A Strategy for Reducing Youth Homelessness in Lanark County

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of a Canada-wide focus on reducing homelessness, local organizations in Lanark County, Ontario have begun working together to develop a homelessness strategy. The proposed plan is to pool resources and establish full service youth homelessness centres in each of the four major communities within Lanark County, beginning in Perth. Before proceeding, further research was requested to examine the viability of such a proposal, and better understand the nature of homelessness in the area.

The research objectives consisted of:

1) Establishing a baseline of youth homelessness in Perth
2) Establishing the need for services in Lanark County (and Perth specifically)
3) Examine possible options for service model

To accomplish these goals both primary and secondary research was conducted. The secondary research process involved exploring similar initiatives across Canada by scanning research and reports published by the Government of Canada, research institutes, and organizations working towards the reduction of homelessness. Primary research was conducted through qualitative interviews with homeless youth aged 16 to 27. Ten interviews in total were completed in three of the largest communities within Lanark County. The concerns and recommendations made by youth were incorporated and contrasted against published findings.

An Approach for Reducing Homelessness

The research process revealed that nearly all homelessness initiatives use a modified version of the housing first approach. Beginning with a philosophy of ensuring individuals have access to permanent residence, without conditions and as quickly as possible, communities are beginning to see a reduction in homelessness. Research from urban areas also indicates that by ensuring adequate housing for all, the total economic burden on the community is reduced.

Homelessness in Lanark County

Primary research obtained from interviews with youth from Lanark County was consistent with research from secondary sources. Providing immediate/temporary shelter is the primary concern for youth, many of whom are not chronically homeless and require temporary assistance.

Conservative estimates suggest 45 homeless youth in Lanark County in a given year, leading to a generalized economic impact of $2,475,000 per annum. However, because these figures are generalized from Canada-wide estimates, the number of

homeless youth is likely higher and the cost is likely lower. This is due to having a large portion of hidden homelessness in rural areas, and less investment in support services and infrastructure.

Reducing Homelessness in Lanark County

Based on secondary research and in-depth interviews, the creation of full-service youth homelessness centres is recommended for the following reasons:

- Creation of access points to identify the homeless population
- Establishment of temporary shelter solutions which do not currently exist in Lanark County
- Increased access to services otherwise difficult to obtain for homeless youth due to the dispersion of resources and lack of public transportation
- Reduction in overhead and operating expenses for each partner organization collectively
- Facilitation of social enterprise initiatives to combat youth unemployment, provide work experience otherwise difficult to obtain, and further generate revenue to decrease the economic impact of homelessness on the county

A general four-step process is recommended in terms of priority

1. Adopt a housing first approach
2. Create unified centres to provide immediate shelter solutions
3. Work to integrate operations with the county's 10 year housing and homelessness plan to create clear transition pathways from shelter to housing
4. Build community partnerships to expand the services available to youth through the full-service youth and homelessness centres.

4 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report has been commissioned by partner organizations in Lanark County with the overall goal of reducing homelessness. A request for research was made through Algonquin College's Centre for Applied Research and Innovation to be conducted throughout the summer months of 2015. There were two primary objectives for the research which are discussed in detail throughout this report. They are:

1) Develop a better understanding of homelessness in Lanark County
2) Examine the reasoning and viability of establishing unified centres for addressing homelessness in Lanark County

Each general objective was examined using several research methodologies including secondary research and primary qualitative research.

This report aims to provide clarity surrounding homelessness and recommendations for next actions.

5 DEFINING TERMS AND CONCEPTS

The following is a list of terms and concepts vital to the understanding of this document.

5.1.1 Types of Homelessness

Unsheltered / Absolute Homelessness: Individuals who have no form of shelter or living accommodation. This includes those who live on the streets or other areas not intended for habitation.

Provisionally Accommodated / The Hidden Homeless: Those who have temporary shelter without security or stability. This includes individuals who are couch surfing, staying in motels and living temporarily with friends or relatives. A large portion of the "hidden homeless" are in this category.

Emergency Sheltered: Individuals who rely on overnight shelters for accommodation.

Insecurely Housed: Those who currently possess living accommodations, but are at-risk of homelessness due to economic or other circumstances.

5.1.2 Popular Models for Addressing Homelessness

Housing First: A philosophy which is recovery-oriented towards homelessness. It states that the first priority should be to move the homeless into independent and permanent housing with no conditions. This should also be accomplished as quickly as possible. However, this is simply the first step as the name implies and must be paired with the appropriate support services to be effective (Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver, Housing first in Canada: supporting communities to end homelessness, 2013). "Housing First is simple: provide housing first, and then combine that housing with supportive treatment services in mental and physical health, substance abuse, education, and employment." (Pathways National, 2015).

Non-Profit Housing: Affordable and community-based housing provided by non-profit organizations.

Rent Geared to Income (RGI): This approach adjusts rental rates depending on the resources of the individual. When this tactic is combined with a housing first approach and non-profit housing, it can facilitate quick transitions off of the streets.

Social Housing: Housing that is provided and sponsored by the community. This can take many forms and is often provided through a collaborative effort between non-profits, co-operative housing groups, and government agencies.

Supportive Housing: Housing typically provided by non-profit groups that integrate various types of assistance into the accommodation and services. This type of housing is often geared towards the elderly, individuals with mental health and addictions, and those with disabilities.

5.1.3 Approaches for Social Change

Collective Impact: A process through which stakeholder organizations collaborate to achieve population level outcomes. Collective Impact is multi sector approach aimed at developing a common vision and action plan to accomplish a specific community level goal.

Youth CI: A program available through Innoweave aimed at improving outcomes for youth in Ontario. The program uses collective impact principles to facilitate change.

6 BACKGROUND

6.1 UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

6.1.1 Homelessness in Canada

Homelessness is a pervasive issue experienced in nearly every community across Canada. While this country enjoys low levels of poverty and displacement in contrast to other regions of the world, homelessness remains a near unshakeable reality. Conservative estimates suggest there are approximately 200,000 Canadians currently experiencing homelessness across the country (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, & Gulliver, 2013). Statistics Canada does not keep records relating to homelessness and there are no official measures in place to track homelessness rates. It is nearly impossible to measure accurately. The homeless do not possess a permanent point of contact, migrate, and are often provisionally accommodated – resulting in an inability to obtain detailed statistics. Starting from such difficulty with even the most basic processes - identifying the scope of the problem - many local organizations face insurmountable challenges when attempting to reduce homelessness.

6.1.1.1 *How many Canadians experience homelessness?*

As previously stated, measuring homelessness is exceedingly difficult. The most reliable figures are often obtained from shelters and temporary housing services. Between 2005 and 2009 approximately 147,000 people used emergency shelters per year across Canada (Segaert, 2012). These figures were obtained by counting the total number of client stays during this timeframe using a stratified cluster sample. There were a total of 655,000 estimated client stays between 2005 and 2009 with safeguards put in place to eliminate counting the same individuals more than once. Unfortunately the number of client stays did not decrease significantly during that timeframe. An estimated 156,030 individuals used shelters in 2005 with that number remaining fairly constant across the five years of study. However, the number of bed nights increase from 4.5 million in 2005 to 5.3 million in 2009 (Segaert, 2012). This is some indication that reductions are not being made in homelessness, despite the efforts of independent organizations and government agencies.

Unfortunately, using shelter data to estimate the prevalence of homelessness in Canada misses individuals who are unsheltered / experiencing absolute homelessness, and those who are provisionally accommodated / the hidden homeless. In order to account for these two population subsets, point-in-time estimates household surveys are used.

> **Point in Time Estimates:** Attempts to physically count the number of homeless individuals in a community. This methodology works to account for the completely unsheltered and absolute homeless. It has been used in many

metropolitan areas, including Toronto, to provide more accurate homeless estimates (City of Toronto, 2013).

Household Surveys: To estimate the prevalence of the hidden homeless / provisionally accommodated groups, telephone household surveys were conducted to identify individuals who were "couch surfing". After conducting 1,027 interviews in the Metro Vancouver area it was estimated that 23,543 individuals were provisionally accommodated during 2009 (Eberle, Kraus, & Serge, 2009). In 2006 the population of Metro Vancouver was 2,116,581 (Metro Vancouver, 2012). This suggests the hidden homeless make up less than 0.2% of a region's population. Based on these findings it is conceivable that on any given night there are approximately 50,000 provisionally accommodated individuals in Canada (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2015). This is a sizeable sub-group that goes largely unnoticed.

Best estimates suggest at least 200,000 Canadians experience homelessness per year, and there are at least 30,000 homeless individuals on any given night (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, & Gulliver, 2013). Based on 2009 population estimates, approximately 0.56% of the population experiences homelessness each year (Statistics Canada Demography Division, 2014) if the rates of homelessness are uniform across the country. Without utilizing point in time estimates, household surveys and using shelter data, it is difficult to obtain accurate estimates for a specific community.

6.1.1.2 *Can homelessness be compared across Canada?*
Research conducted in the Greater Victoria Area found that homelessness patterns in the region are similar to those in Ottawa, along with Toronto and Guelph (Rabinovitch, Pauly, & Zhao, 2015). Using cluster analysis to examine homeless segments, the researchers found there were more similarities between major regions than differences. By examining demographic information across regions, there were few noticeable differences in cluster groupings.

This suggests that patterns and data derived from several regions can be generalized to homelessness as a whole, and vice-versa. However there are documented differences between urban and rural areas that are discussed in this report.

6.1.1.3 *What important trends exist?*
The majority of individuals identified in the "temporary homeless" cluster by Rabinovitch, Pauly & Zhao were between the ages of 20 and 39 years of age (Rabinovitch, Pauly, & Zhao, 2015). This is an indication that younger demographics are more in need of temporary solutions to situational problems.

There is a recognized trend for individuals who become homeless in rural areas to migrate to urban centres. In addition, it is common for individuals and families with low

incomes to migrate to rural areas from urban centres (Peters, Vaillancourt, & Hemingway, 2006). This can lead to cycles of movement between rural and urban communities by individuals who experience sporadic periods of homelessness

6.1.2 Youth Homelessness

Youth homelessness accounts for approximately 20% of the total homeless population. In 2009 there were an estimated 29,964 homeless youth (Segaert, 2012). This number remained consistent between 2005 and 2009. The number of homeless children has increased over the same period from 6,205 to 9,459, accounting for 6.5% of the homeless population. Combined an estimated 36,169, or 26.5% of the homeless population is 24 years of age or younger.

Youth homelessness is estimated to account for 20% of homelessness, with a fairly even split between males and females (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, & Gulliver, 2013). Youth homelessness is estimated at 30,000 annually (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2013) based on shelter use, or 0.65% of all youth using 2014 youth population data (Statistics Canada, 2014). Youth homelessness estimates do not account for hidden homelessness and are almost certainly low. Based on these figures, approximately 1 in 154 youth are homeless in a given year. These numbers increase if children are included into the estimates.

6.1.3 Rural Homelessness

6.1.3.1 *Rural Homelessness tends to be Invisible.*

A significant barrier to effectively addressing homelessness in rural areas is the perception from community members that it does not exist. Homelessness is more invisible in rural areas, largely as the result of three factors; 1) there exists a lack of services available to the homeless which would also expose their situation, 2) the climate tends to be colder and physical shelter more scarce forcing homeless individuals to engage in couch-surfing, and 3) it is more common to seek shelter in remote locations such as in the bush, in tents, in abandoned buildings, or in vehicles (Peters, Vaillancourt, & Hemingway, 2006). This leads to an incorrect assumption by community members and leaders that homelessness does not exist in rural areas. However, completely unsheltered homelessness still exists as demonstrated by a large body of research from across the globe (Cloke, Milbourne, & Widdowfield, 2000) (Le Camp, 2006) (Waegermakers Schiff & Turner, 2014).

6.1.3.2 *Transportation*

Transportation is a common barrier in allowing the homeless to access the necessary services and support. Support services for the homeless tend to be dispersed, and the lack of transportation infrastructure can be a significant barrier to gaining independence.

6.1.3.3   *Housing First and the Homelessness Partnering Strategy*
Interviews with homelessness experts in rural areas suggest that adopting a housing first strategy has significantly improved the ability of communities to develop systems of care and social planning infrastructure (Waegermakers Schiff & Turner, 2014). It is important for rural areas to begin with this framework in order to build the systems needed to reduce homelessness.

6.1.3.4   *Notable Differences between Rural and Urban Homelessness*
Research conducted in British Columbia suggests the following as differences between rural and urban homelessness (Peters, Vaillancourt, & Hemingway, 2006).

- The homeless in rural areas are less likely to have mental health and substance abuse issues
- In rural areas the homeless are more likely to be families
- Homeless individuals are more likely to be younger in rural regions
- There are more homeless women in rural areas when compared to urban
- In rural regions, homeless individuals tend to have more intact social support networks to help them

6.1.4   **Homelessness in Lanark County**
Lanark County has undertaken a ten year housing and homelessness plan which is the first of its kind for the county. The plan contains 7 priorities, which include ending homelessness and increasing access to affordable housing (Lanark County, 2014). There is momentum from both the government and non-profits to permanently address homeless in the county.

In Lanark County, the maximum shelter entitlement from Ontario Works is $479 for a single person, up to $816 for a family with one child. Total entitlements range from $1075 to $1790 per month. In 2013 there were a total of 2393 case units, with 389 being youth aged 7 to 17 (Lanark County, 2014). As of August 9th 2015 the unemployment rate for Eastern Ontario is 8.4%, an increase from the 2014 figures (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015).

Lanark County has a total population of 65,667 and a youth population (16 to 24) of 6,955 (Statistics Canada, 2012). Using the previously identified Canada homelessness averages, the data suggests approximately 368 individuals are homeless in a given year. Using conservative estimates, 45 youth are homeless in a given year.

6.1.5   **The Cost of Homelessness**
Homelessness is estimated to cost Canadians $7,050,000,000 annually when accounting for social services, shelters, correctional services, and health care (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, & Gulliver, 2013). The estimated cost per individual ranges:

> Cost per person = $66,000 to $120,000 using 4 of Canada's major cities (Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and Halifax) as a barometer (Pomeroy, 2005).

Cost per person = $94,202 on average, with this number rising to $134, 642 for individuals who are chronically homeless (RSM Richter & Associates Inc., 2008)

Cost per person = +$55,000 for those with mental health and addictions concerns (Patterson, Somers, McIntosh, Sheill, & Frankish, 2008)

Estimated taxpayer cost per homeless individual = $55,000 to $120,000 per annum.

The latest research was conducted in 2008 and these costs will have only increased since. Assuming the Lanark County takes responsibility for each of these individuals, and using the most conservative figures, homelessness could costs Lanark County $20,240,000 {368 individuals X $55,000}. Youth homelessness would be responsible for approximately $2,475,000 {45 X $55,000}.

However, the true cost due to homelessness is likely lower than these figures. This is because the homeless tend to migrate away from rural areas due to a lack of services. For Lanark County specifically, this results in homeless youth moving to downtown Ottawa, which introduces new issues and challenges. If the county were to take full responsibility for its homeless population today, these figures would be fairly accurate.

The economic cost of homelessness can be drastically reduced by moving towards a proactive, preventative approach that utilizes supportive and transitional housing, with a progression towards ensuring affordable housing units for all. The most significant costs are due to hospitalization and criminal justice expenses, operating shelters, and the support costs of social services (Gaetz, The real cost of homelessness: Can we save money by doing the right thing?, 2012).

Communities all across Canada are seeing the benefits of homelessness prevention and providing the appropriate services. The Calgary Committee to End Homelessness predicts a savings of 3.6 billion by 2018 by adopting a housing first approach, focusing on prevention and working towards enabling the homeless to be self-reliant (The Calgary Committee to End Homelessness, 2008).

6.2 SUMMARY OF BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Homelessness is prevalent in every community studied across Canada. Large subsets of hidden homeless individuals exist who are largely invisible to the overall population. This phenomenon is exacerbated in rural communities that typically have few resources to adequately address homelessness in lasting ways. This lack of resources also leads to migration patterns between rural and urban areas, with the homeless moving to city centres, and those at risk of homelessness moving to urban areas. Addressing homeless

in rural areas using sustainable measures is important for upwards economic and financial mobility.

Using a combination of point-in-time estimates, household surveys, and shelter data, it is estimated that 200,000 Canadians experience homelessness each year, and 30,000 experience homelessness on any given night. Youth homelessness is estimated to be 30,000 individuals each year, accounting for 0.65% of the youth population. The result is 1 in 154 youth experiencing homelessness each year.

In Lanark County it is estimated that at least 368 individuals are homeless each year with 45 or more being youth aged 16 to 25. If these individuals were to stay in Lanark County instead of migrating to Ottawa {which many do} the economic cost to the county would be approximately $20,240,000 total, with youth responsible for $2,475,000.

When comparing urban and rural homelessness, those from rural areas are more likely to be younger, women, have families, have intact social support networks, and less likely to have substance or mental health issues.

It is widely acknowledged that preventative measures including investing in affordable housing, emphasizing housing first, and making services easily accessible will reduce overall homelessness rates and save communities money in the long run.

7 A STRATEGY FOR YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN LANARK COUNTY

7.1 OBJECTIVE
The primary objective is to eliminate homelessness in Lanark County.

7.2 THE NEEDS OF LANARK COUNTY YOUTH
By conducting a series of 10 interviews with homeless youth in Lanark County, trends emerged regarding their needs and barriers.

- Transportation was cited as a consistent barrier for accessing services and bettering their situation
- At least half of interviewed youth had experience with drug addiction or substance abuse. Access to counselling and peer support was commonly stated to have benefitted their condition
- Nearly all youth were very conscious of financial spending and indicated that a small increase in income would make a substantial difference
- Several youth mentioned distrust of traditional medicine for both physical and mental health. Peer support and access to non-traditional medicine was requested
- A third of youth were in relationships while they were homeless. One family also had an infant while homeless. There is a need for temporary housing solutions for families
- Most interviewed youth mentioned friends or relatives as important social support structures. This is consistent with literature findings of rural homelessness. It is important that services are available in Lanark County so youth can stay in the area and maintain their support network.
- Obtaining employment was listed as a difficulty by most interviewed youth. In fact, one individual became homeless in an effort to keep his/her job.
- The Perth youth centre YAK was very important to all youth interviewed in Perth. The staff and programs were regarded with the highest esteem, moving several interviewees to tears. It was often mentioned as the most important factor for helping youth transition away from homelessness. Overall, youth centres play a pivotal role for homeless youth, and those at risk of homelessness.

7.3 HOW TO REDUCE HOMELESSNESS
The following is a general outline for addressing homelessness in Lanark County. It follows the same basic progression of similar initiatives across Canada. Each step should be expanded upon through further planning to generate specific goals and progress milestones.

1 • **BEGIN WITH THE RIGHT FRAMEWORK:** Adopt a Housing First Approach

2 • **ENSURE TEMPORARY HOUSING AND ASSISTANCE IS AVAILABLE:** Establish a Unified Homeless Centre in Each Major Community in Lanark County

3 • **CREATE PERMANENT HOUSING SOLUTIONS:** Work with Lanark County's 10 Year Housing and Homelessness Plan to Create Permanent Housing Solutions

4 • **IMPROVE RESOURCES:** Build Partnerships to expand the services each centre can provide
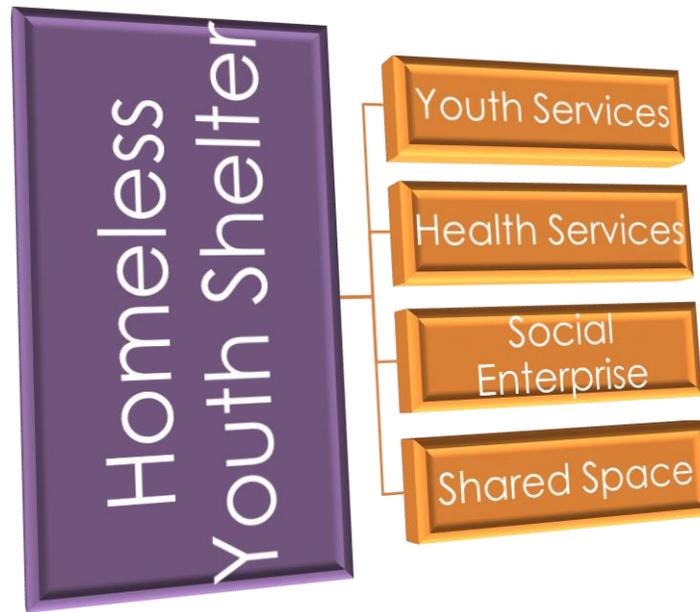
Step 1: Adopting a Housing First Approach

The housing first model has been officially adopted by Canada and has demonstrated great potential for reducing homelessness. The basic premise is that the first priority is to ensure any individual who requires shelter obtains it, with no delay or additional conditions. This includes assisting individuals with criminal records, a history of drug use, or mental health issues to find permanent shelter.

Medicine Hat in Alberta claims they have nearly eliminated homelessness (CBC News, 2014). Their 2015 progress report claims that 73% of the formerly homeless completed their housing first program, with the majority of them now residing in market housing (Medicine Hat Community Housing Society, 2015). The Calgary Committee to End Homelessness has also reported experiencing significant success after adopting a housing first model (The Calgary Committee to End Homelessness, 2008), along with many other examples.

Adopting a housing first approach is crucial, as it is the basis for transitioning the homeless into self-sufficient community members. It provides a point of contact, reduces the likelihood of becoming sick, and overall reduces the amount of financial support they require (Gaetz, The real cost of homelessness: Can we save money by doing the right thing?, 2012).

Step 2: Establishing a unified homeless centre in each major community with Lanark County

In communities across Canada, the pooling of space and resources is becoming commonplace for addressing homelessness. The recommendation for Lanark County is to create facilities where these resources are integrated into one building, or buildings in close proximity. This will reduce challenges for the homeless associated with transportation, increase operational efficiency, and reduce total overhead costs.

Priority #1: Shelter

Before permanent housing solutions can be effective, temporary solutions must be available.

> While most major urban areas are working to reduce the number of shelter beds and converting them into permanent housing units, Lanark County should be doing the opposite. Currently there are no temporary housing solutions available to all youth demographics in Lanark County. Interval House located in Carleton Place is currently the only reliable solution for temporary shelter, and it is only available to abused women. Shelter services must be expanded in Lanark County to provide temporary accommodation for the homeless.

> The primary reasons for recommending an expansion of shelter services are:

> 1. To provide a point of contact.
> 2. To reduce illness and hospital visits
> 3. To fill a fundamental human need which is not currently addressed

When interviewed, nearly all homeless youth participants indicated some form of shelter or temporary housing would be incredibly helpful. Many participants volunteered this information unprompted and with emotion.

A significant barrier for homeless youth was access to services. By bringing these services together, this barrier can be reduced or eliminated.

Interviewed youth reported spending entire days travelling from one community to another within Lanark to access services. These services included medical, employment assistance, and youth centre services.

Through the creation of temporary housing solutions that are paired with youth services, homeless youth will have access to information and programs they otherwise would not have.

Over half of interviewed youth experienced difficulty learning about available services because of their remote locations. Individuals and families who sought shelter outside of towns often could not access services because they did not know they were available. A youth shelter is likely to act as a beacon, drawing homeless youth towards support staff and services that will help them transition towards independence.

Youth Services

The youth centre is an integral part of the unified centre. The youth centre acts as a contact point for youth to access temporary housing when needed. It provides unmet support that is needed by homeless youth when transitioning. The youth centre also helps to ensure homeless youth are not marginalized and segregated from their peers and support systems. The youth centre component provides a wide range of support systems and programs that fill in the gaps not provided by social service agencies.

All youth interviewed from the Perth location cited the YAK youth centre as important to their mental, physical and emotional health.

When talking about the YAK youth centre one interviewee stated:

"To some kids, this is what they call home".

The programs and services offered through YAK Youth centre are viewed as integral for helping youth transition out of homelessness. A formerly homeless youth who took advantage of the skills link program in Perth had this to say:

"To be honest with you, I wouldn't be half of where I am right now if it wasn't for the skills link program. And I wouldn't have come even nearly this far if it wasn't for YAK. I didn't even know this place existed, and when I knew it existed I was blown away."

The youth centre component is important for both youth homelessness prevention and rehabilitation. It fills an important gap which is not addressed through other social services.

Health Services

Many youth reported experiencing mental health and addictions issues.

> An interviewee in Carleton Place who experienced homelessness repeatedly due to domestic abuse recounted their experience with mental health

> > "There was one point where I did run away, and I ran away for a month, and then I ended up in the hospital, suicide, I tried to commit suicide and stuff. Then I went home, and this was around 16…. I spent a lot of my time at the Smith Falls Youth Centre. And they had two workers there, took me and my friend [name omitted] to the hospital because we were thinking suicide. I ended up in CHEO to get help."

> When asked about drug use in the community, a formerly homeless youth interviewed in Perth had this to say:

> > Interviewer: "From your perspective, is the problem drug use, dealing drugs to have an income, or a combination of both?"

> > Interviewee: "It's both. A lot of kids that are homeless get, like, forced into this community. Like you know, you're life is the people around you, but once you're homeless you start meeting all these other people. People that are into these heavier drugs, and I have seen these people go downhill – that's what I'm referring to. They do get into drug habits."

> Another formerly homeless youth in Perth recounted their own experience with drug use.

> > "There are times that you'll hit such a bad point in your life. You'll try and you'll try and you'll try, and you don't get anywhere, and it's depressing. You know? And the only thing that can make you feel better is substance abuse. Whether it is liquor or illegal drugs or even prescription medication, you're abusing it. You need to find comfort somewhere, and if you don't have comfort in a healthy way, you find it in an unhealthy way."

> Homeless youth are at risk of developing drug addictions and experiencing potentially fatal mental health issues. Incorporating addictions and mental health services into the operation of the centre is vital to ensure adequate support is immediately available.

While it is not necessary to establish a permanent office within the unified centre, it is vital that these services are represented within the facility. It is recommended that there

are individuals available once a week that are able to provide addictions counselling/support, mental health counselling/support, and a basic physical health check-up. Medical professionals would make use of the shared space, requiring no additional occupancy space in the centre.

*note – it is not necessary for a representative to visit the centre each week, but be available when needed.

Auxiliary Services: Social Enterprise

To reduce the operating expenses and teach youth important skills, the integration of social enterprise is recommended. Social enterprise helps support marginalized youth by providing experience, social support, networking and contacts, and financial support (LePage & Dean, 2011).

Organizations such as Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU) located in London Ontario is an excellent example of how social enterprise can benefit the entire community. The organization manages a café, recycling program, a woodshop, produces Market Quality Preserves, and sells gift baskets. All of these initiatives are designed to generate revenue that goes back towards benefiting youth in the community, creates employment opportunities that youth would not have otherwise, and teaches employable skills (Youth Opportunities Unlimited, Accessed August 2015). YOU is able to serve over 3,600 youth each year through their initiatives.

Other programs, such as Street Youth Job Action in Vancouver, maintain contracts with the city and private parties to provide youth employment on a per-day basis. Youth are paid at the end of the day for street beautification projects, needle sweeping and pick-up, event clean up, and other odd jobs. This type of program gives youth fast access to additional funds, provides them with work experience and networking opportunities. At the same time, the work is aimed to benefit the broader community and facilitate a positive local perception of homeless and at-risk youth (Directions Youth Services, 2015).

Lack of employment was often cited as a concern for youth in Lanark County during interviews. With an increasing unemployment rate in the region, it is important to explore alternative solutions to allow youth to become self-sufficient.

The exact nature of the business ventures must be examined separately for each centre location. By incorporating social enterprise into each centre location, overall operating expenses can be lowered and more services can be provided for youth.

Auxiliary Services: Shared Space

It is recommended for each centre to have several rooms which are not occupied on a continuous basis. This is what's referred to as the shared space, and is important in a rural community such as Lanark.

There are a number of services that are not necessary or practical to operate on a daily basis. Such services will include:

- Mental health and counselling services
- Addictions services
- Representation from the Ministry of Community and Social Services
- Meeting space for support workers, family, potential employers, and events

Few shelters have designated shared spaces, so there is little precedent for incorporating this element into a youth homelessness centre. However, the challenges of rural homelessness create an intuitive link for this approach. By creating a specific space for temporary services, it allows support to come to the homeless. Since the reverse is often near impossible for homeless youth, it allows for support to be readily available to a degree it could not be otherwise. Some shelters do have shared space such as Cornerstone in Ottawa (Cornerstone, 2011), suggesting that it is beneficial even in urban areas.

STEP 3: WORK WITH LANARK COUNTY'S 10 YEAR HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PLAN TO CREATED PERMANENT HOUSING SOLUTIONS

A full service youth and homelessness centre is vital for addressing the temporary needs of homeless youth and facilitating a transition to self-sufficiency. While there is the potential for the centre to adopt long-term residency units, Lanark County already has an initiative underway to this effect (Lanark County, 2014). The centre can act as an access point for homeless youth to gain support and transition to permanent housing solutions.

STEP 4: BUILD PARTNERSHIPS TO EXPAND THE SERVICES EACH CENTRE CAN PROVIDE

This phase will be on ongoing process to improve the state of youth homelessness in Lanark County. A stakeholder analysis is recommended to prioritize partnerships and programs.

7.4 ESTABLISHING A SUCCESSFUL SOLUTION

To effectively reduce homelessness in Lanark County a large degree of inter-organizational cooperation is required. The primary partners are currently; The United Way Lanark County, YAK Youth Centre, and Kelford Youth Services. Other organizations and government agencies are also involved in the ongoing youth homelessness project. This sections aims to provide some insight into how successful collaboration can be achieved.

7.4.1 Case Analysis of a Similar Partnership

A case analysis was conducted in Vancouver which examined how four organizations successfully coordinated to reduce homelessness in a paper titled, *Four organizations partnered to address homelessness in Vancouver: Analysis of an intersectoral collaboration.* It identified several key factors for success (Saewyc, Mathias, & Moore, 2014). The partner organizations included: Covenant House Vancouver, Inner City Youth Program, Coast Mental Health, and BC Housing.

Establishing Partnerships

- Identify service gaps early on to ensure effective operation
- Focus on common values among organizations and establish a clear vision for change
- Select champions who are committed and visionary
- Pursue small joint funding opportunities such as grants, pooled resources
- Use shared space
- Build trust through small successes

Formalizing and Maintain Partnerships

- Foster positive working relationships through frequent formal and informal communication
- Share resources including staff
- Establish clear roles and boundaries between organizations. Formalize these boundaries to clarify services
- Be flexible and willing to shift process
- Create a culture of mutual learning through joint training and workshops
- Address inevitable or perceived conflicts before they arise
- Maintain ongoing and open dialogue between partner organizations

Expanding Partnerships

- Stay flexible in terms of internal operation and what is expected of new partners
- New collaborators require the same process for building trust as original partners. Be conscious of the need to establish trust.
- Check in frequently to see how new clients/partners feel about the collaboration

By following these principles the collaborative team in Vancouver was able to reduce homelessness and increase operational efficiency.

Organizations maintained separate budgets, funding sources and management structures. This allowed the collaboration to be more fluid and adaptable to change.

7.4.2 Recommendations for Full Centre Youth and Homelessness Centre in Lanark County

1. Establish a separate organization to manage the shelter. It can be staffed and/or managed by current partners, however it should operate as a separate entity.
    Rationale:
    a) This is the method used by all other partnerships examined
    b) It allows for the shelter to be dissolved or changed without serious impact on the operation of partner organizations
    c) It allows for the application of shelter-specific funding
2. Maintain separate budgets and funding sources. It is important to share resources; however the organizations are not encouraged to merge.
    Rationale:
    a) This helps maintain fluidity and adaptability
    b) Separate budgets help maintain a clear division of responsibilities
3. Establish a common and frequently used channel of communication
4. The initial partner organizations in Lanark County are engaged in the Youth Collective Impact (Youth CI) program provided by Innoweave. This process embodies many of the principles identified in the case study examined above, which led to improved homelessness services in Vancouver. Encouraging stakeholders to be involved in the Youth CI program is recommended.
5. Schedule regular meetings and training initiatives, even after the Youth CI process is complete
6. Conduct a gap analysis to identify services which still need to be addressed through the incorporation of new partners. This would be most easily done in conjunction with a stakeholder analysis.

8 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

8.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The overall goal is to reduce homelessness in Lanark County to the point of elimination. Local organizations have partnered with the following objectives:

Long-Term: Reduce youth homelessness in Lanark County by 75% within 5 years.

Short-term: Reduce youth homelessness in Perth by 75% (25% reduction in Lanark overall) within 2 years

The purpose of this research report is to examine the relevant research and suggest a model for reducing eliminating homelessness in Lanark County.

8.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The specific research objectives are as follows:

1. **Establish a baseline of youth homelessness in Perth**
2. **Establish the need for services in Lanark County (and Perth specifically)**
3. **Examine possible options for service model**

8.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research process involved two phases.

FIRST PHASE

The first phase consisted of secondary research to achieve research objectives 1 through 3. All data sources were considered due to the lack of available research and information. Supporting evidence from published papers was used ahead of unpublished data. Similarly, information produced and hosted by reputable sources are considered over those less reputable. Reputation was evaluated based on the recommendations of industry professionals, as well as by investigating references.

Secondary data was acquired throughout the entire research process and compiled between May 18th and August 31st 2015.

SECOND PHASE

The second phase of the research involved primary research. Qualitative interviews were conducted with homeless youth in Lanark County to achieve research objective 2. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each. MRIA ethical guidelines were followed and all participants knowingly consented to the interview.

Interviews were conducted with youth aged 16 to 27 who had been, or currently were homeless while they were a youth. Only individuals who had experienced homelessness within the past 3 years were considered for participation. This was to reduce memory biases while still allowing for a large enough timeframe to find an adequate number of participants.

A total of 10 youth from Smith Falls, Carleton Place and Perth were interviewed between July 17th and July 22nd.

Ten dollar Tim Horton's gift cards were given to participants as incentives upon completion of the interview.

Participants were recording using an audio device in order to facilitate easy data collection. All participants were made aware and consented to being recorded.

The answers and recommendations provided by participants were reviewed and incorporated into the suggested service model.

8.4 RESEARCH RESULTS

Overall, findings supported initial concerns regarding rural homelessness. Several key adaptations must be made to housing and homelessness models in order to make them viable in a rural setting.

Key findings

- Transportation is a central issue. Youth cannot access the services required because (a) no form of public transportation within Lanark County exists (b) services are not centralized making them difficult to access (c) a dispersed population creates a dependency on owning or having access to a vehicle for transportation
- Many youth had experience with some form of substance addiction or mental health issue.
- Some youth were distrustful of traditional western medicine and counseling services
- All youth indicated some type of temporary housing solution is needed in Lanark County
- Nearly all youth indicated it was very difficult to find and maintain employment
- Nearly all youth were currently using (or had while homeless) relied on Ontario Works and social services.

- Nearly all youth interviews would be considered "hidden homelessness" and relied on couch surfing, staying temporarily with friends/relatives, or finding shelter in unmonitored public areas
- Most youth moved between various communities within Lanark County as necessity demanded

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10 APPENDIX: YOUTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

Goal of Interviews

Each type of In-Depth Interview (IDI) relates to a different research objective. The purpose of these IDIs is to include qualitative research to support findings from secondary research and validate the model and approach.

In-Person Youth Script:

> **Purpose:** Establish a service need, both general and specific
>
> **Goals:** The desired outcomes of these interviews are to establish a need to youth homelessness services as well as identify the specific service needs from local youth. These specific needs will help guide the development of the service model.

In-Person Youth Script

Facilitation

Youth interviews are conducted in conjunction with the YAK who is responsible for recruiting participants. The interviews will take place at the Youth Centre to foster a sense of familiarity and comfort with the participants.

Participants Screening Criteria:

- Must currently call Lanark County home
- Under the age of 25
- Has firsthand experience of homelessness within the past 5 years
- Must be willing to speak candidly about their experiences

Interview Details

4 to 10 interviews will be conducted, dependent on the number of available participants. The interviews are expected to last 45 minutes each. Conversations will be recorded for references and note-taking purposes.

Confidentiality and anonymity of responses will be ensured to all participants. No personally identifying information will be disclosed at any time.

SCRIPT

Good morning/afternoon. I'd like to start by thanking you for taking the time to speak with me today. My name is [NAME]. I'm a researcher with the Algonquin College Applied Research and Innovation Centre. The reason I'm here today is because I'm working on a project with YAK and other organizations in Lanark County to look at creating a new building and services to help young people who've been having a difficult time. We want to understand what we can do to help young people who don't have a place to stay, who have a hard time at home, who are struggling with understanding themselves, and are just in need of some extra help.

My job here today is to ask some questions that we think will help us understand what young people like yourself really need. Before we do that however, I want to reassure you of a few things.

- CONFIDENTIALITY / ANONYMITY: Anything you say here to me today will remain anonymous and confidential. This means that no one will know you took part in the study, and no one besides me will know what you said. I will write about our conversation later, and will probably use quotes from our conversation, but no one will know you said it.
    - o Did that make sense to you?
    - o Is that okay with you?
- AGE: For legal and ethical purposes, anyone under the age of 16 requires parental consent to participate in these interviews. We should have sorted this out already, but I'd just like to confirm your age for the records.
    - o IF UNDER 16: we're going to need the consent of a parent or guardian to continue with the interview. I appreciate your time and willingness to help out, so let's follow up with that.
        - ▪ OPTION A: Use form to obtain written consent and reschedule
        - ▪ OPTION B: Call parents on telephone and obtain verbal consent
    - o IF 16 OR OLDER: Great. Now let's continue.
- RECORDING DEVICE: I'll be using a recording device throughout the session to keep track of what we talk about. Just as with everything else, these recordings will remain confidential.
- HONESTY OF INFORMATION: The last thing I want to mention before we get started is that you won't be judged for anything you tell me. I'm here to help gather information and understand what you and people your age need to make life better and more enjoyable. We can't do that without honest and accurate input from you. Nothing you say will be used against you. The only thing I'm required to break confidence about is if it's believed someone's life is in immediate jeopardy. But I can't see that being an issue for us here today.
    - o Do you have any questions or concerns at this point?

    [NO FURTHER CONCERNS IS IMPLIED CONSENT – IF CONCERNS ARISE, ADDRESS THEM AND CONTINUE WITH THE INTERVIEW]

Okay. Let's begin.

Interview Questions

Section 1: General Questions and Youth Centre Questions

1. What brought you to the Youth Centre today?
   - [IF AT THE YOUTH CENTRE JUST FOR THE INTERVIEW] Why do you usually come to the youth centre?
   - Probe – What activities and events are you involved in at the youth centre?
   - Probe – How did you get here / how do you usually get here?
   - Probe – What do you like to do in your spare time?
2. How long have you been involved at the Youth Centre?
   - Probe – Why did you first start coming to the youth centre – what does it have to offer?
   - Probe – Why did you first start coming to the youth centre – what in your life inspired you to come?
   - Probe – Why have you continued to be a part of the youth centre?
3. What do you feel you need to succeed and be happy at this time in your life?
   - Probe – What are your ambitions, dreams or goals right now?
   - Probe – What can an organization do to help you achieve your dreams?
   - What else would you like to see from a youth centre like this? Be imaginative – no idea is too crazy or too wild.

Section 2: Youth Homelessness Questions

I'll be talking about homelessness for a little bit, and there are different ways of defining homelessness, so I want to be clear about what I mean. What I'm talking about is having at least 1 night where you didn't have a permanent place to stay. You could have been staying on a friend's couch, found a spot in the woods or a field, stayed somewhere downtown Perth, or used shelter services of some kind. It could have been for 1 night, for a week, month or longer. And there is almost a limitless list of reasons why you might have had nowhere to stay. The bottom line is that for at least 1 night, you didn't have a permanent place to stay. So keeping this in mind….

4. I don't want you to talk about anything you're uncomfortable with, but anything you can tell me will be helpful. Remember, I'm not here to judge or get you in trouble. I'm here to help. What has been your experience with homelessness over the past 5 years or so?
   - Probe – what were the circumstances?
   - Probe – How long would you say you were homeless?
   - Probe – How did you get by / manage?

5. What is your general opinion on homelessness in Perth
    o Probe – Is homeless a problem in Perth? Do you have other friends who have been homeless?
    o Probe – Are there enough places and resources for you when you don't have a permanent place to stay?
    o Probe – Have you been in any other town or city without a permanent place to stay? How is it the same and how is it different from Perth?
6. Most significant challenges when homeless – hat was the hardest part about not having somewhere permanent to stay?
    o Probe – What about transportation? How did you get to where you needed to be?
    o Probe – What did you do about food?
    o Probe – Where did you stay?
    o Probe – How do you move on, and improve your situation?

Section 3: Need for Centre Components

YAK and some other local organizations are thinking about expanding and changing the services they provide to youth in Lanark County. I want to ask about any experience you've had with some of the following services and tell me how important they are to you.

7. Experience with shelter services?
    o Probe – what is it like in Perth right now?
    o Probe – How important are shelter services to you when you don't have a permanent place to stay?
8. What has been your experience with youth centres? Talk about any youth centres you've been involved with, not just YAK
    o Probe – what is it like in Perth right now?
    o Probe – How important are youth centres and services when you don't have a permanent place to stay?
9. What has been your experience with employment assistance and work opportunities? [Social Enterprise]
    o Probe – what are these services like in Perth right now?
    o Probe – How important are employment services and opportunities when you don't have a permanent place to stay?
10. What's your experience with health services been like (Addictions, mental and physical)
    o What type of services (addictions, mental and physical) did you feel you've needed, or someone else has thought you could benefit from?
    o Are they currently accessible in Perth right now?
    o How important are these services when you don't have a permanent place to stay?

11. What other needs do you have from people and organizations to help you be happy, be your own self-reliant person, and do the things you want to do?
    o Probe – Community of youth in similar situations?
    o Probe – Is it important to stay in Perth / Lanark County?
    o Probe – Other than the things we've talked about, what do you feel would help you achieve those dreams, ambitions and goals we talked about earlier?

That's all the questions I have for you. Thank you so much for participating in this interview. The information you've shared with me today will be invaluable in working towards a better youth centre, better services, and ultimately a better life for anyone in Lanark County who is having difficulty getting by.

Before we end the session, I'd like to give you the opportunity to ask me any questions that you might have about the study, or about anything we've talked about today. I'll answer your questions as best I can.

> [ADDRESS ANY QUESTIONS THAT DON'T BREAK CONFIDENTIALITY, OR EXPOSE PERSONAL INFORMATION PERTAINING TO THE CLIENT, RESEARCH TEAM, AND/OR OTHER PARTICIPANTS]

Thanks again for your time.

END OF SCRIPT