

A WAY HOME
VERS UN CHEZ-SOI
CANADA



**CELEBRATING A WAY HOME'S
FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF WORKING
TOGETHER TO END YOUTH
HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA**

5
YEARS!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We would also like to acknowledge everyone embedded across our A Way Home and Making the Shift advisories, committees and networks, including the 29 organizations of the [National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness](#). Their contributions to our collective vision are invaluable.

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- Maytree
- Ontario Trillium Foundation
- PetSmart Charities
- Province of Ontario

“HOME” MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

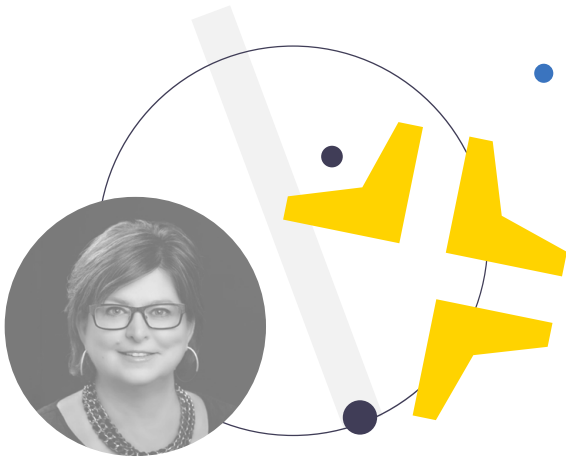
Letter from Board Chair, Jody Ciufu

When “A Way Home” was preparing to launch in 2015, it too meant different things to different people. It was giving front line workers the tools to get youth out of precarious housing and into safe spaces, offering concrete evidence through research and data on what worked and what didn’t, creating a social movement that rejected homelessness as a possible outcome for any Canadian youth, and offering a human rights lens to magnify the injustice leading to homelessness, especially among youth who identify as Indigenous, Black or Racialized, or LGBTQ2S+. From the beginning, we all agreed it wouldn’t be just another bureaucracy among many competing for resources and public attention.

A Way Home came from a partnership between a visionary funder – the Catherine Donnelly Foundation (CDF) – and three innovative entities, Eva’s Initiatives for Homeless Youth (now called Eva’s), the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association. Offering a stable, secure and predictable grant of \$1.25 million over five years was an unusual and liberating move. This allowed the program “Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness”(MLC) to develop and test the concept that local community engagement and systemic policy change together could shift the focus on youth homelessness from emergency response to prevention.

In early 2015, with the full support of CDF and the growing number of partner organizations, including the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Raising the Roof, Eagle Human Rights Trust, and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, the MLC Program started its transition into the federally incorporated not-for-profit “A Way Home” with Melanie Redman as our founding CEO. Two themes would mark the new AWH: systemic change through community grounding and Collective Impact.

The first, firm grounding in the community to effect systemic change, flowed directly from the MLC and has flourished over the past five years and is celebrated in the following pages. An unexpected, yet validating, achievement of AWH is the birth of a world-wide movement. From being invited into communities across Canada, we now accept invitations from countries around the world to share our story, resources and collective vision for change. We’ve even shared our name. Starting with A Way Home America in 2016, A Way Home organizations have launched in Europe, Scotland and Australia.



- The second defining theme of A Way Home is Collective Impact - using a coalition approach to effect transformations in policy, planning and practice. We bring together people with lived experience of youth homelessness, service providers, researchers, policy makers, and funders from a variety of different sectors – community, business, government, academic, charitable, legal, etc. – at local, national and international levels. Collective Impact works as our guiding frame because the many systems that drive young people into homelessness must also be part of the solutions.

It was a group of youth in Kelowna, one of the first sites of our MLC Program, who said that “home” means different things to different people. They also said that there is more than one way home. Choosing this name five years ago, we signalled our founding belief that many partners and many paths will lead to the prevention of youth homelessness and a society where all young people can find A Way Home.

Jody Ciufu, Board Chair



CELEBRATING FIVE YEARS OF COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION

Letter from President & CEO, Melanie Redman

It seems like only yesterday I was in one of my first MLC Steering Committee meetings in my new role as the Director of National Initiatives at Eva's. I vividly recall the brilliant and passionate people at that table - changemakers, if you will. At one point during the meeting, Dr. Stephen Gaetz from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness said that we should all work toward a big national vision for preventing and ending youth homelessness. He proposed that we build on the important work of the MLC program to launch a national coalition. He couldn't have been speaking to a more receptive audience. From that moment on, we put our brains together and the A Way Home coalition began to take shape. As Jody named, we couldn't have done it without the founding partners and the on-going support of the Catherine Donnelly Foundation. We are also fortunate to have an incredibly supportive Board of Directors and Advisory.



I've written this report to showcase key moments, activities and accomplishments that punctuate our work to date to tackle the wicked social problem of youth homelessness. One of the key ingredients of our success is creating spaces for shared learning across communities and countries via the A Way Home movement. Another ingredient is seeding and supporting innovations in policy, planning and practice. Our work is always in close partnership with people with lived experience of youth homelessness, communities and community organizations that ground us in the realities of youth and their families.

In the pages to follow, I hope that our partners across systems and borders recognize their contributions to the A Way Home vision for change. Whether we're creating new knowledge, or working to mobilize existing knowledge, it's only possible through our rich collaborations. It has been an absolute honour to lead A Way Home since its inception. Please join me in celebrating our 5th anniversary and our achievements to date!

Melanie Redman, Founding President & CEO

A Way Home is a national coalition reimagining solutions to youth homelessness through transformations in policy, planning and practice.

A Way Home is a national coalition reimagining solutions to youth homelessness through transformations in policy, planning and practice. A Way Home is also an international movement for change that began with A Way Home Canada. We work with all orders of government, communities, services providers and philanthropy to create a policy, investment and service environment that enables a shift

away from simply “managing” the problem of youth homelessness through emergency services to a more proactive, rights-based approach that focuses on prevention (stopping young people from becoming homeless in the first place) and helping those who are homeless move into housing with supports as rapidly as possible in a safe and planned way. Our collective work is evidence-driven and solutions-focused.



A WAY HOME IN REVIEW

In thinking about the gains the A Way Home coalition has made to date, it's important to reflect back to the beginning and then punctuate some defining moments of our work leading up until now. We can then situate the issue of youth homelessness and our work moving forward in the realities of the pandemic.

Can we prevent and end youth homelessness?

Before we officially launched A Way Home in November, 2015, Members of the A Way Home team were leading Eva's National Initiatives Program, based in Toronto. We had just launched a critical pilot funded by the Catherine Donnelly Foundation (CDF). CDF's first 5-year investment in the "Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness Program" was a clear response to the question "Can we prevent and end youth homelessness?" The answer was, "yes, we think we can" and we think that work has to build from the community up - so that's what we did. We began experimenting with a set number of communities to rally around developing and implementing tangible strategies to prevent and end youth homelessness. We soon found that if we went community by community developing strategies we could never turn the tide on the issue, so we had to go back to the table on the question of *HOW*?

HOW do we prevent and end youth homelessness?

The first 4 years of the Mobilizing Local Capacity to End Youth Homelessness Program gave me, my team, and our national steering committee of service providers, policy makers, advocates, funders, researchers and people with lived experience the space to start answering the question of *how* we could collectively move the dial on the issue.

Crafting a vision to prevent and end youth homelessness

Collectively we crafted a vision paper for what we thought it would take to prevent and end youth homelessness in Canada, and the subsequent years have been focused on laying the foundation for achieving the vision. We brought the lens of Collective Impact to the vision, understanding that there are systems and players outside of the youth homelessness sector of service providers that must be part of creating the solutions. Collective Impact continues to shape our strategy and tactics, both nationally and at the community level.

Developing a national definition of youth homelessness

One of the key first steps with the vision paper was ensuring we're all talking about the same thing when we talk about youth homelessness. So, we worked with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and a broad range of stakeholders to develop a national [definition of youth homelessness](#).

The definition is helpful in two critical ways:

- First, it distinguishes the experience of youth homelessness from that of adult homelessness
- And it also provides age parameters around who is included. We define homeless youth as age 13-24.

Seeding an international movement for change

As part of the vision, in late 2015 we launched the A Way Home Coalition with an initial 10-year mandate. Then something unexpected happened. In the months before and then after our official launch, communities in Canada and countries around the world began inviting us to come and share about our efforts in Canada. This led to many asking to adopt the AWH brand to signify their commitment to the growing movement for change. A Way Home America launched at the White House just six months into our mandate. Now we have A Way Home Ottawa, Kelowna, Peterborough, Europe, Australia and others. Collectively we've been engaged in on-going shared learning and have partnered widely on developing new knowledge.



“Choosing the name A Way Home was a no brainer for us in FEANTSA. It allowed us to tap into an international movement that was already producing results, resources & tools in both Canada and the United States of America.”

“Our mission to prevent and end youth homelessness is not solely a European endeavour and where possible we should share common challenges and co-develop solutions. I’m a big fan of avoiding reinventing the wheel wherever possible and with A Way Home Canada we found inspiring and passionate peers who shared our vision of ending youth homelessness and have been incredibly happy to partner with them and bring their approach to Europe.”

“The name also puts a positive spin on the fight to end homelessness. It’s not focusing on the existing problems or putting young people into a box of ‘homelessness’. It’s about supporting young people to find their home. For services, it pushes the focus back on the way or method with which we accomplish that. This gives us the opportunity to start conversations about how we partner with organisations and opens the door for Collective Impact and other forms of innovation.”

- Robbie Stakelum, FEANTSA/A Way Home Europe

Supporting communities to develop plans

Throughout these years, we continue to support communities, regions, and even provinces and territories to develop practical strategies to prevent and end youth homelessness. We’ve learned so much along the way. We developed the [Youth Homelessness Community Planning Toolkit](#) with support from the Province of Ontario as a way to help communities go further faster on the planning side, because one of our key learnings is that the “devil is in the details” on implementation. Two years ago, we combined efforts with [HelpSeeker](#) and the [Canadian Observatory on Homelessness](#) to launch the [Systems Planning Collective](#) and have expanded our work to build the capacity of other planners to do this work well. We’ve also received support from the Government of Canada to develop online learning modules for systems planners.

“A Way Home-Kelowna was established in 2017, just as our community was in the process of developing a larger plan to tackle the issue of homelessness. A group of dedicated youth organizations had been working together around how to best meet the needs of young people, and agreed to build on this existing collaboration in order to establish and launch AWH-Kelowna.

“At a time when a spotlight was shining on homelessness, we wanted to make sure that the needs of young people were not only taken into consideration, but were embedded within the larger community strategy. As opposed to an afterthought in the community planning process, by establishing AWH-Kelowna we were able to give the issue of youth homelessness the profile and attention it deserved.”

“A combination of timing, opportunity, and partnership allowed youth homelessness to be integrated seamlessly into the community planning process, becoming a priority population with specific targets within the Kelowna Journey Home Strategy. We would not have been able to get AWH-Kelowna off of the ground without the support of AWH-Canada. Being connected to a National movement has allowed us to accomplish things that we could not have imagined by working on our own, including leveraging funding to support our work. Staff from AWH-Canada have been invaluable in helping us throughout the development, and now early implementation, of our youth homelessness prevention strategy.”

“From presenting on the issue of youth homelessness to help with raising awareness and understanding in our community, to providing support, guidance, and technical support in our work, the outcomes have been significant. One year into the Journey Home Strategy, we are in the process of establishing 35 units of youth specific housing, including new supportive housing with dedicated space for young people. In August, we will launch Housing First for Youth, and through the support of and connection AWH-Canada, will join the Making the Shift project. We are also working closely with AWH-Canada and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness to launch the Upstream Project in Kelowna, ensuring that the prevention of youth homelessness is at the forefront of our work.”

“Signing on to the A Way Home brand has allowed us to benefit from evidence led policies and practices, and where there is a lack of evidence, work collectively to build an evidence base. We are excited to work with A Way Home Canada and continue to move forward and show Canada, and the world, that we can prevent, and ultimately end, youth homelessness.”

- Mike Gawliuk, Canadian Mental Health Association, Kelowna



Establishing the AWH Funders Table

The A Way Home Funders Table is the crown jewel of Valerie Lemieux and Mike Flynn and our work together with the Catherine Donnelly Foundation. Valerie and Mike visioned a table of philanthropic support for A Way Home. The main work of the table has focused on shared learning and collaboration. There are many amazing outcomes of the table, including co-developing new funding streams to incentivize prevention programs, collaborating on advocacy efforts and producing new tools and resources.

Creating a national research agenda

One very important step early in our mandate was to work with service providers, policy makers, funders and researchers to co-create a national youth homelessness research agenda. Probably the most important item on the agenda was working with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness to conduct the first ever national study on youth homelessness causes and conditions. The [Without a Home](#) study in 2016 gave communities an important advocacy tool. It gave A Way Home a calling card with various orders of government at a time when there was a desire for and receptivity to this evidence. We just completed the second round of the study with support from the Home Depot Canada Foundation, which goes deeper into important issues like parenting and human trafficking.

Building our public policy asks

We were able to use the results of the Without a Home study to feed the development of policy positions and recommendations across a number of key domains. Several of our policy recommendations have been taken up by various orders of government. We're currently tracking our contributions to policy shifts through our impact evaluation.

Growing the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness

The Learning Community (LC) started as a relatively small and close knit group of innovative practitioners. Growing the Learning Community in a thoughtful way that allowed for trust-building and a culture of collaboration and support was extremely important to us. We grew the LC from 12 to 29 innovative organizations and sector leaders from across the country. Practitioners are not only engaged in a rich and supportive community of practice through the Learning Community, but they're also critical in feeding what's happening on the ground into the work of AWH. We also work together to develop tools and resources for the sector, including the [LGBTQ2S+ Toolkit](#), which was refreshed and re-launched this summer. The Learning Community's working groups are Indigenous youth homelessness, housing and prevention.

Applying a human rights lens

We recognized fairly early on that we needed to take a rights-based approach in all of our work. With the support of Maytree and Laidlaw Foundation, we worked with Leilani Fahra & Canada Without Poverty to develop a guide to ground strategies to prevent and end youth homelessness in international human rights treaties. In our consultations with youth with lived experience to develop the guide, we learned just how strongly the rights language resonates with young people. The [Youth Rights, Right Now!](#) guide has now been translated by FEANTSA Youth in Europe into seven additional languages.

Launching the Making the Shift Demonstration Lab

One of the challenges we've been up against in getting governments and communities to really take up homelessness prevention is having tangible examples of what that looks like in action in policy and practice. We realized we have significant knowledge gaps in this space, so we worked with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Government of Canada to develop a vision for testing models of prevention and [Housing First for Youth](#) in twelve Canadian communities in two provinces. These [demonstration projects](#) in Alberta and Ontario were launched in partnership with community organizations in 2017 with a total investment from the Government of Canada to date of \$14.8 million dollars, with most of the funding going to provide services in communities. The demonstration projects involve a hefty amount of work strengthening the family and natural supports of young people. In conjunction, we're doing rigorous research and evaluation of the projects. As we learn, we are supporting our community partners to continue to strengthen the service models to get the best possible outcomes for young people and their families. One of the projects in Hamilton, ON with the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre is Indigenous designed, Indigenous led, and the research is carried out by Indigenous researchers. We're also learning so much about the value of cultural healing and reconnection that we're applying to all of our work. We have since expanded the demonstration projects to include two additional sites in British Columbia and Newfoundland & Labrador.



Scanning the world for what works

Our next step in filling our knowledge gaps was to partner with the Wales Centre for Public Policy to do an [international scan of evidence](#) of prevention in action. This was really helpful for us in terms of innovative ideas that can be adapted for Canada.

Asking the real experts

We then worked with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness to conduct a [pan-Canadian consultation](#) in 7 provinces and territories with young people with lived experience of youth homelessness to learn what they believe would have prevented their homelessness at every step of the journey. Much of what we heard was confirmed by the international scan of evidence and pointed to important things like school-based early intervention, which is some of the work we're now doing with our demonstration projects. This includes adapting an Australian model of school-based early intervention called the Upstream Project.

Showing who's responsible for what

With all of the previous work described, we were laying the groundwork for a very important piece of work we co-developed with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness called [The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness](#). It provides practical examples of prevention in policy and practice from Canada and abroad. It also identifies who is responsible for what in terms of preventing homelessness. For far too long we've dumped the whole issue of youth homelessness on service providers alone, when the prevention agenda necessitates the active participation of other systems in creating and implementing solutions.

Co-leading a Networks of Centres of Excellence

After we launched the demonstration projects in 2017, we were approached by York University with an idea that A Way Home and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness should leverage the demonstration project work into a federally funded Networks of Centres of Excellence. We won the competition and launched the [Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab](#) in 2019. We were awarded 17.9 million dollars to invest in original research to fill knowledge gaps, but also to provide additional support for service providers in the areas of training and technical assistance. We have five interlocking research themes that are all about prevention and sustainable exits from homelessness. We also have an Indigenous youth homelessness research theme led by Indigenous researchers. This research is not just for research sake (we all know people experiencing homelessness have "research fatigue"), but it is specifically to fill gaps in knowledge that are keeping us from realizing prevention writ large. We're now pleased to announce that the Making the Shift body of work will be part of a United Nations Charter Centre of Excellence housed at York University, known as the "Toronto Center of Excellence on Youth Homelessness Prevention at York University". You can learn more about the Making the Shift impact to date in our recently released [Impact Report](#).

Scaling solutions

Five years in, we're at the point where other communities are starting to take up some of these solutions and implement them in their own communities.

In order to better support communities to do that we are in the process of:

- Evolving & growing the Learning Community and the services we offer to the youth homelessness sector writ large
- Expanding the demonstration projects
- Enhancing training and technical assistance offerings
- Engaging in additional efforts to mobilize the new knowledge created by our collective efforts

Measuring impact

Since AWH's launch in 2015, we've achieved some pretty important milestones. That said, it's important that we understand the real impacts we're having, both positive and negative. As mentioned previously, we have a robust impact evaluation underway led by Blueprint and a postdoctoral fellow at York University. Over the next few years, we'll have emerging learning to share back to all of our stakeholders. An important part of the impact evaluation is capturing case studies of how our work has directly impacted the work on the ground.

“For the longest time in York Region, we were primarily focused on reacting to youth homelessness as it happened. Through conversations with A Way Home Canada and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, we began to understand that we truly could not end youth homelessness if we did not turn our focus to one of prevention. I'm pleased to say with their support and guidance, prevention and programs and services that help to prevent homelessness are front and centre for all providers and local governments as we look to prevent and end youth homelessness.”

- Michael Braithwaite, CEO Blue Door Shelters



POLICY

8 Policy Briefs and Reports

16 Research Reports

PLANNING

17 Community Plans to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness

27 Community Planning Resources

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PRACTICE

1,207

Making the Shift Demonstration Lab Youth Participants

Numbers as of September 2020

- **892** have achieved housing stability
- **882** reported improved health and well-being
- **928** reported strengthened family and natural supports
- **828** strengthened community relations
- **866** reported that they enhanced their essential skills
- **818** remained or returned to school
- **375** are employed or self-employed

29

National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness Members

47

Covid-19 Community of Practice Members

30

Practice Tools



To learn more about our impact, check out our recently released 2019-2020 [Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab Impact Report](#).

Responding to Covid-19

So with all of these important things at play, we now find ourselves in a global pandemic. We've engaged in a number of activities to support the sector during this time. We hold weekly Covid-19 community of practice calls, have curated resources about how to respond to the pandemic and are engaged in numerous advocacy efforts.

For example, we worked with advocacy partners to get provinces and territories to put moratoriums on transitions from care during the pandemic. We also conducted two rounds of national surveys during the pandemic with more than 60 organizations across the country and released [reports](#) with the findings and recommendations. We'll continue being as agile in our response to service providers' needs as those service providers are to the needs of young people and their families in these difficult times.

“The pandemic has exposed just how insane and unsafe it is to warehouse people who are homeless. We're all aware that post-pandemic we may find ourselves in a situation of extreme austerity, or our leaders will recognize this as a massive opportunity for transformation. Regardless, the prevention of all forms of homelessness becomes that much more important. For the austerity agenda, keeping people mired in homelessness is very expensive. For a more just and equitable agenda, it is time we stop people from becoming homeless in the first place. I believe A Way Home is well positioned to help make this happen.”

- Cécile Arbaud, Executive Director, Dans la Rue

LOOKING AHEAD

We have much work underway to contribute to the transformation of how we respond to youth homelessness. With our [Theory of Change](#) as an important guide, we'll make the best possible use of the next five years of the A Way Home mandate. We'll continue to ground our work in the wisdom of people with lived experience of youth homelessness. We'll work toward Reconciliation, and in support of a diverse, equitable, and inclusive Canada where all young people and their families have everything they need to thrive. We'll continue doing this work as a coalition, where together, we are stronger.