

# Child, Youth and Family Programs

It is estimated that approximately 20% of those experiencing homelessness are between the ages of 13 and 24.

One of the solutions for helping youth experiencing homelessness make healthy transitions to adulthood by avoiding life on the street is strengthening families and addressing their needs. There are a number of programs available to families, youth and children experiencing homelessness (or at risk of homelessness). A Way Home Canada features key examples of youth services, including:

- School-based interventions
- Family reconnection
- Support for LGBTQ2S Youth
- Support for youth transitioning from care
- Employment, training and education
- Youth transitional housing and Housing First

While youth experiencing homelessness, as a group, is incredibly diverse, they all share a lack of experience living independently and supports for developmental needs. The transitional period from childhood to adulthood can be difficult, and youth services are necessary to best support youth experiencing homelessness and those at-risk. Without these critical support systems, at-risk youth can fall victim to the dangerous street life that carries a number of long-term consequences, including chronic homelessness, violence, exploitation, mental health, substance use, dropping out of school and criminality. The longer a youth continues to experience homelessness, the more likely they are to be subjected to various risks such as sexual exploitation, economic exploitation, traumatic experiences, declining health and addictions.

For families with children experiencing homelessness, programs are just as essential, and often the lifeline that keeps them afloat. As of 2013, the child poverty rate in Canada was at 19%. Furthermore, Indigenous children were overrepresented in this statistic, making up 40% of the children living in poverty across the country. Some of the causes of family homelessness include family violence, a lack of affordable housing, low-wages, un/underemployment and low rates of social assistance. Therefore, programming and services must support parents overcome a number of personal challenges (i.e. family break up, mental health, substance use, loss of employment) as well structural factors (i.e. growing income inequality, lack of affordable housing, discrimination, low social assistance rates) while promoting an enriching and secure environment for their children.

Initiatives include food programs, housing stability programs and housing retention, as well as other community services such as employment centres, health services, family support programs, as well as many other services that are not necessarily focused solely on homelessness. However, solving family homelessness requires strategies with focuses beyond basic needs. Raising the Roof's study Putting an End to Child and Family Homelessness in Canada lists a number of recommendations for community agencies and all levels of government, stressing the importance of cooperation, overlap and extensive investments.

In addition to developing integrated programs, service providers and governments must also understand the distinct challenges of sub-populations in order to meet their specific needs and develop solutions to ending homelessness. For example, 29.5% of youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ2S and of the youth staying in shelters, 28.2% identify as members of racialized communities. Below are a few youth and family-focused initiatives:

Youth Reconnect is an early interventions shelter diversion program developed by RAFT Niagara Resource Service for youth in Ontario. The initiative helps homeless and at-risk youth access resources, increase their self-sufficiency, assist to maintain school attendance and secure housing.

Link, delivered by Aunt Leah's House in British Columbia, provides a series of services and programs for youth in transition from foster care. Link offers life skills workshops, drop-in, outreach, and one-on-one support to work on challenges identified by youth.

Aura Host Homes is a program established by the Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary that provides LGBTQ2S youth experiencing homelessness a safe place with host parents where their sexual orientation and gender identity is respected and celebrated.

The Healthy, Empowered and Resilient (H.E.R) Pregnancy Program in Edmonton works with street-involved women to access healthcare services before and throughout their pregnancy, and addresses issues such as addiction, poverty and family violence.

With quality programming and appropriate prevention strategies and solutions to homelessness, we can ensure that no child or youth becomes entrenched in a lifelong struggle with chronic homelessness.



From the COH Press

## [Child Welfare and Youth Homelessness in Canada: A Proposal for Action](#)