

## Youth Homelessness in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality: Community Plan - Executive Summary

Youth homelessness has emerged as a pressing issue in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM). Local homeless counts were completed in the region in 2016 and repeated in 2018. These included a 1-day Point in Time Count led by Cape Breton Community Housing Association (CBCHA) and a 1-month Service Based Count led by the Nova Scotia Health Authority – Public Health – Eastern Zone. 19% of individuals experiencing homelessness in the CBRM are under the age of 25<sup>1</sup>, which is on par with the national rate<sup>2</sup>. The local homelessness rate has decreased, yet there has been a 4% increase in the prevalence of homelessness among youth ages 16-29, resulting in 117 youth experiencing homelessness<sup>3</sup>.

The stereotypical picture of homelessness is often not the reality. A person can be homeless in a wide range of situations, such as unsheltered/absolutely homeless, emergency sheltered, provisionally/temporarily accommodated, and at risk/precariously housed<sup>4</sup>. These conditions were considered in the local homeless counts. Anyone can become homeless. However, research shows that there are high rates of homelessness in Canada among LGBTQ2S youth, Indigenous youth, youth who have experienced trauma and abuse, and youth who have had involvement with child welfare services<sup>5</sup>. Homeless youth may face additional problems in wellbeing, such as unemployment, mental health issues, and an increased risk of victimization.

There are several strong programs and initiatives in place to address community needs and help vulnerable populations in the CBRM. However, there is a lack of a coordinated approach to specifically address youth homelessness, and a lack of youth-focused housing programs. Many programs and services are underfunded and time-limited, making it difficult to plan for long-term development. Youth homelessness is a unique issue due to various factors and therefore has its own definition and requires different strategies<sup>6</sup>. There is an emphasis in the literature on preventing youth homelessness through an integrated systems approach<sup>5,7,8</sup>. Steps to address this issue can include initiatives like Housing First for Youth<sup>9</sup>, and Coordinated Access to streamline services for people experiencing homelessness<sup>10</sup>.

The Youth Homelessness Plan is a project of CBCHA, in collaboration with the Cape Breton Association of Youth Housing and Programs Initiative, and Affordable Housing and Homelessness Working Group. A Way Home Canada and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness were consulted for guidance and resources. Local consultations took place with 22 youth and over 60 service providers. The majority of the youth participants had lived experience of homelessness. Local consultations revealed information consistent with concepts found across research:

- **Factors leading to youth homelessness can include:** lack of affordable housing, financial barriers, lack of employment, family conflict, mental health and addiction issues, gaps in transition support
- **Once a young person experiences homelessness, they can face additional barriers to moving forward:** lack of a permanent address and identification/documents, limited independent living skills, difficulty finding rental housing, difficulty meeting daily needs, barriers to transportation, barriers to education, limited access to basic healthcare

Feedback from consultations showed a need for youth homelessness prevention in the CBRM. The “A Way Home: Youth Homelessness Community Planning Toolkit”<sup>8</sup> recommends setting priorities

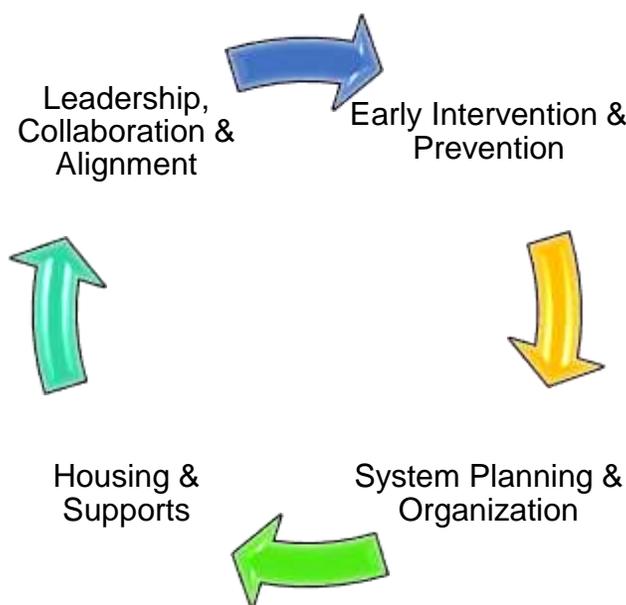
around prevention, systems planning, housing and supports, and leadership. The local youth plan strategies are organized within this type of framework to demonstrate how prevention can be applied in the CBRM.

**Vision:** Youth homelessness in the CBRM will be reduced and prevented.

**Mission:** To enhance access to coordinated, adequate, and appropriate services and supports for youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness. To provide transition planning to help youth exiting homelessness to live an independent life.

**3-Year Goal:** To decrease youth homelessness (age 16-24) in the CBRM through intervention efforts, and prevent new experiences of homelessness by 2021.

A **Strategic Plan** has been drafted by the working groups to address four related priority areas.



<sup>1</sup> CBRM Point in Time Count and Registry Week Report (2018). Sydney, NS: Cape Breton Community Housing Association.

<sup>2</sup> Gaetz, S., Dej, E., Richter, T. & Redman, M. (2016). The state of homelessness in Canada 2016. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

<sup>3</sup> Roy, L.M. & Bickerton, J. (2018, in progress). Clone of understanding homelessness in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality: A service based approach. Research report. Sydney, NS: Nova Scotia Health Authority.

<sup>4</sup> Gaetz, S., Barr, C., Friesen, A., Harris, B., Hill, C., Kovacs-Burns, K., ... Marsolais, A. (2012). Canadian definition of homelessness. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

<sup>5</sup> Gaetz, S., O'Grady, B., Kidd, S. & Schwan, K. (2016). Without a home: The national youth homelessness survey. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2016). Canadian definition of youth homelessness. Retrieved from Homeless Hub: [www.homelesshub.ca/youthhomelessdefinition](http://www.homelesshub.ca/youthhomelessdefinition)

<sup>7</sup> Gaetz, S. (2014). Coming of age: Reimagining the response to youth homelessness in Canada. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

<sup>8</sup> Turner, A. (2016). A Way Home: Youth homelessness community planning toolkit. Toronto, ON: A Way Home Canada. Retrieved from <http://homelesshub.ca/toolkit/way-home-youth-homelessness-community-planning-toolkit>

<sup>9</sup> Gaetz, S. (2017). THIS is Housing First for Youth: A program model guide. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

<sup>10</sup> Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (2018). Blog: What is a Coordinated Access system? Retrieved from <http://caeh.ca>

## Strategic Plan for Youth Homelessness in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM)

**Vision:** Youth homelessness in the CBRM will be reduced and prevented.

**Mission:** To enhance access to coordinated, adequate, and appropriate services and supports for youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness. To provide transition planning to help youth exiting homelessness to live an independent life.

**3-Year Goal:** To decrease youth homelessness (age 16-24) in the CBRM through intervention efforts, and prevent new experiences of homelessness by 2021.

**Measurements:** Intervention and prevention targets created and measured using Point in Time and Service Based homeless counts, By Name List, shelter and housing program data.

	Strategies	Activities	Short-Term Outcomes
Leadership, Collaboration & Alignment	Enhance collaboration among key stakeholders, including youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involve relevant service providers in completing youth plan activities</li> <li>Form a youth committee to facilitate youth involvement in plan activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working groups are committed to implementing youth plan activities</li> <li>Representatives from relevant program areas are involved in communication</li> <li>Youth engagement is considered at all stages of implementation</li> </ul>
	Align youth plan activities with local Affordable Housing strategy and provincial homelessness and housing initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a local Affordable Housing strategy</li> <li>Maintain awareness of provincial homelessness and housing initiatives</li> <li>Adjust youth plan strategies and activities as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is consistent messaging in strategic documents</li> <li>There are ongoing opportunities for discussion among working groups (i.e., if youth plan implementation activities must be modified)</li> </ul>
Early Intervention & Prevention	Provide information to youth and adults who work with them, about housing and homelessness issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop resources that can be used to teach youth about housing and independent living skills</li> <li>Develop resources to help service providers identify youth homelessness and/or at risk situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth have increased basic understanding of the process of moving from home to independent living, and contacts for community-based services if they need help</li> <li>Service providers have increased awareness of actions to take if a young person is at risk of or experiencing homelessness</li> </ul>
	Explore the role of family intervention programming in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Map existing family supports to determine coordination of referrals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working groups have an enhanced understanding of existing family supports</li> </ul>

	Strategies	Activities	Short-Term Outcomes
	addressing youth homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify service gaps and potential for further research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information is used to guide Coordinated Access system development</li> </ul>
System Planning & Organization	<p>Design and implement a Coordinated Access system for the homeless serving system</p> <p>(See CAEH.ca)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a structure, training protocol, common approach for assessment and prioritization, and coordinated referral process</li> <li>Maintain and monitor a By Name List of individuals seeking permanent housing, including youth</li> <li>Determine protocol for data management, monitoring, and sharing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is increased collaboration among service providers and a coordinated process in place to assist youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness</li> <li>There is involvement from public systems and community groups, including outside of the Sydney area</li> <li>Referral processes are sensitive to the needs of LGBTQ2S youth and Indigenous youth</li> <li>Progress is measured and a review timeline is created and followed</li> </ul>
Housing & Supports	Create a crisis/emergency response to youth homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a youth emergency response, with dedicated assistance built in to promote independence</li> <li>Monitor service utilization of current shelter supports to determine the need for youth shelter beds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth will have a place to go that is targeted to their needs, if they are in need of emergency shelter</li> <li>Youth accessing emergency shelter will have immediate support to help plan next steps</li> </ul>
	Help youth transition to independent living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and expand youth-specific housing and support programs, including Housing First for Youth, Housing Support, Youth Trusteeship, and employment interventions</li> <li>Support youth to manage money and housing costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth will have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>access to housing and supports that are appropriate for their needs</li> <li>input regarding their living situation (e.g., alone, with roommates, city/town)</li> <li>ongoing support to manage housing-related issues, stay connected to community supports, and engage in the workforce and/or career support</li> </ul> </li> <li>Youth will be able to plan and complete more tasks on their own</li> <li>Youth will have increased financial literacy and the means to pay their rent and utilities on time</li> </ul>