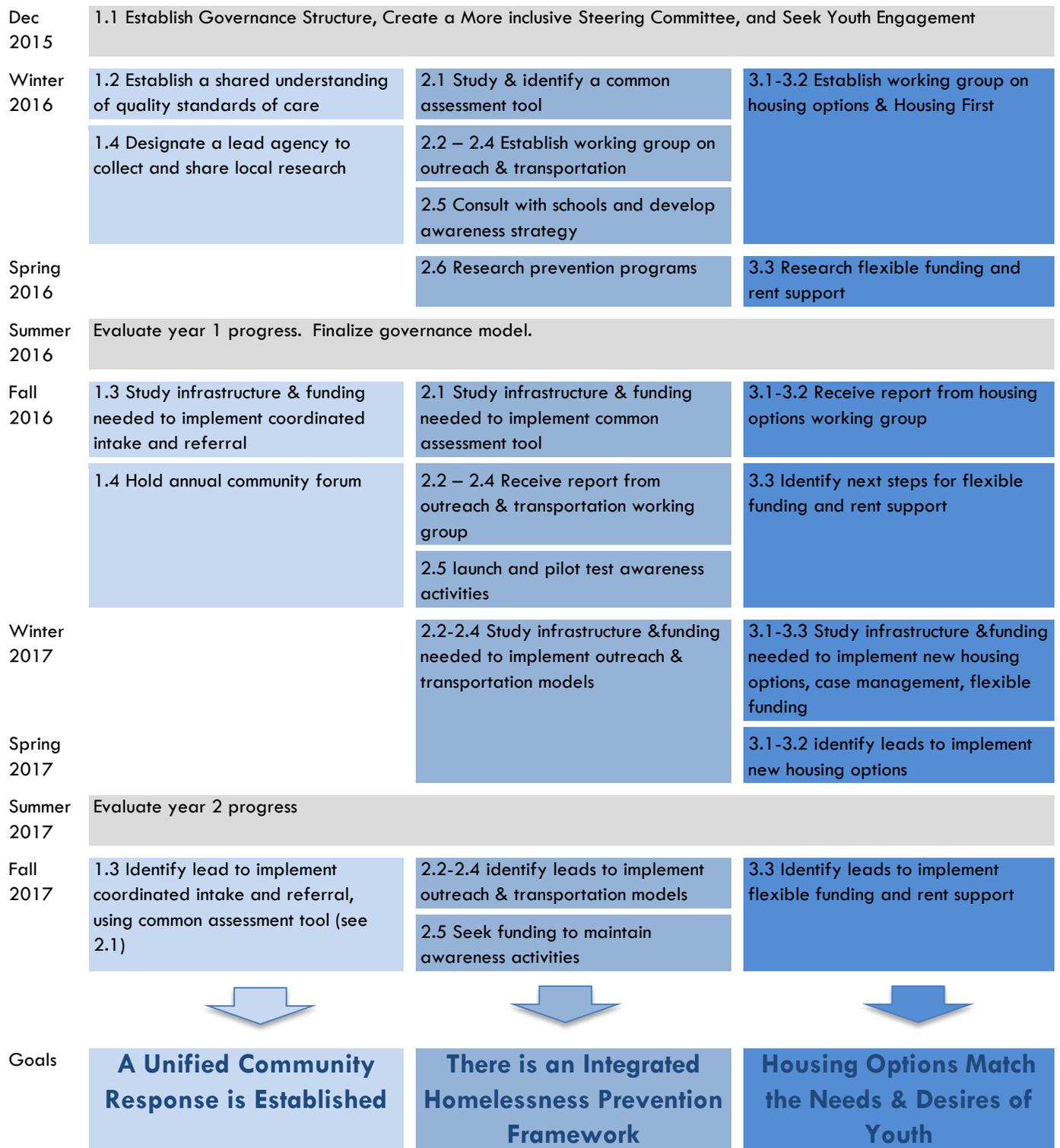
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The Action Plan to End Rural Youth Homelessness: At a Glance



Action Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Rural Wellington County

Youth homelessness is a challenging, multi-faceted problem. Addressing it effectively requires collaboration among a range of different partners who share a deep understanding of the local context. The need for a grounded local response is especially strong in a rural community, where strategies developed and evaluated in large urban centres may not translate. This action plan is a comprehensive strategy designed to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness in rural Wellington County. It draws on the lessons learned in other communities where possible, but it is built around concrete recommendations that emerged out of consultation with local youth and service providers.

This plan builds on past efforts. For example, the 2011 Rural Homelessness Study prepared for the County of Wellington¹ flagged the unique needs of youth experiencing homelessness. It recommended the creation of safe shelter alternatives as well as opportunities to play and develop life skills. In response, a group of service providers came together to address the issue and applied to participate as one of six communities in the Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness Program (MLC).² Once selected to be an MLC community, the Community Resource Centre of North and Centre Wellington, Wyndham House, and the County of Wellington were tasked with leading the MLC program in Wellington County, resulting in the Action Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Rural Wellington County.

The MLC is a national program that supports small and medium-sized communities with resources to develop community plans to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness. The MLC program began their national collaboration in 2012 with the following founding partners; Eva's Initiatives, The National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, The Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and Raising the Roof with funding from the Catherine Donnelly Foundation. In 2015 the MLC founding partners formed a national coalition to end youth homelessness. The coalition, called A Way Home: Working Together to End Youth Homelessness³, is committed to bringing effective community planning, service integration and alignment of strategies and resources for maximum impact at the national, provincial and community levels.

Definition of Youth Homelessness

The following definition of youth homelessness, provided by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH)⁴, was used to guide the development of this Action Plan:

“the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges and/or racism and

¹ Grodzinski, E., Sutherns, R., Londerville, J., & Bentham, C. (2011). *Rural Homelessness Study*. County of Wellington.

² These organization are referred to as the “current steering committee” in the rest of this report.

³ www.awayhome.ca

⁴ Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. (2012). *Canadian Definition of Homelessness*.

discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing”

The COH further provides a typology of homelessness to account for the range of physical living situations:

- **Unsheltered**, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation;
- **Emergency Sheltered**, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence;
- **Provisionally Accommodated**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, and finally,
- **At Risk of Homelessness**, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards.

Within this report other definitions of homelessness are utilized⁵:

- **Relative Homelessness**, referring to those who are living sheltered in precarious, informal, or transitional spaces, or living in substandard conditions at risk of housing loss (e.g. couch surfing, staying with a friend)
- **Absolute Homelessness**, referring to those who are staying in emergency shelter or living unsheltered in spaces not intended for living (e.g. on the street or rough sleeping)

Youth Homelessness in a Rural Context

In Ontario, youth who live in rural and remote communities can face unique challenges.⁶ To provide context for this Action Plan it is useful to understand how rural homelessness differs from homelessness in urban environments. While causes of homelessness (e.g., family breakdown, mental health and/or substance abuse issues, poverty), are similar between urban and rural areas such as Wellington County, there are a number of issues that differentiate homelessness in a rural context. The Rural Homelessness Study (2011) provides an overview of these issues, which are also made reference to within specific Action Strategies identified in this Action Plan. To summarize:

- Many homeless individuals experiencing homelessness in rural areas are considered to be part of the “hidden homeless” (e.g., couch surfing) which can challenge outreach services and make identifying the extent of homelessness in a community difficult
- Communities have little awareness or understanding of rural homelessness
- Public transportation is limited, and this can act as a barrier to attending appointments and maintaining employment in rural contexts where individuals often have to travel great distances to access services or attend work
- Rural areas are underserved in terms of supports and programs
- Affordable rental housing is sparse and the cost of living (especially with respect to food and transportation) is high

⁵ Grodzinski, E., Sutherns, R., Londerville, J., & Bentham, C. (2011). *Rural Homelessness Study*. County of Wellington.

⁶ Government of Ontario (2014). *Stepping up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario's Youth Succeed*.

- Individuals from rural areas often hold strong ties with their home community. This can have both positive and negative implications and can act as a deterrent to leaving.

The Local Research Process

Consultations with Youth

Beginning in November of 2013, the project hired a consultant who trained and hired youth researchers, and then conducted a series of focus groups, interviews and surveys with rural youth in the County. More than 60 youth took part. Themes from these interviews informed a 2014 report that included a number of action recommendations.⁷ A number of these action recommendations are reflected in this current action plan.

Point in Time Count

As the development of this plan was underway, the County of Wellington administered a Youth Point in Time (PIT) Count to provide a snapshot of the numbers and demographics of those experiencing homelessness on a particular day of the year within a specified time frame. This particular PIT count was conducted with the help of service providers who anonymously counted youth however there are limitations to the methodology. Specifically, it is possible that some youth may have been counted more than once, and/or the hidden homeless and youth who did not reach out to service providers may have been missed. The results of the PIT Count in April 2014 show that 29 youth were identified by service providers as experiencing homelessness during the specified time period. The majority of these youth were female and most were experiencing relative homelessness. The results of the count are shared in the table below.

Table 1: Number of Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Wellington County on the Evening of April 15th to the Morning of April 16th, 2014

Gender	
Male	9
Female	18
Other	2
Status	
Relative homelessness	26
Absolute Homelessness	3

In 2015 the PIT Count was broadened to include the entire geographic area (Guelph and Wellington). Results show that a total of 92 youth were identified by service providers as experiencing homelessness during the specified time period. The majority of these youth were male, and the majority were experiencing relative homelessness.

⁷ Young, R.P. (2014). *Towards Addressing Youth Homelessness in the County of Wellington*.

Table 2: Number of Youth Experiencing Homelessness in Guelph & Wellington (The County of Wellington conducted a Point In Time to measure rural youth homelessness) on the Evening of April 15th to the Morning of April 16th, 2015.

Gender	
Male	51
Female	39
Other	2
Status	
Relative homelessness	73
Absolute Homelessness	19

Data Analysis and Consultation with Service Providers

Recommendations from these other sources were refined into a preliminary action plan in the spring of 2015. Existing local reports and resources from other communities were first reviewed and then sent to the committee for examination. Next a community meeting was held with representatives from:

- The County of Wellington
- Wyndham House
- Community Resource Centre of North and Centre Wellington
- Guelph and Wellington Poverty Task Force
- Guelph Family Health Teams
- A Way Home
- Youth Resiliency
- United Way of Guelph and Wellington
- 2nd Chance Employment Counselling

Discussion focused on selecting implementation steps for each action strategy. Finally, all of the information gathered from the community meetings was analyzed and incorporated into the existing Action Plan.

Introduction to the Action Plan

Key findings from a number of reports and local research projects have been used to guide the development of the Action Plan. These findings, cited in the footnotes, are incorporated in the following sections to illustrate the importance of each of the action strategies. Findings from the youth surveys and focus groups described above are integrated to show that in many instances, the strategies are substantiated by the experiences of youth in the County.

Purpose

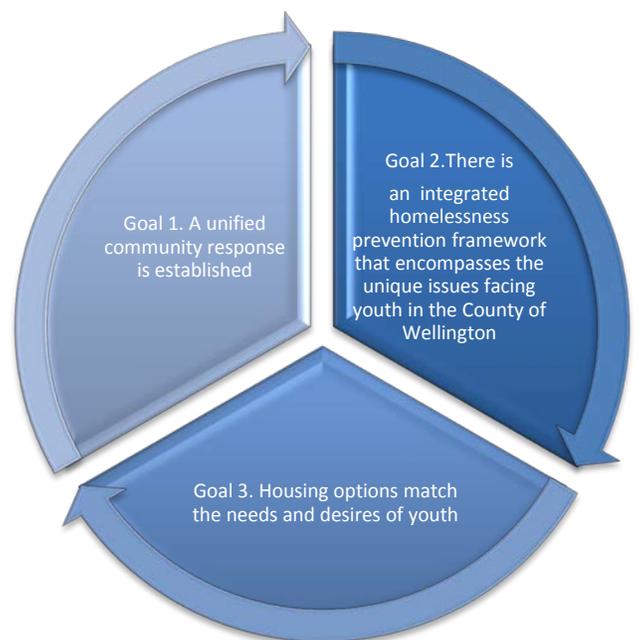
The Action Plan serves to support the development of a shared vision to end youth homelessness in Wellington County. The plan responds to what youth experiencing homelessness in Wellington County have identified as priority issues, and illustrates the types of strategies and contributions that are needed in Wellington County to address these issues. Specific reference is made to the application of the Action Strategies within a rural context.

Outline

This Action Plan is a local response to a national issue. It is not intended to prescribe a “one-size fits all” approach to end youth homelessness. It is however, intended to serve as a catalyst for collaboration and knowledge mobilization.

The Action Plan is situated within a **Positive Youth Development Framework**⁸. In contrast to traditional approaches, which often focus on the deficits of youth experiencing homelessness, this framework focuses on strengthening the assets and resiliency factors all young people need to lead a healthy life and transition to adulthood. Applying this framework to the Action Plan requires an understanding of human development so the action strategies presented therefore align with the developmental requirements of the population served.

There are three key goals outlined in the Action Plan. For each goal, there is a list of action strategies and associated implementation steps. The action strategies outline what is needed in Wellington County to meet each goal and the implementation steps provide a plan for putting the action strategies into practice. In some cases, where deemed applicable, promising practices are described to highlight programs that are well aligned with an action strategy, and that could be useful for implementation. All goals and actions strategies are of equal importance – the order in which they appear is not intended to suggest that some goals are more important than others. Just as the environments that youth interact with intersect to influence youth development and experience, so too do the strategies in this Action Plan. This Action Plan assumes that all three goals will be



⁸ http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthopportunities/steppingstones/youth_policy_about.aspx

worked toward simultaneously, as success in one area will depend on the success in another. Importantly, this Action Plan is the first step, not the last step, in establishing a clear agenda to end youth homelessness in Wellington County. It will continue to evolve and to become more concrete over-time. Ongoing changes to the Action Plan will demonstrate the developmental nature of community-based work and systems change.

Table 3: Summary of Goals and Action Strategies

Goal	Action Strategies
Goal 1: A Unified Community Response is Established	1.1. Establish an Integrated Network of Supports 1.2. Establish a Shared Understanding of Quality Standards of Care 1.3. Create a Coordinated Intake and Referral Process with Multiple Points of Entry 1.4. Create a System to Collect and Share Localized Research
Goal 2. There is an Integrated Homelessness Prevention Framework that Encompasses the Unique Issues Facing Youth in the County of Wellington	2.1. Utilize a Common Assessment Tool 2.2. Enhance Transportation Services to Ensure Access to Housing and Supports 2.3. Ensure Timely Outreach and Access to Respite/Emergency Accommodation 2.4. Provide Support to Families Through Counselling and Mediation 2.5. Create a School and Community Awareness Strategy 2.6. Support Innovative Prevention Projects that Focus on Mental Health and Addictions, Education, and Employment
Goal 3. Housing Options Match the Needs and Desires of Youth	3.1. Implement and Enhance the Housing Options 3.2. Make Housing First a Housing Option for Youth within a Continuous Case Management Approach 3.3. Create Flexible Funding and Rent Support Program

The action plan includes four major types of “implementation steps.” The relative emphasis placed on each step varies depending on the current status of each action strategy.

- **Fully engaging partners:** Many of the action strategies presented in this plan begin with reaching out to new partners
- **Gathering and sharing information:** Several strategies focus on improving the flow of information through the service system, and between youth and providers.
- **Refining plans for new services and supports:** There are many ways to approach some of the action strategies listed here. Some implementation steps focus on further refinement of the service delivery plan through study of best practices, pilot testing, or stakeholder consultation. This work may be undertaken by the Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee itself, or (where the need for planning is more intense), a designated working group or sub-committee.
- **Implementing new services and supports:** There are some implementation steps that can move almost immediately to making practical changes in the way services are provided to rural youth.

Structure and Governance

This Action Plan was developed by an interim steering committee, working together with a large and informal network of supporters that included rural youth as well as service providers. Moving forward, a crucial first step will be to formalize this governance structure. This process will begin with the formation of a larger, more inclusive steering committee that has a clear set of processes in place for making decisions, engaging with youth and developing action plans. Many of the specific implementation steps included in this action plan speak to the need for stronger governance and infrastructure. Within this report, a number of groups are identified and it is important to make clear the composition of these groups, as well as their role in implementing each action strategy. The diagram below is a visual depiction of how these groups will work together to oversee implementation of this plan.

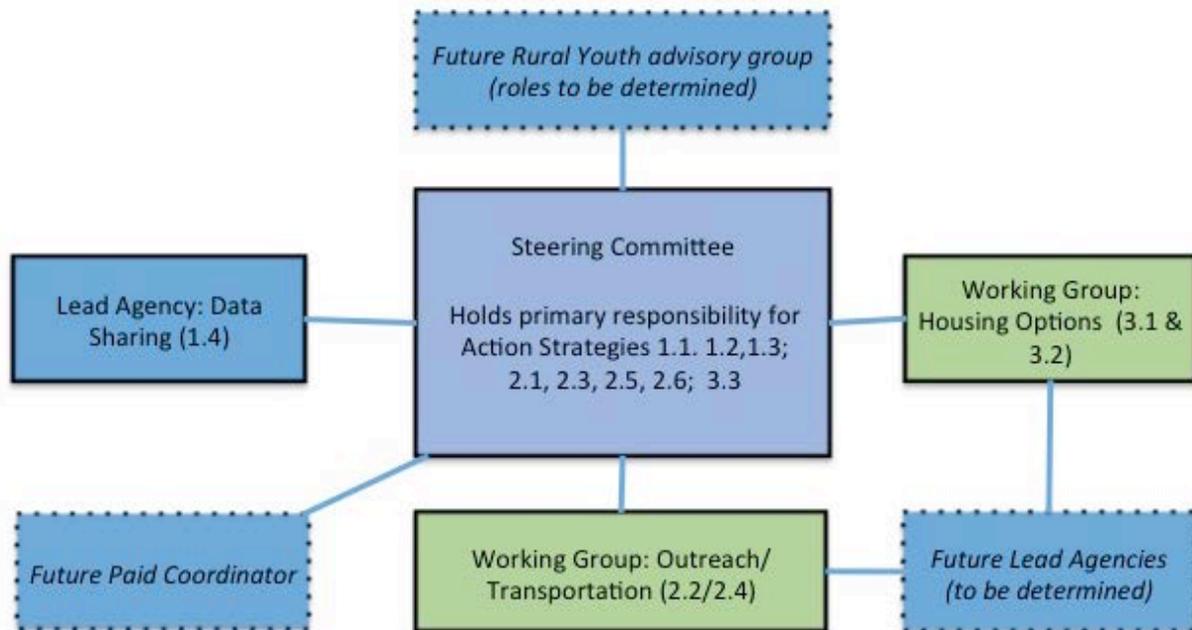


Table 4: Key Stakeholders and Roles

Group	Composition	Role
Rural Youth	Rural youth, including youth with experience of homelessness	Youth have played a key role in the development of this plan, and will continue to be approached as partners. The specific structures for this process have not yet been developed.
Current Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee	This existing group includes one individual each from Wyndham House, the Community Resource Centre of North and Centre Wellington, and the County of Wellington	To review current drafts of the Action Plan To invite individuals from the Network of Supports to join the Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee To prioritize which action strategy requires a working group ⁹
Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee (planned)	This plan assumes a larger, more inclusive steering committee composed of individuals representing organizations from the Network of Supports	To hold the vision, coordinate action on all aspects of the plan at a strategic level, promote collaboration and evaluate progress. To develop action strategies that focus primarily on improving coordination and responsiveness of existing services To establish working groups or identify lead agencies associated with particular action strategies To keep the Network of Supports updated on progress, promote collaboration, and share information.
Network of Supports	Stakeholders within the community who may interact with youth and youth experiencing homelessness	To receive and act on information provided by the Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee To join the Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee where possible
Working Groups	These time-limited, task-focused groups will include agencies identified by the Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee	To conduct research related to particular action strategies and/or develop buy-in from the Network of Supports To identify Lead Agencies once an action strategy is ready for implementation
Lead Agencies	Agencies that agree to take on responsibility for implementing a particular action strategy. May or may not be represented on the Steering Committee.	To carry out work associated with a particular action strategy
Plan Coordinator	One individual	To support the Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee and facilitate communication throughout the entire structure

⁹ At current writing the Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee has identified which action strategies will require a working group based on the need for research and work currently taking place within the community. Where the level of need is higher, a working group will be established.

Goal 1: A Unified Community Response is Established

Definition: A unified community response means that all youth serving agencies, programs, and institutions work together as providers for the same clients. As youth move through the sector, different agencies work collaboratively to help meet intersecting needs and prevent youth from becoming homeless and/or move them out of homelessness as quickly as possible.

The Need

The homelessness sector alone cannot address youth homelessness. In order to best meet the needs of youth it is necessary for other sectors (e.g., mental health, education, corrections, healthcare, etc.) to work in collaboration within an integrated network of care. Shared goals and philosophies, and coordination of care promotes the efficient operation of the sector so that youth can transition out of homelessness as quickly as possible.

Action Strategy 1.1 Establish an Integrated Network of Supports

- An integrated network of supports is established by health care, addictions, mental health, child welfare, education, corrections, housing and homelessness service sectors working together.
- Agencies and programs that have clear roles and mandates to work together in a client-centered approach are mobilized.

The Case for Action

In any given community a number of services may exist to support youth experiencing homelessness, and in many cases these services often work independently of each other. Such an isolated system design is not conducive to achieving effective results, as organizations work to only meet immediate needs of clients. However, when organizations work collaboratively to address the needs of youth through the coordination of services, and common goals and objectives that are designed to address homelessness, youth are supported to transition out of homelessness in an effective and efficient manner that ensures that they receive the services that they need and desire. Such a strategic response to youth homelessness is client centered and ensures that each agency has a clear role and mandate, while also working together to help the same client¹⁰

While there are a variety of services available in Wellington County, generally these services are limited and under-resourced¹¹. Although an integrated network of supports is important regardless of the geographic context, it may be even more so in a rural area such as Wellington County.

¹⁰ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto. The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

¹¹ Grodzinski, E., Sutherns, R., Londerville, J., & Bentham, C. (2011). *Rural Homelessness Study*. County of Wellington.

Table 5: Implementation Steps for Action Strategy 1.1

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
FULLY ENGAGING PARTNERS		
Implementation Step A) The current Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will invite agencies, programs, services, and institutions that represent the various youth sectors and reflect the diversity of Wellington County to join the extended Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal commitment from key partners to participation in network of supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2016
Implementation Step B) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will collectively establish a philosophy and approach to guide their work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Philosophy written and endorsed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2016
Implementation Step C) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will ensure it has a strong infrastructure in place (governance structures, financing for a wide range of services and supports, capacity for planning and expanding, evaluation, and quality improvement) to support growth and sustainability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance structures in place Funding for the functions of the network in place Sustainability plan in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer 2016
Implementation Step D) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will establish a mechanism to ensure that rural youth continue to have a voice in guiding the strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy to ensure ongoing consultation with youth developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer 2016

Promising Practices

- Hamilton's Street Youth Planning Collaborative is a committee composed of individuals in positions of leadership at youth serving agencies, frontline service providers, and youth members, who are committed to working toward collective planning, service integration and wrap-around supports for youth experiencing homelessness so that youth experience healthy transitions to adulthood.
- The Lethbridge Youth HUB is a client-centered assessment, triage, resource and referral service for youth aged 24 and under, including those with complex needs. The HUB assists youth to access resources to secure housing, navigate and connect to community systems, and provide support and advocacy that allows youth to fully participate in community life. The HUB is guided by Family First and Housing First philosophies. A strength-based and harm reduction approach is used by staff to build trusting and collaborative relationships based on respect, inclusion, client-choice and dignity.

Action Strategy 1.2. Establish a Shared Understanding of Quality Standards of Care

- Wrap-around support is recognized as a key intervention for sustaining housing.
- A combination of case management and housing support is understood to be the most successful approach to ending youth homelessness.

The Case for Action

Wrap-around support has been recognized as a key intervention for sustaining housing, and a combination of case management and housing support are vital components of this intervention. Effective case management involves a client-centered approach, in which the specific background, context, and level of need of each client is reflected in proposed plans to assist youth to transition out of homelessness. In such an approach, case workers coordinate with youth, and in some cases family members, to assess client needs and required services that will help to move them out of homelessness. The literature suggests that successful case management is best approached through alignment with an integrated network of supports that incorporates wrap-around support in its philosophy and practice. That is, a number of service providers from various sectors or organizations work collaboratively at every level to ensure effective case management so that the young person does not get lost in the system¹². Youth exiting child protection or corrections have additional case management needs that should be addressed within the local network of supports.

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness¹³ has identified housing supports as one of ten essential components to a successful plan to end homelessness. Housing supports are crucial as youth often have little experience securing accommodation. Housing supports differ depending on each individual's needs but, in many instances youth may require funds to secure accommodation, assistance finding suitable housing, assistance understanding leases and their rights as a tenant, as well as maintaining their living space¹⁴. Specific to the rural context, the Host Homes model has also been identified as a valuable form of housing support that is seen as desirable to youth experiencing homelessness in Wellington County¹⁵ (see Action Strategy 3.1).

Table 6: Implementation Steps for Action Strategy 1.2

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Timeline
REFINING PLANS FOR NEW SERVICES AND SUPPORTS		
Implementation Step A) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering committee will outline wrap-around support (a combination of case management and housing support) within its philosophy and approach	• Philosophy written and endorsed	• Winter 2016
Implementation Step B) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will ensure principles are embedded into common assessment and referral training with other key partners.	• Philosophy written and endorsed	• Fall 2016

¹² Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto. The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

¹³ Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. (2015). *Ten Essentials*. Retrieved from <http://www.caeh.ca/a-plan-not-a-dream/ten-essentials/>

¹⁴ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto. The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

¹⁵ Young, R.P. (2014). *Towards Addressing Youth Homelessness in the County of Wellington*.

Key stakeholders to involve in this strategy include existing housing providers and existing Case Management Workers (E.g. Wyndham House, Homewood, ACT Teams, Family Health Teams, Child Welfare Probation and OPP)

Action Strategy 1.3. Create a Coordinated Access and Referral Process with Multiple Points of Entry

- There are multiple points of access across the network of supports (education, mental health, addictions, corrections etc.).
- The network of supports utilizes a common assessment tool to identify needs and direct referrals.
- Program and housing supports are targeted to youth based on individual need and readiness.
- There are high levels of public and service sector awareness of housing options and support programs.

The Case for Action

There are a number of ways through which youth experiencing homelessness may “touch” the system. This contact can occur through mental health, corrections, education, or healthcare sectors, etc. When these sectors possess a high awareness of available support services and work together to meet the individual needs of youth, such an integrated network of support can move the youth out of homelessness with as little delay as possible. Coordinated access whether centralized or decentralised is important to ensuring that service providers have access to common information, collected through a common assessment tool (see Action Strategy 2.1¹⁶), that is shared between agencies. The strength of this approach is that it builds on system integration, offering timely referrals to youth requiring services. In this way, youth become clients of the system, rather than individual agencies¹⁷.

Youth participating in the surveys and focus groups acknowledged the importance of multiple points of access across the network of supports. Specifically they noted that they would prefer to access the system through professionals they already have a relationship with, including school Guidance Counsellors, school Social Workers, and Child & Youth Counsellors.

¹⁶ Currently there are three tools that could be reviewed for common assessment with youth in Wellington County: HIFIS, SPDAT, and a tool being developed by the Government of Alberta.

¹⁷ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto. The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Table 7: Implementation Steps for Action Strategy 1.3

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
FULLY ENGAGING PARTNERS		
Implementation Step A) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will ensure the network of supports reflects the diversity of Wellington County and that there is representation from all youth service sectors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional members added to the Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee and/or network of supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2016
GATHERING AND SHARING INFORMATION		
Implementation Step B) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will ensure all key members of the network of supports are engaged with the work currently underway to develop a common assessment tool (Alberta Government project and OrgCode SPDAT for youth project). The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will also review HIFIS to ensure the effective integration of common assessment tools into HIFIS for rural Wellington County (see Action Strategy (2.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network of supports knows who to refer homeless youth to Referrals are coming in from network of supports Exposure to information about common assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2016
Implementation Step C) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will select the most appropriate assessment tool for Wellington County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision reached 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geared to progress of work
Implementation Step D) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will reach out to the network of supports to increase buy-in to common assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement of the Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee and/or network of supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBD
Implementation Step E) The network of supports will ensure all of its members are prepared to utilize the selected assessment tool.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uptake of assessment tool Training session on chosen common assessment tool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBD
Implementation Step F) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will determine how coordinated entry will work in a regional context, how the system of care will be organized to leverage community resources currently in place, and how the governance of the operational approach will be operationalized.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBD

Key stakeholders to involve in this strategy include the County, CMHA, School Boards, Guidance Counsellors, and Family & Children's Services

Promising Practices

- The Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) is an evidence informed approach to assessing an individual's or family's acuity. The tool, across multiple components, prioritizes who to serve next and why, while

concurrently identifying the areas in the person/family's life where support is most likely necessary in order to avoid housing instability¹⁸.

- The Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) software is a free, community-driven application. As a client management tool, the software enhances service providers' ability to manage their operations and collect information about the population using shelters¹⁹. HIFIS can serve as the technological backbone to operationalize intake, assessment, referrals and service co-ordination across the homeless-serving system.
- Under Alberta's Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness (the Youth Plan), Human Services is developing a Youth Needs/Risk Assessment Tool to help better serve homeless youth in Alberta. The Youth Needs/Risk Assessment tool will help maximize the services used by homeless youth or youth at-risk of homelessness, by providing a common tool for assessing what their needs are, reducing duplication in service delivery and ensuring the application of consistent data collection methods. By employing a tool that is common to all partners, it will enhance the ability to examine the needs of youth in need of support in Alberta. Through its specialized questions and data gathering, the tool will be able to assess a wide range of aspects of the young person's life (health, housing, social supports etc.) thus providing a more accurate understanding of their service-needs. The tool is being developed to be open sourced and available for use nationally.

Action Strategy 1.4. Create a System to Collect and Share Localized Research

- A system for ongoing learning about homelessness in the County of Wellington is established.
- The challenges of "measuring" rural homelessness are accounted for.
- The system allows for real-time reporting on the total number of homeless youth in Wellington County, the length and causes of their homelessness, their demographic characteristics and needs, and the services they receive.

The Case for Action

Measuring homelessness in rural communities has been cited as a common concern²⁰. Specifically, the extent of rural homelessness is commonly under-estimated. In many instances, counts rely upon the number of people accessing emergency shelters, but in rural areas the number of service sites is often small and there is difficulty counting those who do not access such services²¹. At the present time, emergency shelter usage by Wellington County residents is only available in Guelph, and usage is low²².

Therefore, although a number of local reports²³ are helping us to learn about the state of youth homelessness in Wellington County, there is still much more information to be gathered. The establishment of a system that collects and shares localized research about the real time number of youth experiencing homelessness in Wellington County,

¹⁸ <http://www.orgcode.com/product/spdat/>

¹⁹ <http://hifis.hrsdc.gc.ca/index-eng.shtml>

²⁰ Grodzinski, E., Sutherns, R., Londerville, J., & Bentham, C. (2011). *Rural Homelessness Study*. County of Wellington.

²¹ Robertson, M., Natalie, H., Fritz, N., Noftinger, R., & Fischer, P. (2007). Rural Homelessness. In *Toward Understanding Homelessness: The 2007 National Symposium on Homelessness Research*. Deborah Dennis, Gretchen Locke, and Jill Khadduri (eds.)

²² Grodzinski, E., Sutherns, R., Londerville, J., & Bentham, C. (2011). *Rural Homelessness Study*. County of Wellington.

²³ For more information about statistics and trends please see Grodzinski, E., Sutherns, R., Londerville, J., & Bentham, C. (2011). *Rural Homelessness Study*. County of Wellington

the length and causes of their homelessness, their demographic characteristics, and their needs will help to build the knowledge base. This is a process that can be supported by the development of a common assessment tool (see Action Strategy 2.1). Such a system would not only help to strengthen services offered by agencies, but also help to explain in greater depth the experiences of youth experiencing homelessness over time²⁴.

Table 8: Implementation Steps for Action Strategy 1.4

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
GATHERING AND SHARING INFORMATION		
Implementation Step A) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee in collaboration with the Network of Supports will explore options to address consent/privacy issues so that all agencies within the Network of Support can access the information collected through the common assessment tool.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issue addressed by Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2016
Implementation Step B) A current member of the network will be designated as lead for ensuring data is collected, shared and analyzed. Resources will be devoted to this role.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead organization and individual named Resources (in-kind or financial) accessed for this function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2016
Implementation Step C) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee in collaboration with the Network of Supports and the designated measurement lead will provide guidance and training on how to use the information collected (through the common assessment tool and other means) strategically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data is collected, consolidated and shared Information sharing infrastructure (such as software) created and launched. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2016
Implementation Step D) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will hold an annual service provider/youth community forum to collect and share information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forum held together with A Way Home Forum well attended by rural youth with lived experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2016

²⁴ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto. The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Goal 2. There is an Integrated Homelessness Prevention Framework that Encompasses the Unique Issues Facing Youth in the County of Wellington

Definition: Prevention means stopping youth from becoming homeless in the first place. An integrated prevention framework includes activities that remove or reduce risk factors as well as promote protective factors to ensure wellbeing²⁵.

The Need

Prevention is important for a number of reasons. Individuals experiencing homelessness often experience challenges related to mental health and addictions or family breakdown which makes them particularly vulnerable, and homelessness incurs costs for tax payers related to healthcare and corrections²⁶. If we are able to stop youth homelessness before it occurs we can both support healthy youth development, as well as lessen the demands on various sectors, and ultimately put an end to youth homelessness.

Ontario's youth strategy identifies a number of groups who often face multiple barriers, including youth who are leaving the child welfare system, Indigenous youth, newcomers, racialized youth, youth with special needs and LGBTTQ youth.²⁷ When youth who are members of these groups live in small communities, they may face additional challenges. In addition research and best practices from leading organizations in the youth homelessness sector like A Way Home and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, reveal that preventing homelessness for these populations must include specialized and more targeted approaches that address these multiple barriers.

For prevention to be successful, research has suggested that it must occur at three levels:

- **Primary prevention** focuses on strategies that prevent homelessness from occurring by enhancing protective factors.
- **Systems prevention** ensures that youth are not discharged into homelessness after leaving the care of institutions. This element is especially important in the context of Ontario's child welfare and youth justice systems.
- **Early intervention** focuses on designing strategies that support youth when they are at risk for becoming homeless²⁸

Action Strategy 2.1. Utilize a Common Assessment Tool

- When a youth or family "touches" the system, be it through mental health, addictions, child welfare, corrections, or housing services, they are immediately assessed, their needs are identified, and client-

²⁵ Mobilizing Local Communities to End Youth Homelessness in Canada. *Essentials to End Youth Homelessness*.

²⁶ Gaetz, S. (2012). *The Real Cost of Homelessness: Can we save money by doing the right thing?* Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Network Press.

²⁷ Government of Ontario (2014). *Stepping up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario's Youth Succeed*.

²⁸ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto. The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

centered plans are put in place.

- It is clear which agencies among the network of supports will administer the common assessment tool.
- The network of supports has the ability to undertake common assessment and to act on the results.

The Case for Action

Common assessment is an important tool in ensuring that networks of support are integrated and effectively serving youth experiencing homelessness. Common assessment refers to a standardized approach to assessing an individual's situation, the complexity of their needs, the services that they currently utilize or may require in the future, and also takes into account their socio-cultural background and elements in their lives that may contribute to risk or resilience²⁹. Utilizing a common assessment tool is intended to benefit homeless youth in a number of ways:

- Helping individuals move through the system faster (by reducing the amount of time people spend moving from program to program before finding the right match)
- Reducing new entries into homelessness (by consistently offering prevention and diversion resources upfront, reducing the number of people entering the system unnecessarily)
- Improving data collection and quality, and providing accurate information on what kind of assistance consumers need³⁰

When communities have established integrated networks of support and are sharing information, common assessment can also circumvent the need for individual agencies to conduct assessments so that youth do not have to share their story multiple times with different service providers, and instead receive quicker access to services³¹.

Below is an outline of the initial steps to take to put Action Strategy 2.1 into practice. The development of a common assessment tool is a key step in creating a coordinated intake and referral process, so some of the steps listed below overlap with those in Action Strategy 1.3.

Table 9: Implementation Steps for Action Strategy 2.1

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
GATHERING AND SHARING INFORMATION		
Implementation Step A) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will collect and review the current common assessment tools being created (by the government of Alberta and by OrgCode) and those that are already in use elsewhere (SPDAT).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key stakeholders actively involved in review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter 2016
Implementation Step B) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will select the most appropriate assessment tool or combination of assessment tools for Wellington County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tool selected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geared to progress of work

²⁹ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto. The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

³⁰ National Alliance to End Homelessness. *Coordinated Assessment Toolkit*. (2012) In Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto. The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

³¹ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto. The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
Implementation Step C) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will establish a memorandum of understanding to implement and utilize the selected assessment tool as part of a system of coordinated intake and referral (see 1.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memorandum created and signed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2017
Implementation Step D) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will explore systems/mechanisms for sharing the data collected through the common assessment tool across the network of supports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See Action strategy 1.4, steps C and D 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2017

Key stakeholders to involve in this strategy include Child and Youth Serving Organizations within Wellington County, CADS, CMHA, Family & Children's Services, the Youth Justice system, Hospitals, Funders (large and small), Municipalities, the County of Wellington and rural youth.

Action Strategy 2.2. Enhance Transportation Services to Ensure Access to Housing and Supports

- Youth have the ability to access employment, educational opportunities, housing, and supports without the use of a personal vehicle.
- Transportation is affordable and safe.

The Case for Action

Insufficient transportation can make daily activities challenging. This is particularly true in rural areas, such as Wellington County, where public transportation is scarce, and taxi services are costly where they do exist³². Compounding this issue is that winter road conditions can make travelling dangerous, and businesses and services are often considerable distances apart. Youth participating in the focus groups stated that transportation is critical to helping them be successful and connected. Transportation is key to employment, attending school, accessing services, and keeping close connections with family and friends. Increasing access to transportation for youth who do not have a personal vehicle is therefore vital to youth homelessness prevention. While providing access to transportation is clearly important for youth, it is also important to note that other Action Strategies within this report are also working to bring services to youth to help them move from crisis to stability.

Table 10: Implementation Steps for Action Strategy 2.2

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
REFINING PLANS FOR NEW SERVICES AND SUPPORTS		
Implementation Step A.) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will establish an Outreach & Transportation working group to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working group established Protocol and plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2016 – Fall 2016

³² Grodzinski, E., Sutherns, R., Londerville, J., & Bentham, C. (2011). *Rural Homelessness Study*. County of Wellington.

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore how to enhance and expand the mandate around what transportation is currently available to youth. • Develop a protocol that outlines how and when a youth can book transportation. • Develop a protocol for assessing when the transportation required by a youth is of an urgent nature. • Investigate whether a pool of volunteer drivers could be on-call for “urgent night calls”. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developed • Lead agency designated • Best practices examined 	

Key stakeholders to involve in this strategy include Community Resource Centre of North and Centre Wellington, the County of Wellington, Family & Children’s Services, rural youth, East Wellington Community Services, Family Health Teams and the Police

Promising Practices

- Wellington Transportation Services offers a volunteer driver program, managed by the Community Resource Centre and funded by the County of Wellington that helps individuals to access services. Although this service cannot currently transport youth without a legal guardian present, this offers a promising alternative to public transportation which is limited in rural areas.

Action Strategy 2.3. Ensure Timely Outreach and Access to accommodation while connecting young people to longer term place-based supports

- Outreach is not stationary, but mobile; outreach providers are meeting those in need of outreach services at the locations where they are and are comfortable with.
- Provides place based supports directly to young people so they can stay embedded in their system of natural supports, remain in school and move forward with their life in a safe and planned way
- Outreach is able to cross community boundaries and outreach workers are able to stay connected with youth for a period of time after youth have become housed.
- Outreach is timely, reaching youth within the 72 hour critical window.
- Temporary accommodation is available to youth at all hours.
- Accommodation provides a “time-out” for youth as longer-term housing support is sorted out and family counselling and possible reconnection is underway.

The Case for Action

Timely and mobile outreach is important because research suggests that once youth become homeless, reaching them within 72 hours is crucial for intervention³³ as youth who are reached within this window can be diverted from the emergency shelter system and for rural youth means a greater likelihood that they will remain in their communities.³⁴ Youth may be unaware of programs and services in their community and this was indeed largely

³³ Collaborative Community Health Research Centre. (2002). *Research Review of Best Practices for Provision of Youth Services*. Victoria: Child & Youth Mental Health and Youth Justice Division Ministry of Children and Family Development.

³⁴ McLean, L. (2005). *Seeking sanctuary: An exploration of the realities of youth homelessness in Calgary*. Calgary: Calgary Homeless Foundation.

true among survey and focus group participants in Wellington County. Responses from youth also suggested that although they may be aware that particular services exist, they may not understand in what way these services can help them, or know how to access them. Outreach can help to raise awareness and understanding of such services through providing information and building trusting relationships.

Mobile outreach is particularly important in rural areas such as Wellington County, where many youth might be considered “hidden homeless” (e.g., those youth staying on a friend’s couch). Outreach workers often go to spaces where youth are known to congregate. However, in rural areas these spaces may be hidden or may not exist at all. Therefore, it is important for outreach workers to make themselves visible and promote services so that youth know where to turn³⁵. Accordingly, it is important to note that outreach works best when all organizations within the network of supports are involved. This means that all organizations providing services can promote other services. Specific to Wellington County is the promotion of the Here 24/7 line which will help to build awareness of and access to available services.

Providing youth experiencing homelessness with access to respite/emergency accommodation is also important. Currently, emergency shelter accommodation exists only in Guelph so access is limited and when used by youth from the county, means that they must leave their communities, peers, schooling etc to seek shelter and supports. However, the implementation of the Host Homes model or other uniquely rural strategies (see Action Strategy 3.1) holds promise and outreach should focus on alignment with these models. In addition, opportunity for youth to return home or connect to natural supports where it is safe and desired, with supports for both youth and family, have shown to be an important component.

Table 11: Implementation Steps for Action Strategy 2.3

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
GATHERING AND SHARING INFORMATION		
Implementation Step A) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will determine if Here 24/7 will act as a support for youth to access addictions, mental health, and crisis services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports from network members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBD
Implementation Step B) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will ensure all organizations within the network of supports are promoting Here 24/7 as a way for youth to access addictions, mental health, and crisis services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports from network members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 2016
REFINING PLANS FOR NEW SERVICES AND SUPPORTS		
Implementation Step C) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will establish a working group to research existing outreach models being used in other communities and to explore feasibility within Wellington County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working group established 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter 2016

³⁵ National Alliance to End Homelessness. (n.d). *Housing and Outreach Strategies for Rural Youth: Best Practices from the Rural Youth Survey*.

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
Implementation Step D) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will research existing outreach models being used in other communities (e.g. Niagara's The RAFT) to explore feasibility within Wellington County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report / presentation on the feasibility of each model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2016
Implementation Step E) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will study the infrastructure and funding needed to implement the chosen outreach model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The model identifies lead organization, required resources, roles of partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2017
Implementation Step F) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will identify a lead agency to implement outreach model.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead chosen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2017

Key stakeholders to involve in this strategy include agencies currently offering outreach services within Wellington County, Here 24/7, EWCS, Community Resource Centre of Wellington, Family Health Teams and Wyndham House

Promising Practices

- Wyndham House includes a Youth in Transition (YIT) worker, who helps youth with involvement in the child welfare system, aged 16 to 24 to connect with educational, employment, housing, life skills, mental health and other resources in their communities. This worker travels throughout Wellington and Dufferin counties, as well as the City of Guelph, providing life skills training, emotional support, advocacy and links to other services. The worker often assists with discharge planning.
- The Youth Reconnect program, designed by an organization called The RAFT in Niagara Region, reaches out to youth at risk of homelessness in rural communities, in order to help them access supports while remaining in their home community and continuing to attend their home school. Staff provide supports around advocacy, life skills training, one-on-one mentoring, emergency hostel access, family reunification, and community integration. They work through partnership with other social service agencies that have a presence in rural communities. Key outcomes include helping clients to live independently, reducing high-risk behaviours and maintaining school attendance.
- Three early intervention prevention programs offered by the Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary have been proven to be highly effective at providing targeted outreach and support to youth. (Elements, Script Outreach, and Fusion).

Action Strategy 2.4. Provide Support to Families Through Counselling, Mediation and Reunification

- Family counselling and mediation is offered as soon as youth are flagged as being at risk of homelessness or as soon as those identified youth leave home
- For youth who have left home, supports to reconnect to natural supports when safe and desired by youth.
- All family members are supported in understanding their family relationships, how to manage and negotiate in challenging situations, and how to develop supportive, meaningful, and sustainable relationships within the

family.

- Families are counselled on how to support youth experiencing mental health and addictions issues.

The Case for Action

Plans to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness emphasise the “Family First” approach. In many cases, youth homelessness is preventable if interventions happen early and families receive the necessary support. Although family conflict also plays a part in adult homelessness, the connection is more critical for youth since they are, by virtue of their developmental stage in life, still largely financially, emotionally and, depending on their age, legally dependent upon their families.

Strengthening families through reunification, counselling or mediation may be the service and support that a young person needs to prevent them from experiencing homelessness. Working with young people and their families prior to the experience of homelessness, or intervening to mediate family conflicts once a young person leaves home offers young people the opportunity to improve the relationship or resolve family conflicts. Parents/caregivers may not know where to go or how to access parenting resources or supports. Enhancing and increasing accessibility to resources such as family mediation, conflict resolution, counselling and assessment services must be a priority. Family First is an approach that helps young people remain ‘in place’ in their communities, where they can continue in school and stay connected to natural supports (including friends, family members, teachers, etc.). For young people who have experienced homelessness, it is a key housing stability strategy that prevents the recurrence of homelessness and helps them move forward with their lives in a safe and planned way. The outcome is not that the young person remains in an unsafe or undesirable household, but that they continue to draw on family support.

The 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan for Guelph Wellington recommends providing a range of supports to assist people at risk of homelessness to remain housed (Goal #2), and part of this includes reaching out to youth who are dealing with family breakdown. Family breakdown has been cited as a major factor contributing to youth homelessness. Indeed youth participating in the surveys and focus groups identified family conflict as a predominate cause of youth homelessness in Wellington County. Causes of family breakdown include difficulty supporting a young person with mental health and/or addictions issues, as well as problems with family members (e.g., conflict, abuse)³⁶. Since youth are still developing, families are particularly important in providing practical, social, and emotional support, as well as addressing basic needs.

Table 12: Implementation Steps for Action Strategy 2.4

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
FULLY ENGAGING PARTNERS		

³⁶ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto. The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
<p>Implementation Step A) The current Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee (Community Resource Centre of North and Centre Wellington, Wyndham House, County of Wellington) will ensure there is meaningful representation from existing agencies offering various types of family support and counselling on the Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional members added to the Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee and/or network of supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2016
<p>REFINING PLANS FOR NEW SERVICES AND SUPPORTS</p>		
<p>Implementation Step B) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will establish an Outreach & Transportation working group (already described under Action Strategy 2.2). This working group will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommend the most effective mechanisms for ensuring early family support, including counselling, and mediation is provided to youth who are homeless or at risk and to parents/caregivers. Note: One possibility is to ensure any youth service provider receives training on how to access family counselling and mediation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working group established Protocol and plan developed Lead agency designated Best practices examined 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2016-Fall 2016
<p>Implementation Step C) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will study the infrastructure and funding needed to implement new family support elements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business model developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2017

Key stakeholders to involve in this action strategy include families, services that work with families, school guidance counsellors and mental health leads, CMHA

Promising Practices

- Eva's Initiatives Family Reconnect Program pioneered a model for family reconnection designed to resolve the underlying family conflicts that can precipitate homelessness or reconnect youth to natural supports once they experience homelessness. The model includes assessment, counselling, and linkages to outside services and supports, and it is designed to help young people improve relationships, strengthen life skills, and engage in meaningful activities so that they can return home or move into the community with the support of family members.³⁷
- In Australia, the Family First approach is a prevention strategy central to their school-based youth homelessness prevention strategies called the Geelong Project. The Upstream Project in Canada is adapting the evidence based Geelong Project where youth are assessed to identify those who are at high risk of

³⁷ Winland, D., Gaetz, S., & Patton, T. (2011). *Family matters: Homeless youth and Eva's Initiatives Family Reconnect Program*. The Homelessness Hub Report Series: Report 3.

homelessness. Those that are identified are then provided with supports.³⁸

- The Infinity Project in Calgary Boys and Girls Clubs is a Housing First program for youth that includes the Family First approach.
- See also Youth Reconnect – The RAFT Niagara – Promising Practices Action Strategy 2.3

Action Strategy 2.5. Create a School and Community Awareness Strategy

- Information about youth homelessness is brought to schools and the community, and to youth gathering places in particular, and common messages are communicated.
- The development of the awareness strategy includes consultation with the organizations involved in the network of supports (mental health, addictions, housing, educational organizations) to build core messages.
- Examples of topics that will be covered in the strategy include: challenging myths and misperceptions about homelessness, dealing with family conflict, financial stress and worry, peer and romantic relationships, navigating social services, mental health and addictions, dealing with landlords, and housing options.

The Case for Action

Public education about youth homelessness has been identified as a key component of homelessness prevention strategies³⁹. This type of strategy involves raising awareness about youth homelessness and related services, as well as providing information on important topics. Often such strategies involve sharing information related to challenging myths and misperceptions about homelessness. This would appear to be of particular relevance to Wellington County as a number of youth who participated in the surveys and focus groups shared that they often experienced stigma related to the homelessness experience. In particular, they expressed that it is often difficult for people to understand what homelessness looks like in a rural context, and as a result they are unwilling to acknowledge its reality⁴⁰.

When information is presented in schools, it can also act as an “early warning system” in that it can help youth and school staff to self-identify risks that may contribute to homelessness⁴¹. Indeed, youth participating in the focus groups suggested that it would be useful for information to be present in locations that they frequent such as schools, drop-in centres, and recreation centres. Since such strategies also seek to raise awareness of available services, they can also help to develop points of contact within the system through empowering school staff to be comfortable recommending services to students.

³⁸ <http://www.raisingtheroof.org/Our-Programs/The-Upstream-Project.aspx>

³⁹ Raising the Roof. (n.d). *Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions*.

⁴⁰ Grodzinski, E., Sutherns, R., Londerville, J., & Bentham, C. (2011). *Rural Homelessness Study*. County of Wellington.

⁴¹ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto. The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

Table 13: Implementation Steps for Action Strategy 2.5

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
IMPLEMENTING NEW SERVICES AND SUPPORTS		
Implementation Step A) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will develop a “pocket size” resource guide that will include information concerning youth (example topics are listed above) and be disseminated in locations where youth gather across Wellington County (awareness raising).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources accessed Resource guide developed, tested and disseminated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spring 2016
Implementation Step B) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will work to obtain collaboration from schools. They will engage and empower schools (principals, teachers, student councils) to incorporate existing resources about homelessness that are available through the Homeless Hub into the classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School representatives engaged as partners Leads identified for this work Number of schools reached; number of resources distributed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2016
Implementation Step C) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will launch a series of interactive community awareness activities that raise awareness about youth homelessness within Wellington County (e.g. the “surfing couch” to highlight that youth homelessness in Wellington County is often hidden).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leads identified for this work Events held, resources distributed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2016

Key Stakeholders to involve in implementing this action strategy include Growing Great Generations Planning Table, School Boards, local business leaders, service providers and rural youth.

Promising Practices

- Toronto based Covenant House offers a school based education program for youth in grades 6 to 12. *Before you Run* provides information about factors contributing to youth homelessness (e.g., family breakdown, abuse, mental health, substance abuse), as well as resources to help youth make better choices⁴².
- The Upstream Project in Canada is adapting the school based Geelong Project from Australia. See Promising Practices in Action Strategy 2.4

⁴² <http://www.covenanthousetoronto.ca/homeless-youth/School-Presentations>

Action Strategy 2.6. Support Innovative Prevention Projects that Focus on Mental Health and Addictions, Education, and Employment

- Mental health programming that is preventative in nature, promotes mental health awareness, strives to reduce stress, distress and worry associated with adolescence is available to all youth, not only youth at risk.
- Youth at risk of disconnecting from their education are re-engaged with their education and offered greater educational support.
- Youth have alternative educational opportunities that match the needs of youth experiencing challenges with housing and mental health/addictions.
- Youth have the opportunity to make money in their local community, explore different interests, identify life learning goals, and harness strengths within themselves.
- Employers are prepared to support youth in maintaining their jobs and receive training about how to connect with youth, communicate with youth, and motivate them to carry out their responsibilities.

The Case for Action

Prevention projects that focus on mental health and addictions, education, and employment have an important role to play in reducing youth homelessness. Mental health issues often appear in adolescence⁴³ and have been identified as a contributing factor to youth homelessness in many cases. Regrettably, insufficient understanding about mental illness, lack of awareness about or availability of mental health services, and concern of stigmatization too often prevent youth from seeking help⁴⁴. Therefore, there is a need for universal mental health programming that is preventive in nature, promotes mental health awareness, and strives to reduce stress, distress and worry associated with adolescence.

Employment opportunities are also key to preventing homelessness. When youth have money, they are able to pay their rent and maintain their housing, effectively preventing homelessness. Employment also helps youth to identify their interests and acquire skills that foster healthy development and prepare them for careers. However, Ontario is one of the most difficult places for youth to find a job with youth unemployment rates well above the national average, and in Wellington County lack of employment has been cited as a major cause of poverty⁴⁵. Those youth who are at risk for homelessness, or are experiencing homelessness may also be at risk for disconnecting from their education, and in Ontario, for those youth who do not complete high school, the unemployment rate is double that of those who do complete high school (28% vs. 16% in 2013)⁴⁶. Youth participating in the surveys and focus groups shared that they feel that the education system is failing to teach them desired skills, or teach them in a manner conducive to their learning. This points to a clear need for innovative education and employment projects geared toward the needs of youth with multiple barriers.

⁴³ Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2009). *Toward Recovery and Well-Being: A Framework for a Mental Health Strategy in Canada*.

⁴⁴ Government of Canada. (2006). *The Human Face of Mental Health and Mental Illness in Canada*.

⁴⁵ Grodzinski, E., Sutherns, R., Londerville, J., & Bentham, C. (2011). *Rural Homelessness Study*. County of Wellington.

⁴⁶ Geobey, S. (2013). *The Young and the Jobless: Youth Unemployment in Ontario*.

Table 14: Implementation Steps for Action Strategy 2.6

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
FULLY ENGAGING PARTNERS		
Implementation Step A) The current Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will ensure key players from the mental health and addictions, education, and employment sectors are members of the Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional members added to the Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee and/or network of supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> December 2015
REFINING PLANS FOR NEW SERVICES AND SUPPORTS		
Implementation Step B) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will review existing prevention programs/projects within Wellington County as well as other promising practices to identify what can be leveraged and what gaps need to be filled.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report back completed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spring 2016

Key Stakeholders to involve in implementation of this action strategy include rural youth and representatives from agencies providing supports related to mental health, addictions, education, and employment

Promising Practices

Education

- Current member of the Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee Wyndham House, Covenant House Toronto and the Good Shepherd in Hamilton all operate Ontario Section 23 schools for young people who are unable to learn in a traditional classroom as per the Ontario Education Act. Consider ways to provide those supports in a decentralised format for rural youth.
- See also The Raft – Niagara, for the education supports provided in Youth Reconnect.

Mental Health

- GLOWW (Giving Light Offers Worth and Wellness) in Guelph and Wellington County is a youth led initiative that advocates for mental health through creating dialogue and educating the public about mental health.
- Vancouver's Inner City Youth team run by St. Paul's Hospital provides integrated services (e.g. psychiatric assessment, primary care, counselling, group recreational activities and independent living skills) to youth experiencing mental illness and addiction who are also experiencing homelessness, or who are at risk for homelessness. Collaborative teams work with youth to find suitable housing while also providing integrated services.

Employment

- The Youth Employment Toolkit developed by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, (COH) provides

shelters, housing providers and youth serving agencies with resources for developing youth employment projects for at-risk youth. The model can be modified to fit individual community or agency needs.

- London's Youth Opportunities Unlimited manages a Transitional Housing Program that provides youth with an individual plan to address needs and goals that will help them to move toward becoming self-sufficient. Pre-employment and educational training are also provided. Upon graduating the program, youth can enter into a geared-to-income tenancy agreement with a specific housing unit.
- Funded by the Government of Ontario, 2nd Chance Employment Counselling Services in Guelph and Fergus provide youth with assistance writing resumes and cover letters, help with career exploration and goal setting, workshops on interviews, and opportunities for job shadowing, with the overarching goal of helping youth to secure employment and decide on what career is best suited to their aspirations.
- Ways 2 Work, located in Guelph, is a 16 week program for individuals aged 15-30 who are not in school and currently out of work, that assists in developing skills to help secure and maintain employment and be successful in a chosen career. While attending the program, participants receive funding equivalent to minimum wage, acquire employment related skills, and receive certification in Smart Serve, First Aid, Safe Food Handling and WHMIS.
- As part of the Ontario Government's new Youth Jobs Strategy, Youth Job Connection provides support and training for individuals aged 15 to 29 who are not in school or employed and face multiple barriers to employment (i.e., poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, youth living with disabilities, youth who have limited work experience).

Goal 3. Housing Options Match the Needs and Desires of Youth

Definition: To have “housing options” means to have access to different types of housing that vary in terms of style and supports provided. For housing options to “match the needs and desires of youth”, youth must have the ability to transition from one housing program to another within or close to their home community according to their individual preference and developmental stages⁴⁷.

The Need

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (United States) recognizes that housing can be represented by a number of options, and each should match the needs and desires of youth so that they receive the necessary supports. As youth gain skills related to independent living and economic security, their needs and associated supports may change. Relatedly, if things don’t work out in one living arrangement, it may be necessary for youth to receive other supports once again. Therefore, it is necessary that youth be able to move along the housing continuum as their situations change, and that they are included in associated decisions.

Action Strategy 3.1. Implement Alternative Housing Models

- Youth have increased access to housing within their community.
- The model serves as a home-based alternative to an emergency shelter.
- Lengths of stay are flexible based on an individual’s unique situation and their ability to locate and prepare for permanent housing.
- Case management is offered to youth whereby they are directed to the appropriate services within the community that will support them to stay connected and secure permanent housing.
- Family counselling is emphasized so that early intervention can occur.

The Case for Action

Currently no emergency shelters exist within Wellington County. However, given the low population and vast geographic span of the County, it has been noted that developing such shelters would not be financially feasible⁴⁸ or desirable to youth⁴⁹. However, there are alternative models that may work in Wellington County. One such option is the Host Homes model, which has been cited as a promising alternative to emergency shelters, particularly in rural areas. A common conceptualization of Host Homes is,

“a formalized mutual agreement between a community member and a service provider. The community member provides shelter, food, and sometimes transportation for youth, while the provider delivers case management services. In most instances, the community member receives a small stipend to help defray associated costs, and undergoes training and background checks similar or identical to those completed by foster parents”⁵⁰.

Since Host Homes are located within or close to the home community they may be a particularly desirable option for rural youth who often have strong ties to their community and wish to remain in it⁵¹. Youth who participated in the

⁴⁷ Mobilizing Local Communities to End Youth Homelessness in Canada. *Essentials to End Youth Homelessness*.

⁴⁸ Grodzinski, E., Sutherns, R., Londerville, J., & Bentham, C. (2011). *Rural Homelessness Study*. County of Wellington.

⁴⁹ Young, R.P. (2014). *Towards Addressing Youth Homelessness in the County of Wellington*.

⁵⁰ National Alliance to End Homelessness. (n.d). *Housing and Outreach Strategies for Rural Youth: Best Practices from the Rural Youth Survey*. Page 2.

⁵¹ Grodzinski, E., Sutherns, R., Londerville, J., & Bentham, C. (2011). *Rural Homelessness Study*. County of Wellington.

surveys and focus group discussions were inclined to suggest the Host Homes model was the best option for shelter. Youth expressed that moving to a Host Home would be an immediate solution for securing shelter, but also noted that they see contact with supportive adults as valuable. Youth also stated that this model would help them to feel like they were living in a more ‘normal’ family environment.

Another option that may work well in a rural setting is the “dispersed foyer” model. In this approach, youth live together in small groups of 3 or 4 people, in longer-term housing, but have access to a shared support hub where they can access life skills training, school, or employment supports.⁵²

Table 15: Implementation Steps for Action Strategy 3.1

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
REFINING PLANS FOR NEW SERVICES AND SUPPORTS		
<p>Implementation Step A) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will establish a housing options working group. The working group will explore existing models to learn about their policies, case management models, family support processes, screening processes, learnings etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Options working group established Report presented to Steering Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2016
<p>Implementation Step B) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> study infrastructure and funding needed to implement housing options explore how to leverage Here 24/7 or 211 so that planned housing options can serve an emergency response purpose (there is 24 hour on-call support to either de-escalate a situation or direct/transport to planned housing options) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report on the model presented to Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2017
IMPLEMENTING NEW SERVICES AND SUPPORTS		
<p>Implementation Step C) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee and working group will identify an agency to take the lead on implementation of new housing models in Wellington County. These models should ensure homes already offering supports to youth are leveraged, and that homes are clustered around schools. Some homes should be open all hours.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead agency designated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2017

Key stakeholders to involve in implementation of this action strategy include Family & Children’s Services, schools, Bridging the Gap staff, families that already provide informal support to youth, Here 24/7 staff, and other community members who support displaced youth.

⁵² Gaetz, S. & Scott, F. (2012). *Live, Learn, Grow: Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Homeless Youth: A Framework for the Foyer in Canada*. Homeless Hub Report Series.

Promising Practices

- Bridging the Gap, a program from Halton, targets youth at risk. It uses a mixture of models, including Host Home placements, with community volunteers who offer youth a safe place to stay in their homes. Staff work with these volunteers closely and provide highly individualized outreach supports around emergency shelter, housing, family dynamics, youth advocacy, and other similar issues.
- Aura is a Host Homes Project operated by the Boys and Girls Club of Calgary that provides youth with a safe place where their sexual orientation and gender identity is respected and celebrated. Youth have the opportunity to live in a supportive and affirming home with a trained host parent where they can strengthen their relationships with natural supports, connect to community and end their experience of homelessness.

Action Strategy 3.2. Make Housing First a Housing Option for Youth within a Continuous Case Management Approach

- Permanent housing is made available to youth within their home community, through a timely, continuous and flexible case management approach that reviews needs and adjusts services/supports as needed.
- Case management is flexible across the different forms of housing, so that youth have the opportunity to shift from one form of housing to the next without compromising their support and connections to community.
- Housing First is used as a transitional option when necessary.
- Youth development is considered in the design and implementation of Housing First in Wellington County (the values, principles, and key elements of Housing First are adopted and adapted for youth).
- The model reflects the unique context of rural communities.
- Housing support is integrated with education, training, and employment for young people.
- Youth who are living in permanent and affordable housing or who have reunited with their family do not lose all form of case management as soon as they become housed or return home.

The Case for Action

The U.S. National Alliance to End Homelessness has identified Housing First as a “best practice” and is preferred for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and who require intensive supports. However, much of the literature about Housing First has focused on adult populations so little is known about its effectiveness in the context of youth homelessness. That being said, there are particular aspects of Housing First strategies that offer promise for the application to youth populations.

Mental health and addictions issues have been cited as a contributing factor to homelessness. Youth who are Indigenous, youth with disabilities, LGBTTQ youth and youth leaving care are also at elevated risk. In some programs, housing is revoked if individuals do not abstain from substance use and/or abide by particular rules. Housing First does not place such conditions on individuals and allows them to accept support at their own pace while still being provided with housing stability. Housing stability also provides youth with space that is free from negative influences and harsh environmental or social stressors that may contribute to substance use or mental health issues⁵³.

⁵³ Forchuk, C., Richardosn, J., Laverty, K., Bryant, M., Rudnick, A., Csiernik, R., & Kelly, C. (2013). *Housing First, or Both Together*. Implications for Policy and

Youth participating in the surveys and focus groups expressed sentiments that are aligned with the Housing First approach. Specifically, they shared that they want access to shelter, without conditions being placed upon them.

Despite these promising aspects, it is important to acknowledge that some Housing First principles must be *adapted* for youth. Specifically, youth development must be considered when implementing such a strategy. For example, Housing First assumes that individuals have the skills necessary for independent living and in many instances youth have yet to develop these skills and can become overwhelmed with the independence associated with living on their own. Furthermore, during adolescence, peers often play an important role and living alone can result in disconnecting from ones peer group⁵⁴. Indeed, social isolation was cited as a concern among youth participating in the surveys and focus groups. The report entitled *A Safe and Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth*⁵⁵ provides recommendations for Housing First for Youth. Core principles include:

- **Youth Choice and Determination** in which youth have choice in the type of living arrangements they would prefer and the supports they will receive (including opportunities for education and training)
- **Positive Youth Development Orientation** where youth are supported in transitioning to adulthood. Supports are provided to youth based on developmental needs and challenges
- **Social and Community Integration** which provides youth with opportunities for social and cultural engagement and participation in meaningful activities

The *Housing First in Rural Communities Report*⁵⁶ also draws attention to the unique rural context that may require adaptations of Housing First. For example, Housing First has traditionally relied on private sector housing which is limited in rural areas, and as noted, it is perceived as undesirable for individuals to move out of their home communities to areas where housing stock may be more plentiful. This does not mean that Housing First is unobtainable in a rural context, but rather that particular considerations must be taken into account when applying this model.

For these reasons, it is important that case management is aligned with Housing First practices such that youth are directed to appropriate housing quickly. Furthermore, it is imperative for case management to be flexible across the continuum of housing so that youth have the opportunity to shift from one form of housing to the next without compromising their support and connections to the community, which are often strong for rural youth. Case management should also be continuous so that the youth have consistent support from, and strong relationships with their case management team. Indeed, research points to the benefits of positive role models for helping youth to positively transition to adulthood⁵⁷.

It is particularly important for case management to be ongoing, even after a youth becomes housed⁵⁸. Things don't always work out and youth may find themselves in situations that challenge their housing arrangement. Youth may experience conflict with family or their landlord, lose their job, experience stressful situations, or fall back into

Practice, 95.

⁵⁴ Forchuk, C., Richardosn, J., Laverty, K., Bryant, M., Rudnick, A., Csiernik, R., & Kelly, C. (2013). *Housing First, or Both Together*. Implications for Policy and Practice, 95.

⁵⁵ Gaetz, S. (2014). *A Safe and Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Frame for Youth*. Toronto: The Homelessness Hub.

⁵⁶ Waegenmakers, J., Turner, A. (n.d). *Housing First in Rural Communities: Rural Homelessness and Housing First Feasibility Across 22 Canadian Communities*. Calgary.

⁵⁷ Zeldin, S., Christens, B.D., & Powers, J.L., (2013). The psychology and practice of youth-adult partnership: Bridging generations for youth development and community change. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 51(3-4), 385-397.

⁵⁸ Gaetz, S. (2014). *Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada*. Toronto. The Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

substance abuse. In such situations it is important that a case worker is there for social, emotional and practical support so that housing remains secure. Therefore, ongoing assessment of needs is important, so that services and supports can be adjusted as required. Case management is a complex process that is resource intensive and requires a strong business plan and collaboration from a variety of key stakeholders. For these reasons, the implementation steps listed here focus on refining plans and developing possible models.

Table 16: Implementation Steps for Action Strategy 3.2

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
REFINING PLANS FOR NEW SERVICES AND SUPPORTS		
<p>Implementation Step A) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will establish a Housing Options & Case Management working group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Options & Case Management working group established 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2016
<p>Implementation B) Drawing on existing resources and other Housing First for youth models, the working group will explore how Housing First needs to look different for youth. The Working Group will also document who is currently doing case management in Wellington County and how it is being offered, and research what intensive case management needs to look like in the context of youth homelessness. It will identify how the roles of existing case managers can be built upon, enhanced, and supported to meet the needs of youth and ensure case management is continuous across housing models. The Housing Options & Case Management working group will identify how measurements of success need to be different for youth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report presented to Steering Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2016
<p>Implementation Step C) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee and the Housing Options & Case Management working group will identify infrastructure and funding needed to implement housing first options. They will identify the partners that need to be involved to ensure that adequate supports (education, training, employment for young people) are available to youth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report presented to Steering Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2017
<p>Implementation Step D) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will ensure that the common assessment tool is linked to case management intake (see 1.3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report presented to Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fall 2017

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
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IMPLEMENTING NEW SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

<p>Implementation Step E) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee and Housing Options & Case Management working group will identify an agency to take the lead on Housing First for rural youth in Wellington County.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead agency designated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter 2017
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Key stakeholders to involve in implementation of this action strategy include the County of Wellington, organizations involved in implementing Housing First for adults, education and youth employment agencies. Existing Case Management Workers should also be involved (Wyndham House, Homewood, ACT Teams, Family Health Teams, Probation and OPP), as well as School Child and Youth Workers, Family Counselling and Support Services, Family & Children's Services and County of Wellington.

Promising Practices

- The Boys and Girls Club of Calgary's Infinity Project helps youth ages 16 to 24 obtain suitable and affordable housing while also providing supports to maintain their housing (e.g. reviewing lease agreements, helping youth respond to landlord concerns, providing rental supplements). Youth are also supported to achieve self-sufficiency through participation in employment training programs, enrolling in school, and participating in skills development opportunities. Program staff also help youth with the transition to adulthood through facilitating family reconnection, supporting youth to attend community events and exploring youth interests in the community.
- The Transition to Independence Process (TIP) model has been adopted by a number of youth serving agencies in Guelph Wellington, including Wyndham House. This model involves youth in planning processes and guides agencies in providing support to youth with emotional/behavioural difficulties during transitions in the domains of employment, educational opportunities, living situations, personal effectiveness and wellbeing, and community-life functioning.
- The Doorway is a program based in Calgary that works with youth who are living on the streets. Using an innovative personal planning and goal-setting tool called Myplan, staff at the Doorway establish step-by-step contracts with participating youth so that they can move towards their goals at their own pace. There are cash incentives for achieving each small goal, and a holistic emphasis on housing, employment, life skills and education.
- The Outcomes Star is a case management measurement tool developed in the U.K. that seeks to identify where a service user is on their journey related to a number of domains. Scores are plotted for each domain through discussion with the service user and worker, and then tracked at regular intervals throughout their journey. Although this tool is highly regarded, there is a cost associated with it.

Action Strategy 3.3. Create Flexible Funding and Rent Support Programs

- Youth have opportunities to utilize income and rent support funding to support their accommodation with extended family members and friends.

The Case for Action

In some instances, a key aspect of housing support may include providing youth with funds to help them secure suitable accommodation. Currently, there are few affordable options for youth in the Wellington area⁵⁹. Within the context of Wellington County, youth participating in focus groups expressed a preference for remaining within their own community, and with family members or friends where possible. Individuals providing housing in the Host Homes model are often compensated for associated costs, and providing youth with the opportunity to compensate their Host Home family themselves offers an opportunity for the youth to develop skills that will be valuable when they transition to independent living.

Table 17: Implementation Steps for Action Strategy 3.3

Implementation Steps	Indicators of Success	Proposed Timeline
IMPLEMENTING NEW SERVICES AND SUPPORTS		
Implementation Step A) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will identify what current funding sources can be leveraged to support youth housing costs associated with various housing models (building on funding flexibility that exists locally).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource plan developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2016
Implementation Step B) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will explore how to appropriately compensate rural housing providers by researching how providers are compensated in other communities (e.g. Bridging the Gap).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource plan developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2017
Implementation Step C) The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee will review local funding models (County CAD program, CHPI, and Housing First funding models) and assess their applicability to youth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource plan developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Winter 2017

Key stakeholders to involve in implementing this action strategy include potential funders (including Innoweave), the County of Wellington, the LHIN, CMHA and Family & Children's Services.

Promising Practices

- Based on the Housing First philosophy, the Community Agency Delivery rent support program provides ongoing rent support, integrated with community based wrap-around supports so that individuals can find

⁵⁹ Wellington County. (2012). *Housing and Homelessness Plan for CSM Service Area of Wellington County and the City of Guelph: Interim Summary of Findings and Conclusions of the Need and Demand Study for 2006-2011*.

and maintain safe and affordable housing in Wellington County.

Conclusions

This Action Plan is the first step in setting a clear agenda to end youth homelessness in Wellington County, and is well aligned with the 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan for Guelph Wellington. It also reflects the unique needs of youth within a rural context. It is intended to facilitate collaboration and it is developmental in nature; it will continue to evolve over time with input from key individuals and organizations. Some action strategies and implementation steps are less developed than others, but this should be viewed as a strength rather than a limitation of the plan. Since this plan is reliant upon the engagement of partners, occasions for input into the development of certain pieces will provide opportunities to engage and collaborate on the plan.

Although there are a large number of action strategies and implementation steps outlined in this plan, it should be noted that there is already important work taking place to address and prevent youth homelessness within Wellington County. This speaks to the practical and achievable nature of the goals identified in this plan. At its core, this plan is intended to coordinate all of the work that is currently taking place to show how this work fits into the overall goals of the plan, and how this work can be organized within a youth homelessness framework. Indeed, many of the implementation steps outlined in this plan focus on fully engaging partners so that information can be gathered and shared, plans can be refined for new services and supports, and new services and supports can be implemented. The Rural Youth Homelessness Steering Committee and working groups will play a key role in coordinating this work. Many of the implementation steps identified in this plan highlight the need for long-term sustainability planning. Building the infrastructure to manage this work in a coordinated way is essential in order to prevent and end youth homelessness in Wellington County and the Steering Committee will confront questions not directly addressed in this plan.