



YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION MAPPING PROJECT

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YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION MAPPING PROJECT

Background

According to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, "'Youth homelessness' refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence" (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016). This includes sleeping on the streets or in public spaces, staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing, couch surfing involving temporarily staying with friends or family members without a secure or stable arrangement, and living in places unfit for human habitation, such as cars or abandoned buildings.

Youth homelessness is a pressing issue in Canada, highlighted by troubling statistics that underscore the severity of the crisis. Gaetz et al. (2016) reported that "[o]n any given night, over 7,000 youth experience homelessness, and many more are at risk of precarious living situations" (p.1). Things have not improved in the intervening years with results from the third nationally coordinated Point-in-Time (PiT) count (2020-2022), which gathered information from 40,713 individuals across 72 communities and regions in Canada, finding that youth aged 13 to 24 made up 12% of the total, or approximately 4,886 individuals (Quayum et al., n.d.). As "PiT Counts occur within designated communities and are consequently geographically limited to specific municipalities or regions ... PiT Counts may miss a proportion of people experiencing homelessness because of seasonal variations and migration between communities" (Strobel et al., 2021) and are generally considered an undercount of persons experiencing homelessness, thus underscoring the enormity of this issue.

Looking at the Greater Victoria area PiT count, conducted in March 2023 in the Capital Regional District (CRD), of the 765 respondents approximately 8% (~ 61 individuals) were youth aged 14 to 24 with 36% unsheltered (~22), 9% in emergency shelters (~6), and 54% (~33) provisionally accommodated (Community Social Planning Council, 2023). Again, these figures likely underestimate the true scope of youth homelessness, as many young people find themselves in *hidden* situations, such as couch surfing, living temporarily with friends or relatives, or residing in unsafe environments, that are not captured in traditional counts. Factors known to contribute to the number of youths experiencing homelessness include rising rent prices, increased costs of living, and longer waiting times for mental health care.

There is an urgent need for a different approach to youth homelessness.

Understanding Youth Homelessness

It is of vital importance to recognize that youth homelessness is very different from adult homelessness. Youth homelessness goes beyond the loss of stable housing; it also encompasses the disruption of important relationships and social connections with parents, caregivers, family, and the wider community – relationships that are essential for the healthy development of youth



(Homeless Hub, n.d.). Additionally, youth are at a heightened risk of becoming victims of crime. Further, youth homelessness is often accompanied by deteriorating mental and physical health and increased school absences. All of this makes the path to recovery exceptionally challenging for youth as they are presented with a complex system that is difficult to navigate.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH, 2012) proposed a typology of youth homelessness that can be used by communities to understand, define, and enumerate the nature and extent of youth homelessness in their community. The typology categories currently being used across Canada (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness) and the United States (National Alliance to End Homelessness) are

- **Temporarily disconnected** – these individuals are generally younger, have more stable or redeemable relations with family members, a less extensive history of homelessness and are more likely to remain in school
- **Unstably connected** – these individuals have more complicated housing histories, are likely to have longer and repeated episodes of homelessness, are more likely to be disengaged from school, and have challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment.
- **Chronically disconnected** – these individuals comprise the smallest group of homeless youth and have the most complex experiences including longer-term homelessness, a greater likelihood of repeated episodes, and they are more likely to have mental health problems, addictions issues and/or a diagnosed disability with unstable or no relations with family.

See [Appendix A](#) for more information.

Youth-specific shelters play a vital role for those at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness, providing a safe alternative to the streets, especially during family conflict. These shelters offer essential services such as food and accommodation, while creating supportive environments where young people can receive guidance and service navigation. Further, their needs differ significantly from those of adults so having a dedicated environment tailored to their unique challenges is essential for their well-being (Gaetz et al., 2010).

Unfortunately, resources for youth in the CRD are severely limited. For example, the Kiwanis Emergency Shelter (serving ages 13-18) and the Out of the Rain youth shelter (serving ages 15-25) collectively provide just 25 beds: less than half of the youth identified during the 2023 PiT count and fewer than the number of youths who were completely unsheltered or staying in emergency shelters. While the PiT count may not fully capture the extent of youth homelessness in the Greater Victoria area, it does provide a glimpse into the significant number of at-risk youths facing family breakdown, mental health challenges, and other issues who may urgently need access to safe emergency shelter to help them get back on their feet. Additionally, while the Greater Victoria area has several adult shelters, youth under 18 are unable to access them, even when youth shelters are full. This lack of options leaves young people at heightened risk of vulnerability and harm when faced with absolute homelessness.

While significant attention has been focused on emergency responses to the growing issue of homelessness, there needs to be a greater emphasis on preventing individuals from becoming homeless, particularly with preventing youth homelessness. Approximately 46% of those



experiencing reoccurring or chronic homelessness indicated they had their first experience with homelessness before the age of 25 (Quayum et al., n.d.). This push for prevention needs to come from all levels of government, from federal government to local municipalities, to ensure that no unnecessary harm comes to those whose needs could be addressed quickly and effectively with the right resources and with adequate funding.

Continuing research and knowledge dissemination focusing on youth homelessness prevention is essential as the information gathered provides us with keys to effectively addressing this crisis.

Pathways Into Homelessness

Understanding the pathways to homelessness is essential for developing effective prevention strategies. It is critical to address the root causes of youth homelessness and advocate for improved support systems.

Commonly identified pathways that lead youth into homelessness include but are not limited to; not getting along with family, getting kicked out, violence/abuse at home, mental health challenges, substance use, not having enough money, and not being able to find any affordable housing (Smith et al., 2023). Layered atop these identified pathways are interactions between various systems such as criminal justice, healthcare, and government care. As might be expected, interactions with these systems significantly increases the risk of homelessness for youth. Moreover, these systems have historically struggled when trying to provide effective transition planning, often leaving vulnerable youth to become homeless (McCreary Centre Society's Youth Research Academy, 2021). This is highlighted by data from the 2023 PiT count where one in three respondents had prior experience with government care (Davis et al., 2023). This statistic highlights a broader issue across Canada, particularly in British Columbia where over 4,875 youth aged 0-18 were in care between March 2022 and 2023 (Ministry of Child and Family Development, n.d.).

Although access to programs and financial aid are designed to support youth to create a transition plan, the information presented shows that youth often exit care without adequate support, education, or resources—making them especially vulnerable to homelessness.

Youth at Greatest Risk

Certain groups of youth are disproportionately affected by homelessness and include Indigenous and LGBTQS+ youth. Recognizing the unique challenges these groups of youth face is vital in providing appropriate housing, supports and services.

Indigenous Youth

To better understand the context of the experiences of Indigenous youth who are experiencing homelessness or precarious housing it is crucial to recognize that the Indigenous definition of homelessness differs from other definitions that rest on colonial perspectives. Unhoused Indigenous youth often seek more than just a traditional shelter; they also need strong cultural connection. Housing must not only meet the basic needs of its inhabitants but also be adaptable, allowing for the unique and specific desires of each individual to thrive. That is to say:



Indigenous homelessness is a human condition that describes First Nations, Métis and Inuit individuals, families or communities lacking stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means or ability to acquire such housing. Unlike the common colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews. These include individuals, families and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities. Importantly, Indigenous people experiencing these kinds of homelessness cannot culturally, spiritually, emotionally or physically reconnect with their Indigeneity or lost relationships. (Thistle, 2012, p. 6).

Indigenous youth are significantly overrepresented in the homeless community, making up over one-third (34%) of those responding to the McCreary Centre Society's 2020 BC Homeless Youth survey, painting a preliminary picture of youth experiencing homelessness in British Columbia (McCreary Centre Society's Youth Research Academy, 2021). Further, the BC Ministry of Child and Family Development's 2023 data indicates that Indigenous children and youth make up approximately 68% of those in care within the child welfare system (Ministry of Child and Family Development, n.d.). Underlying these numbers is a history of trauma and ongoing systemic discrimination that significantly contribute to Indigenous youths' heightened vulnerability. These deeply concerning numbers highlight a strong relationship between government care system and youth homelessness, especially for Indigenous youth.

2SLGBTQI+ Youth

2SLGBTQI+ youth also encounter unique, albeit different, challenges that increase their risk of homelessness. Discrimination, stigma and familial rejection are significant factors that lead many young people in the 2SLGBTQI+ community to leave their homes. Research shows that a substantial percentage of youth experiencing homeless identify as queer, trans, or questioning with Government of Canada statistics indicating that 25% to 40% of all youth experiencing homelessness in Canada identify as 2SLGBTQI+ (Government of Canada, 2022), meaning that nearly one in three youth experiencing homelessness identify as 2SLGBTQI+¹. In the McCreary Centre Society's 2020 BC Homeless Youth survey over 46% of youth identified their sexual orientation as something other than straight, with 13% reporting that the reason they became homeless was due to conflict at home because of their gender/sexual orientation (McCreary Centre Society's Youth Research Academy, 2021). This information underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to address 2SLGBTQI+ youths' specific needs.

Youth Homelessness Prevention Typology

To prevent youth homelessness from occurring it is important to be able to identify different types of prevention. According to Gaetz et al. (2018a),

¹ It should be noted that, while groups are presented as binary, individuals are not. The information found provided group and not intersectional data. For example, we do not know what percentage of Indigenous youth experiencing homelessness identify as 2SLGBTQI+, or vice versa.



Youth homelessness prevention refers to policies, practices, and interventions that either (1) reduce the likelihood that a young person will experience homelessness, or (2) provide youth experiencing homelessness with the necessary supports to stabilize their housing, improve their wellbeing, connect with community, and avoid re-entry into homelessness (p. 25).

For purposes of this report, we are using the Gaetz et al. 2018a/Gaetz et al. 2018b *Typology of Youth Homelessness Prevention* that provides five key categories of youth homelessness prevention:

1. **Structural Prevention** – addresses systemic factors contributing to housing precarity through legislation, policy and investment aimed at enhancing housing stability. Effective structural prevention may support creation of more affordable housing options and protect against discrimination in housing markets.
2. **Systems Prevention** – focuses on barriers that lead to homelessness, emphasizing the need for better support systems for individuals transitioning from public systems such as healthcare or child protection. Streamlining these transitions can significantly reduce the risk of homelessness.
3. **Early Intervention** – provides immediate supports for those at high risk of homelessness or those who have recently experienced homelessness. Early intervention programs are critical and may include counseling, job training, and educational support to help youth retain their housing or access new appropriate housing quickly.
4. **Eviction Prevention** – implementation of measures to support individuals at risk of eviction remain in their homes. Measures may include landlord/tenant legislation, rent controls and crisis support services that offer assistance during times of financial distress.
5. **Housing Stability** – initiatives and support for individuals exiting homelessness to ensure they do not return to it is vital. This may involve ongoing case management, life skills training and access to supportive housing programs.

Prevention may occur across any of these five key categories, with the primary aim of making upstream changes. Upstream changes, often referred to as *primary prevention*, involve modifying structural or systemic factors, such as making housing more affordable or enhancing access to education. In contrast, downstream factors are the outcomes produced by these upstream changes, creating either positive or negative effects (Gaetz et al. 2018a).

While understanding what youth homelessness prevention is, it is equally important to clarify what youth homelessness prevention is not. While emergency services and frontline support are invaluable resources, “all youth homelessness prevention interventions must include either “(1) the immediate *provision* of housing and supports to youth experiencing homelessness or housing precarity, or (2) the immediate *protection* of housing, with supports, for youth at risk of homelessness” (Schwan et al., 2018). Thus, regardless of the services and supports provided, youth must have *immediate provision* or *protection* of housing and supports specifically designed for youth experiencing homelessness or housing precarity, to be defined as youth homelessness prevention.



Funding Resources for Youth

In British Columbia, three main types of funding exist to support youth (see [Appendix B](#)). However, conversations with youth and frontline service providers reveal that many of these resources are at capacity or fail to provide the necessary support during critical transitional periods. Some youth face rejections from funding agreements, while others navigate the application process with relative ease. Without necessary financial assistance, transitioning to complete independence can be nearly impossible. Many youth end up lacking stable housing, job opportunities and access to mental health services leaving them particularly susceptible to homelessness.

Cost of Prevention:


It is common to see the recurring theme of insufficient funding when it comes to government budgets. While some initiatives receive priority, others are neglected. Although efforts to tackle homelessness generally focus on and receive downstream funding, the impact often feels minimal. As a result, there has been a shift towards homelessness prevention, not only because it reduces the number of individuals falling into homelessness, but also because it is often much less expensive than providing emergency services for those already experiencing homelessness. According to Fisher (2018), Canada spends over \$7.01 billion annually on homelessness. Research indicates that investing in prevention would potentially lower the public cost of addressing homelessness from approximately \$56,000 (CDN) per person each year to about \$14,924. If we are able to prevent 40,000 people from becoming homeless for just one year, the potential savings for the government would reach nearly \$600 million (CDN).

Project Overview

Recognizing the complexities of youth homelessness, the Youth Homelessness Prevention Mapping project (YHPM) aims to enhance awareness and improve outcomes for young people aged 13-24 in the CRD. This six-month initiative, led by the Alliance to End Homelessness in the Capital Region (AEHCR) and supported by the Victoria Foundation, focuses on systematically mapping the resources and needs of at-risk youth in the CRD through the creation of a database containing housing, services and programs for youth. In addition, this report provides a comprehensive system-mapping effort designed to identify the barriers young people face in accessing services and where there are gaps in the system through engagement of both youth and organizations providing supports services, and housing for youth. Further, the *Prevention through Systems Change: Creating Home* project emphasizes the importance of raising awareness for homelessness prevention, advocating for increased attention from local, provincial and federal governments.

Methodology

After receiving a Victoria Foundation Systems Change Collaboration grant in April 2024 the Alliance to End Homelessness in the Capital Region hired a Youth Homelessness Prevention Coordinator to facilitate the *Prevention through Systems Change: Creating Home* project focused on youth homelessness prevention system mapping for the Capital Region. Beginning May



2024, the Youth Homelessness Prevention Coordinator was tasked with creating a youth homelessness prevention systems map that included a database of resources specifically for youth and collect information about youth homelessness from key parties such as youth and service providers. To facilitate this work and raise awareness in the community, information describing the project and requests for participation was sent out through social media in an effort to engage youth-focused organizations within the homelessness sector (see [Appendix C](#)). A virtual project launch was held with service providers on June 18, 2024. The virtual project launch focused on the project details, as well as prevention strategies with respect to youth homelessness.

Youth Resources Web-based Database Application Development

As part of this initiative, a centralized database has been created cataloging low- and no-cost resources available to youth in the Capital Region of British Columbia².

Following the virtual project launch, a survey tool was created using SurveyMonkey®. Youth-focused organizations submitted information about their programs and resources for youth aged 13-24 in the CRD using the SurveyMonkey® online platform. Program and housing information was collected for three months. After one month of collecting program and housing information, the AEHCR hired a web developer to create an online web-based database application to collect, store and organize the resource information.

After the online survey tool was closed, information collection continued with additional local resources including listings for youth organizations, programs and housing being added to the database. Over the following months, this database has evolved into a comprehensive and accessible resource guide for at-risk and homeless youth in the community, with the AEHCR continuing to collect information from the youth-focused organizations within the homelessness serving and sector adjacent organizations.

Although there were challenges gathering resources for youth from youth-focused organizations, promoting the initiative through various channels to encourage participation, as well as including an option for youth-focused organizations to contribute their resource listings directly to the database has met with a good deal of success.

Development of the Interview/Focus Group Guides

Following initial database creation and launch, youth were engaged through focus groups to gather firsthand insights from those directly affected by homelessness. Additionally, frontline youth service providers were consulted to provide information about homelessness prevention in the CRD and identify gaps in the current support system. Similarly to gathering resources for youth, there were challenges in engaging youth and youth service provider participation in focus group interviews. To mitigate these challenges and encourage participation in the focus group interviews, information was promoted through various social media and other channels. To encourage youth involvement in the focus group interviews posters, with information about participating in the project, were placed at youth-serving locations and support workers helped

² “The Capital Regional District (CRD) is the regional government for 13 municipalities and three electoral areas on southern Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands” (<https://www.crd.ca/>)



spread the word. Youth who were interested in participating signed up by emailing the YHPM project coordinator. Using this strategy the AEHCR conducted three focus group interviews: two sessions involved youth aged 13 to 24 with firsthand experience of housing instability, while the third session included frontline youth service providers.

The youth focus groups were held at the Victoria Native Friendship Center with eight participants and at Mirrors Supportive Housing with twelve participants. Focus group interviews followed the same format and lasted two hours. Participants were compensated with stipends and provided with food and beverages. The front-line youth service provider focus group interview was held at the Victoria Youth Empowerment Society office with 15 frontline youth service providers from various organizations including the Youth Empowerment Society, Kiwanis Emergency Shelter, Rise Up Youth, the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction and Threshold Housing.

Youth Focus Group Interview Format

The YHPM project objectives were described at the beginning of each focus group. Focus group facilitators emphasized that the goal of the focus group was not to revisit past traumas, rather attention was to be directed towards gaining insights that could contribute to the creation of a better future with empowerment for youth. The youth were also assured that their feedback would be directly reflected in this report and include their recommendations.

The first activity involved a large tree diagram where youth were asked to identify what was and what was not working in the current system. The tree branches represented successful resources, while the roots were to be used to describe the things that needed more support or were considered challenges. Participants used yellow Post-it® notes for positive contributions and pink Post-it® notes for challenges. To facilitate discussion, youth were encouraged to share their thoughts aloud as they placed their Post-it® notes on the tree.

During the second activity, youth were asked to suggest ways to reduce and/or prevent youth homelessness in the CRD. Ideas were recorded on Post-it® notes and placed on a large sheet of paper. As was done previously, and to facilitate further discussion, youth were encouraged to share their thoughts aloud as they placed them on the large sheet of paper.

The final activity was a "dotmocracy" exercise. Each youth participant was given twelve dot stickers to vote for their priorities by selecting among the suggestions provided in the second activity. The youth participants voted by placing their dots next to the suggestions as they pleased and could place more than one dot by a suggestion. Using results from the dotmocracy exercise helped identify youth participants' top three most important recommendations for reducing youth homelessness.

Following the conclusion of the youth focus group interviews, participants were invited to participate in the recommendations process and shaping the report if they were interested. To date, none of the youth participants have come forward to engage further.



Frontline Youth Service Provider Focus Group Interview Format

The frontline youth service provider interview focus group began with a brief presentation on youth homelessness prevention and the typology of youth homelessness prevention (Gaetz et al. 2018a, Gaetz et al. 2018b; see the [Youth Homelessness Prevention Typology](#) section for more information).

During the first activity frontline youth service provider participants were asked to list resources, programs and services they considered effective in preventing homelessness. As they shared their insights, the team recorded their suggestions on Post-it® notes. After compiling a comprehensive list, service providers participated in an open discussion to identify possible reasons homelessness among youth persists despite the wide and varied *prevention* programs that are available in the CRD.

During the second activity participants explored missed opportunities and gaps in the current system using the prevention typology categories: Structural Prevention, Systems Prevention, Early Intervention, Eviction Prevention, and Housing Stability. Participants were divided into two groups, with each group identifying gaps and missed opportunities related to youth homelessness. Following the breakout discussions, one member from each group presented their findings. All participants worked collectively to decide on a category for each of the gaps or missed opportunities listed.

All new resources, programs, or services mentioned during this focus group interview were added to the database.

Analyses

All resources included in the Youth Homelessness Mapping Prevention Project 2024 web-based database application (<https://victoriahomelessness.ca/youth-support-organizations/>) were examined to determine the number of resources focused on prevention. Information collected from the focus group interviews was analyzed to identify common themes and explore differences between the youth and service providers perspectives.

Web-based Database Application Mapping Analysis

All 161 resources were analyzed to determine the proportion of prevention-based versus reactive resources available for youth. When possible, programs were further categorized into one of the five different types of homelessness prevention: structural prevention, systems prevention, early intervention, eviction prevention and housing stability (see the [Youth Homelessness Prevention Typology](#) section). It is important to note that Indigenous programs were categorized through the lens of the Canadian definition of Indigenous homelessness and then aligned with the western typology of homelessness prevention.

Web-based Database Application Analysis

The web-based database application contains a total of 241 entries and includes a list of organizations, programs and housing options available in the CRD. Of these entries, 70 are for organizations, 8 are for housing, and 161 are for programs.



Information collected for the database application was gathered through a combination of direct contributions from service providers through the SurveyMonkey© tool and through the YHPM project page. Additionally, various databases and organizational websites were examined for other information that had yet to be included. It should be noted that information that was not provided directly by organizations may be less accurate than direct responses, as it was sourced from organizational sites and may be out-of-date. As well, if relevant information for a field was not available or found on the organization's site, the field has been left blank. A minimum of two individuals reviewed the information to classify the information collected.

Of the 161 program resources, 95 (59%) of the programs were classified as preventative. Notably, 62 programs (38.5%) did not fall under the prevention typology. The "Other" category, comprising 4 programs (2.5%), includes resources that cannot be easily classified within the prevention framework, but are considered to be preventative. While all 161 programs were categorized, it should be noted that 14 programs could be categorized across multiple prevention types.

Table 1

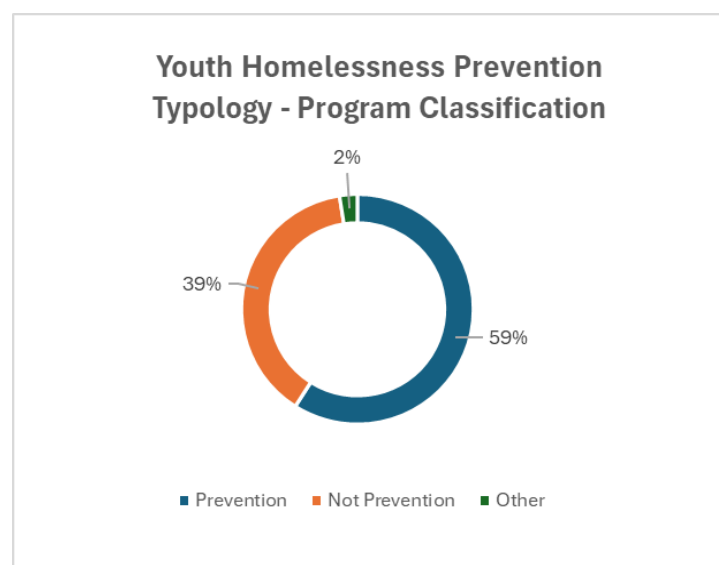
Youth Homelessness Prevention Typology - Program Classification

Category	Number (n) of Programs (% of total)
Structural Prevention	10 (6.2%)
Systems Prevention	35 (21.7%)
Early Intervention	38 (23.6 %)
Housing Stability	2 (1.24%)
Evictions Prevention	10 (6.2%)
Not classifiable as a Prevention Program	62 (38.5%)
Other	4 (2.5%)

Note: 14 of the programs could have been classified in more than one category. For these programs, the most appropriate category was selected for classification.

Figure 1

Categorization: Prevention versus Not Prevention Programs



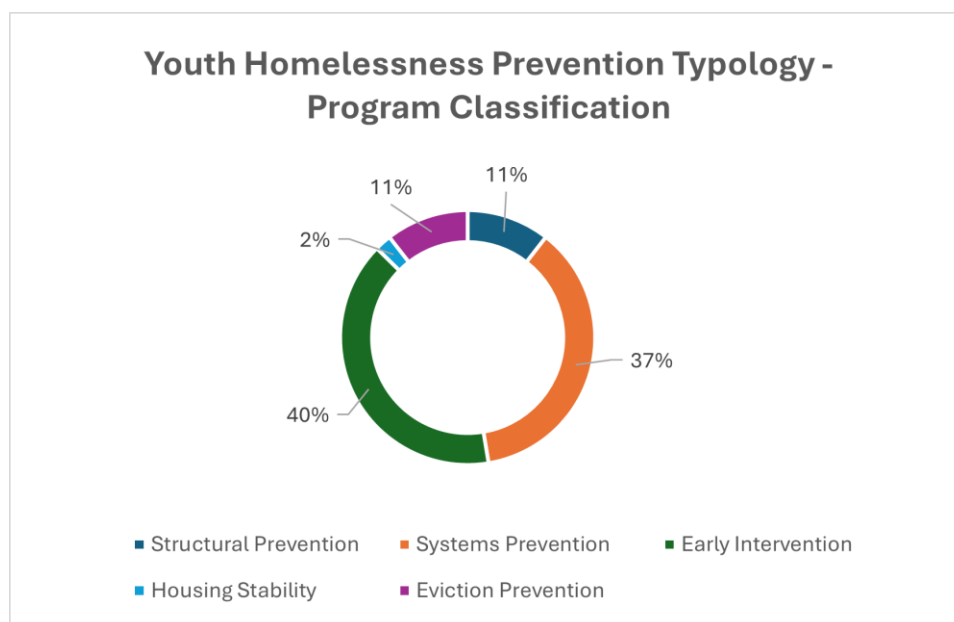
Examining the 95 programs that fall within the Youth Homelessness Prevention Typology we find that the majority of programs provided in the CRD (n=73, 77%) are aimed at systems prevention (n=35, 37%), designed to address youths' issues before they escalate into homelessness, and early intervention (n=38, 40%), proactively creating supportive frameworks for youth.

In contrast, there are fewer programs to support structural prevention (n=10, 11%), indicating there is less emphasis on addressing systemic issues directly. As well, programs for eviction prevention (n=10, 11%) that might allow youth to remain in their housing by providing services that offer assistance during times of financial distress were also less prevalent.

With only two programs (2% of the total) focused on housing stability in the CRD, this type of prevention appears to be almost non-existent. This scarcity highlights a critical gap in support services specifically designed to assist youth transitioning out of homelessness and prevent their return to unstable housing situations.

Figure 2

Program Classification for Programs Focussing on Youth Homelessness Prevention



Youth Focus Group Interview Themes

Data collected from the two youth focus group interviews were themed using the three activities designed to elicit information on identification of (i) what is working in the current system, (ii) what is not working, and (iii) ways to reduce and/or prevent youth homelessness in the CRD. The dotmocracy exercise captured the top three reduction/prevention priorities.

What's Working

The youth focus group interview analysis highlighted several effective support mechanisms for youth, emphasizing six key areas: emergency shelter, outreach, supportive housing, health and wellness services, housing resources and employment resources. Resources included

organizations such as the Foundry, programs such as SYD Youth Dextox, emergency shelter services such as Out of the Rain, and housing provided through BC Housing.

Table 2

Youth Suggestions for What's Working

Category	Resource
Emergency Shelter	Out of the Rain
Outreach	Substance Use ²
	Youth Support Workers
Supportive Housing	Food ²
	Providing Responsibility ²
Health and Wellness	Foundry
	Access to Emotional Support (e.g. vets for pets etc.)
	Detox -SYD Youth Detox
	Detox - OPS Roads
Housing	BC Housing
Employment	START Program

Note: The (²) denotes a suggestion was referenced twice.

What's Not Working

Several key categories where support systems for youth are lacking were identified through analysis of participant responses. These categories included social assistance, family support, supportive housing, social programs, education, health and wellness, service navigation, expenses, housing and employment. There were two responses that were not classified. The focus group participants were especially animated when it came to discussing the issues that they faced with issues ranging from stigma in attaining social assistance to needing more detox beds.

Table 3

Youth Suggestions for What's Not Working

Category	Issue
Social Assistance (e.g., MCFD \$)	Stigma
	Too Low (Not Enough to Cover Bills) ⁸
	Need more \$ for Families
	Inaccessible Information (Youth Benefits)
Family Support	Child Custody Removal Instead of Support
Supportive Housing	Food
	Safety Concerns ²
	Infantilizing ⁵
	Wellness Checks/ Privacy ⁵
Social Programs	Racial Discrimination/ Profiling
	Stigma
	Need More



Category	Issue
Education	Programs Limit Access ² (e.g teen moms, moms only no partners)
	Transitioning/Aging out - Continued Support ³
	Tenancy
	Navigation of Benefits
	Life skills ³
Health and Wellness	Finances
	Long Waitlist
	Inaccessible Information
	Detox - Need more beds
Every door is NOT the Right Door	Detox - Long Waitlist
	Referral Runaround
	Navigation Issues ³
Expenses	Some Housing Not Appropriate for Youth
	Internet/ Phone too Expensive
Housing	Cost of Living too High ²
	Not Enough Family Housing/Housing in General ⁴
	Cost of Right too High ⁴
	Not Able to Meet Housing Tenancy Threshold ²
	BC Housing
	Inaccessible Information
	Not Enough Pet Friendly Units ³
	Housing Guidelines being Enforced ³
	Low Income Housing is too Expensive
	Age Restrictions
Employment	Experience Requirements
	Need Support for all Aspects of the Job Search ²
	Disability Cap
Unclassified	Family Problems
	Where to Smoke

Note: The (^{superscript number}) denotes the number of times a suggestion was referenced.

Reducing and Preventing Youth Homelessness

The participants in the youth focus group interviews identified categories of prevention initiatives that need to take place in order to reduce or prevent youth homelessness. This includes improvement in social assistance, outreach, social programs, education, health and wellness, housing, employment and safety. Suggestions range from easy access to physical and mental health supports to housing being built closer to public transportation.



Table 4*Youth Suggestions for Homelessness Reduction and Prevention*

Category	Suggestion
Social Assistance	No Disability Cap/ More \$ ³
Outreach	More Support Workers Indigenous Support Workers Workers Treat Clients with Respect
Social Programs	Transitional Supports End Racial Discrimination Social Assistance to Families in Need (Not Child Removal) ² Family Support - Appropriate Programs
Education	More Focus on Life Skills Rental Education Financial Assistance to Training/University Access to Employment Programs of Interest Free/Reduced College/University Fees
Health and Wellness	Low Cost, Free Mental Housing Counselling Easy Access to Supports - Access to Doctors Easy Access to Supports - Access to Mental Health Support
Housing	Diverse Housing More Housing Built Closer to Public Transit More Rent Geared to Income Housing ³ More Housing @ 25% of Market Rent ³ More Rent Subsidies Housing as a Human Right (Person Centred) Easy Access to Housing More Transitional Housing
Employment	Higher Wage Tax Equity Create Jobs Geared to Youth (Openness to Hire Youth) ²
Safety	Feel Safe

Note: The (^{superscript number}) denotes the number of times a suggestion was referenced.

Frontline Service Provider Focus Group Themes

Using the youth homelessness prevention typology categories: Structural Prevention, Systems Prevention, Early Intervention, Eviction Prevention, and Housing Stability, data collected from the frontline service provider focus group interviews were themed using the two activities designed to elicit information on (i) identification of resources, programs and services they considered effective in preventing homelessness and (ii) missed opportunities and gaps in the current system.



Effective Resources, Programs, and Services Reducing and Preventing Youth Homelessness

Frontline service provider focus group participants highlighted a large selection of 43 programs, resources and services that they believe are working well and could be considered to be providing homelessness prevention for youth.

Several organizations emerged as key in delivering youth homelessness prevention efforts. For example, the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre (VIRC) and the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA) were mentioned as great supports that focus on newcomers, including youths. Additionally, programs like Umbrella Outreach provided by the Umbrella Society and the Young Moms Programs offered at organizations such as the Kiwanis Family Centre and The Cridge Centre for Family were noted for their targeted support. In discussions of housing, frontline service provider participants mentioned resources such as the Out of the Rain Shelter (Beacon Community Services), Mirrors supportive housing (BC Housing, operator Beacon Community Services), and Pandora youth apartments (YMCA-YWCA of Vancouver Island).

Current System: Missed Opportunities and Gaps

Using the *Typology of Youth Homelessness Prevention* the participants in the frontline service provider focus group interviews identified missed opportunities and gaps for categories of youth homelessness prevention in the current system of youth housing and programs in the CRD. Gaps and missed opportunities include resources such as

- Structural prevention: support for substance use including access to drug testing
- Systems Prevention: increase in funding support including Persons with Disabilities Benefits (PWD)
- Early Intervention: life skills training including parenting skills
- Evictions Prevention: housing available to youth when they age out of care
- Housing Stability: more types of housing including supportive dry/sober housing

Table 5

Current System: Missed Opportunities and Gaps

Category	Resource
Structural Prevention	Support for Substance Use - Access to Drug Testing Support for Substance Use -Treatment Beds Support for Substance Use - Remove Public-Use Substance Ban Strict Gov Rules/ Policies Don't Support Prevention Training for Front Line Workers (Across Sectors) Centralized Services Financial Support for Families Accessibility to ID Services Equity in Systems – Intergenerational Trauma Equity in Systems – Criminalization Equity in Systems – Stop Sweeps Equity in Systems – Stigma (e.g. Pharmacies etc.) Equity in Systems – Racism Equity in Systems – Poverty Cycle

Category	Resource
Systems Prevention	Services/Programs/Resources – Community Coordination
	Services/Programs/Resources – Accepting Self- Referral
	Services/Programs/Resources – Accessibility
	Services/Programs/Resources – Social Workers
	Services/Programs/Resources – Safe Supply
	Services/Programs/Resources – Mental Health
	Services/Programs/Resources – Free Community Centre Programs
	Safe Spaces – Culturally Safe (+ Services)
	Safe Spaces – Gathering Spaces (Connection)
	Affordable Higher Education
Early Intervention	Increase Funding Support – PWD
	Increase Funding Support – Shelter
	Transition Support – Expand Saje
	Transition Support – Transition Plan ³
	Accountability – Service Provision
	Accountability – Gov Decision Makers Connect Front Line (Youth Workers)
	Accountability – Consistent Rules
	Life Skills ² – Employment
	Life Skills ² – Parenting ²
	Life Skills ² – Finances
Evictions Prevention	Substance Use Supports)
	Family Counselling
	Schools – Wraparound Services
	Schools – Curriculum: Mental Health
Housing Stability	Life Skills
	Continuing Subsidies
	Housing Available When Aged-Out
	More Types of Housing – Supportive: Dry/Sober
Undefined	More Types of Housing – Community
	More Types of Housing – Pet-Friendly
	Housing Outreach Supports
	More Foster Placements ≠ Supports for Families
	Opportunities for Youth Connection
	Housing Equality
	Increase Resident Advisory Committee

Note: The (superscript number) denotes the number of times a suggestion was referenced.

Youth and Frontline Service Provider Cross-cutting Themes

After comparing the gaps in the current system between the youth focus groups and the frontline service provider focus group responses, many common themes and trends arose. The gaps highlighted by each of these focus groups include resources (i.e., programs, housing) that are not working as they are, resources that are needed, and resources that we need more of in the system.



Cross-cutting themes included lack of treatment beds for detox and lack of access to information youth need to ensure they remain housed and healthy. As well, issues such as stigma and racism youth face when accessing the services and supports they need were highlighted.

Table 6

Common Gaps Identified: Comparison of Youth and Frontline Service Provider Groups

Resource Issue	Youth
Treatment Beds	Detox-More Beds
Strict Government Rules/Policies Don't Support Prevention	Housing Guidelines being Enforced
Centralized Services	Referral Runaround
	Navigation Issues
Financial Support for Families	Appropriate Programs for Families
	Social Assistance to Families in Need (Not Child Removal)
	Money for Families
Stigma in Systems	Stigma of Social Programs
Racism in Systems	Racial Discrimination/Profiling
Information Accessibility	Information Hard to Find
	Referral Runaround
	Inaccessible Information (Youth Benefits)
	Navigation Issues
Social Workers	Workers Treat Clients With Respect
	Continued Support
Mental Health	Mental Health Support
	Low Cost/ Free Mental Health Counselling
Safe Spaces	Feel Safe
Increase Funding Support (PWD/Shelter etc.)	No Disability Cap/ More Money for Disability (PWD)
	Not Enough to Cover Bills
	Money for Families
	Internet/Phone too Expensive
	Low Income Housing too Expensive
	Cost of Living too High
Transition Plan (Expand Saje, etc.)	Continued Support
	Transitional Supports
Life Skills (Employment, Parenting)	Life Skills
	Access to Employment Programs of Interest
	Appropriate Programs for Families
Substance Use Supports	Access to Doctors
	Support Workers
	Access to Mental Health Supports
	Low Cost/ Free Mental Health Counselling
Family Counseling	Appropriate Programs for Families
Life Skills (Tenancy, Finances)	Rental Education



Resource Issue	Youth
Continuing Subsidies	Financial Education
Pet Friendly Housing	Continued Support
More Types of Housing/ More Housing	Pet Friendly Housing
	Family Housing/Housing
	BC Housing (Waitlist)
	Pet Friendly Housing
	Low Income Housing Too Expensive
	Diverse Housing
	Built Closer to Public Transit
	Transitional Housing
	Housing as a Human Right (Person Centered)

Results

Results presented are divided by the two sources of information gathered for the *Prevention through Systems Change: Creating Home* project (Youth Homelessness Mapping Prevention Project 2024): (i) the web-based database application (<https://victoriahomelessness.ca/youth-support-organizations/>) and (ii) the youth and service provider focus group interviews.

Results for the Web-based Database Application

As of October 2024, the YHPM web-based database application contains 70 entries for organizations, 161 entries for programs, and 8 entries for housing listings. This indicates that there is a range of service providers available to support at-risk and homeless youth. As well, the 161 program entries offer a wide variety of low- to no-cost programs including community building, education, employment, food, health and wellness, and outreach. There are also over 30 Indigenous focused programs. However, the limited number of housing listings, just 8 entries, highlights a significant shortage of diverse and available housing options for youth. Within the eight housing listings there are two emergency shelters providing a total of only 25 beds, two supportive housing facilities, two transitional housing options, and one subsidized housing listing. All housing on this list, with the possible exception emergency shelters, has limited capacity and waitlists.

While over one-half of the programs (n= 95, 59%) were categorized as preventative, it should be noted that 14 programs could be categorized across multiple prevention types, possibly indicating that program categorization may be dependant on reasons a youth is accessing the service. This overlap was particularly evident in early intervention and housing stability programs. For example, when a young person at risk of homelessness seeks life skills training such as financial education or tenancy information, this is categorized as early intervention. However, if that young person is already housed and obtaining life skills to better understand tenancy and related topics, this program is classified as housing stability. Further, if the youth is tenuously housed and does not have the finances to cover rent for the next month this same program is categorized as eviction prevention.



Notably, 62 programs (38.5%) identified did not fall under the prevention typology. However, it is crucial to emphasize that the inability to categorize a program within the prevention typology does not decrease its significance. Many of these programs are fundamental to the overall support system for at-risk youth and provide wonderful opportunities for youth. Each program plays a vital role in addressing the complex needs of youth and their community. For the entire system to thrive, we must recognize and support the contributions of all programs, regardless of the classification we use.

Although programs classified as "Other" only comprised 4 programs (2.5%) that could not be easily classified within the prevention typology, these "Other" programs are essential to the broader efforts of homelessness prevention and include essential services such as food banks and transportation assistance.

Despite the interest shown in the Youth Homelessness Mapping Project, as evidenced by 682 page views between August 2024 and October 2024, utilization of the database application remains lower than expected. During this period the Youth Serving Organizations search received 336 views pointing to a strong demand for local service providers, while the Youth Programs search attracted 119 views, and the Youth Housing search attained 76 views.

Youth Focus Group Interview Results

What's Working

Youth participating in the focus group interviews felt that "Out of the Rain", an emergency shelter for youth aged 15-24 run by Beacon Community Services, was working well and provided much needed shelter when youth face a tenuous housing situation or homelessness.

Youth also identified youth support workers, a crucial component of youth homelessness prevention, as a part of the system that is currently working well. Further to what is working, youth named both Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC) and Umbrella Society as organizations offering programs in areas such as system navigation and substance use, providing much needed outreach support to youth in their journey.

Youth also identified the need to be able to take care of themselves – especially when speaking of the importance of food access and the opportunity to take on responsibilities within supportive housing units where they lived – as a key piece to what is currently working.

Effective health and wellness initiatives were also mentioned. These included services such as the Foundry, SYD Youth Detox and the OPS Road programs which provide essential emotional, health and substance use support.

The START program, facilitated by Worklink BC, was mentioned as a helpful resource that is working well when it comes to finding employment. The START program provides youth aged 15-30 with the opportunity to develop employability skills while getting paid while participating in the program.

What's Not Working

A major concern expressed by the youth was the inadequacy of social assistance programs, particularly those from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Participants



indicated that the financial support provided is insufficient and does not cover basic living expenses such as internet and phone plans, leaving many youths struggling to make ends meet.

Provision of family support structures were also highlighted as problematic, with concerns about child custody removals occurring instead of featuring supportive interventions to keep families together.

Participants noted that supportive housing often comes with safety concerns and feelings of infantilization that can arise from overly protective practices, such as wellness checks and lack of privacy.

Education and health services also emerged as areas that youth focus group participants felt needed improvement. Long waitlists for health and wellness programs, including detox services, hinder timely access to necessary care especially when a youth signals that they are ready to enter a needed program. Youth also highlighted issues with navigating benefits, acquiring life skills and understanding tenancy rights and obligations.

As with any group that is tenuously housed or experiencing homelessness, youth indicated that housing remains a significant issue. With the shortage of affordable and family-friendly options, high costs and stringent tenancy requirements, it is difficult, and in some instances impossible, for a young person to secure stable living arrangements.

Youth also shared the challenges they faced in navigating services, feeling as though every door they tried led them to the wrong place or to a dead-end, resulting in frustrating referral runarounds.

Further, youth pointed to systemic issues such as racial discrimination and profiling within social programs stating that they limit access and/or reduce the desire to access certain necessary programs and resources. The youth participants provided an example of restrictive rules faced within certain teen mom programs: youth participants stated that they felt constrained by a policy that prohibits young mothers' partners from joining them to learn more about caring for their child.

Additionally, the stigma surrounding programs offered and the inaccessibility of information regarding youth benefits and resources for youth further compound the challenges.

While not classified, youth shared that there were issues with working through family problems and that they were unable to find places where they could smoke in their current housing.

Priorities for Reducing and Preventing Youth Homelessness

Youth participants stated that feeling safe is a fundamental necessity for youth well-being and a major factor in reducing and preventing youth homelessness.

Youth participants emphasized the need for enhanced social assistance programs, advocating for changes to the disability caps and increased funding to better support families. They highlighted the importance of outreach efforts, particularly the need to hire more support workers, including Indigenous support workers who would provide culturally relevant assistance.



Respectful treatment from service providers to foster a positive experience for their youth clients was identified as crucial.

In speaking about education, the youth participants expressed a strong desire for a greater emphasis on life skills training and rental education. They also felt that more financial assistance for those pursuing career training is needed. Youth suggested that access to employment programs should be improved, along with initiatives for free or reduced fees for college and university attendance.

When speaking about health and wellness, youth participants called for more low-cost or free mental health and counseling services, as well as easier access to healthcare providers.

Youth expressed a need for more diverse and affordable housing options, ideally located near public transit, with a particular focus on housing policy and enforcing housing as a human right legislation. Additionally, they advocated for increased availability of transitional housing and housing affordability based on rent geared to income metrics.

When it comes to employment, the youth called for higher wages and tax equity, alongside the creation of more job opportunities specifically geared towards young people.

Dotmocracy and the Top Three

When asked what three things would reduce or prevent youth homelessness, youth focus group participants at Mirrors Supportive Housing focused on housing, social assistance, and education and employment. First, they emphasized the urgent need for more low-income housing, advocating for options priced at 25% of market rent. Second, they called for improvements in social assistance, specifically requesting the removal of the disability cap and increased funding. Lastly, youth participants expressed a strong desire for enhanced education focused on life skills, alongside more financial assistance for training and university opportunities, thus highlighting the critical role of both education and employment.

Similarly to their peers, youth focus group participants at the VNFC focused on housing, social assistance, and education as the top three areas that would reduce or prevent youth homelessness. The youth participants stressed the importance of social assistance that supports families in need and does not resort to child removal. Secondly, they highlighted the necessity for more rent-geared-to-income housing, advocating for affordable living options. Lastly, they emphasized housing as a human right, advocating for a person-centered approach that recognizes that everybody has a right to permanent, safe, stable housing.

Table 7

Youth Focus Groups: Dotmocracy and the Top Three

Rank	Category	Suggestion
Mirrors		
1	Housing	More Low-Income Housing (25% of Market Rent)
2	Social Assistance	No Disability Cap/ More \$ ³
3	Education	More Focus on Life Skills
3	Employment	Financial Assistance to Training/University



Victoria Native Friendship Centre

1 Housing	Social Assistance to Families in Need (Not Child Removal)
2 Social Assistance	More Rent Geared to Income Housing
3 Education	Housing as a Human Right (Person Centred)

Summary of Key Findings for Youth Focus Groups

Key findings for the youth focus groups highlight significant shortcomings in support systems for youth at both the local and provincial levels. A recurring theme was the lack of accessible information regarding available benefits geared to youth. Many participants reported that they were unaware of the resources that are available to them, emphasizing the urgent need for improved outreach and initiatives to help youth navigate existing support services.

Additionally, participants stressed the importance of ongoing support throughout their journey, including social worker and support worker in-reach and outreach, regardless of the youth's age and for as long as needed. While systems navigation is crucial, many youths reported experiencing discrimination, racism and stigma when navigating social service systems. It is incredibly important that young people feel safe, respected and heard as negative encounters with staff have led some to avoid necessary services altogether.

The youth participants also emphasized that enhancing access to life skills training and meaningful employment programs is crucial for providing them with the necessary tools to thrive in adulthood. Skills such as financial literacy, tenancy education, and other practical life education should be integrated into the school curriculum. This proactive approach empowers youth to navigate adult life, allowing them to make more informed decisions, ultimately reducing the cycle of homelessness across future generations.

The barriers faced in securing stable housing were a significant concern. Participants noted the high cost of rent, lack of available options and housing programs' restrictive requirements make it difficult for youth to find affordable, safe and suitable living arrangements. The scarcity of pet-friendly options and rental assistance for specific demographics, particularly youth and young families, further complicates their housing search.

Many youth focus group participants shared negative experiences with social assistance programs, highlighting the stigma that often accompanies receiving such support. The funding amounts they receive illustrate the circumstances many at-risk and homeless youth face, even when they qualify for assistance. In British Columbia, current rates for PWD for a single youth are under \$1,000, with a maximum shelter rate of \$500 (see [Appendix D](#)). This is insufficient to cover rent in Victoria and, if a youth is fortunate enough to find a place, will not cover other essential expenses like food. To help these youth thrive there is an urgent need for deeply affordable housing options coupled with higher social assistance amounts.

Although social assistance income increased slightly for more people recently, the amount still falls short of meeting the cost of living or living wage needed to live in the Greater Victoria area. Additionally, although there are social and rental assistance programs available, the application process can be lengthy and complicated. Many eligible youth face difficulties navigating these systems, which can result in applications being denied due to incorrect submissions. As these



processes take time, youth may find themselves in precarious situations while awaiting funds. The situation becomes even more challenging for youth with pets or children. And, even when funding is secured, the low vacancy rate of just 2.6% in Victoria, one of the tightest in Canada, is a significant barrier (CMHC | SCHL (2024)).

Furthermore, housing providers often adhere to National Occupancy Standards (NOS) which, despite being intended as guidelines, are sometimes treated as strict rules (see [Appendix E](#)). These regulations may dramatically affect a family's ability to secure housing. For example, gender and age restrictions dictate that children cannot share rooms unless they meet specific criteria; a family of four with two children of different genders over the age of five would be forced to rent a three-bedroom apartment, even if that means paying for space they cannot afford. This effectively reduces the number of available units for families and, in some cases, may result in no suitable options being available in the CRD. These constraints increase the likelihood of entire families becoming homelessness.

Ultimately, the voices of these young individuals highlight a pressing need for systemic change. By prioritizing affordable housing, increases in social assistance, family-centered support, and accessible education and employment resources, we can significantly reduce the risk of youth homelessness in the CRD.

While it is essential to recognize that youth focus group participants identified issues and gaps in the current system, it does not mean that programs or resources addressing their needs do not exist. Rather, this information highlights the challenges youth often face when accessing these programs, whether that be lack of information, capacity constraints, or program restrictions. For example, many youth participants expressed a strong desire for college and university education, as well as job training, be made available at little or no cost. While there are programs designed to support this, feelings of overwhelm navigating available resources and lack of awareness of these resources reported by youth participants remain a significant barrier. For example, the Provincial Tuition Waiver Program waives tuition and eligible fees for current and former children or youth in care studying full-time or part-time at BC public post-secondary institutions, the Native Education College, or approved union-based trades training providers. Additionally, the B.C. Access Grant (Part-Time) provides upfront, non-repayable financial assistance to low- and middle-income students enrolled in part-time studies at BC public post-secondary institutions. While these programs may not meet every individual need, they do address some of the key concerns raised by youth, highlighting the importance of improving awareness and accessibility to ensure that young people are able to take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

Front Line Service Provider Focus Group Interview Results

While frontline service provider participants highlighted many programs, resources and services that they feel are doing great work in providing some aspect of homelessness prevention for youth, they indicated that there are still many gaps and issues in the existing systems.

Capacity: When asked about how we can have so many great prevention programs and still have youth homelessness frontline service providers noted that, despite the existence of



numerous excellent prevention programs, most programs are operating at full capacity and often have extensive waitlists. The demand for substance use and mental health services far exceeds the available spots. When individuals seek help, they need access immediately—not months or years later. The delays can have tragic consequences, with some young people falling through the cracks. In the worst cases, youth are dying while waiting for support.

Gaps in the Current Prevention System

Systems Prevention: Service providers stressed the need for affordable higher education, as well as increased funding support for PWD assistance and shelter allowance. They also advocated for expanding initiatives like Strengthening abilities and journeys of empowerment (SAJE), emphasizing the importance of comprehensive transition plans for individuals aging out of care. Accountability within service provision was also of high importance, with a call for stronger connections between government decision-makers and frontline youth workers to ensure there is consistent and constant communication about the needs of youth who are experiencing homelessness or precariously housed and includes consistent rules regarding access to programs and services youth require.

Structural Prevention: The necessity for improved access to drug testing and treatment beds was emphasized, as well as the urgent need to remove public-use substance bans to ensure youth who use substances do not suffer harms, including stigma or serious, life-threatening consequences. Additionally, the impact of strict government rules and policies for housing and healthcare were highlighted as barriers, along with the need for comprehensive training for frontline workers across sectors providing housing and healthcare with information on the existing rules and policies. An expressed desire to see more and better accessibility to ID services, as well as more financial support for families were also noted.

Early Intervention: Life skills training that includes employment, parenting, finances, and substance use support was considered highly important. Frontline service providers also emphasized the importance of family counseling services and wraparound supports for youth. Further, front line service providers suggested that mental health be added to school curricula.

Housing Stability: Frontline service providers stressed that the development of additional diverse housing options, including supportive, dry and pet-friendly environments to cater to the various needs of youth, are imperative. They also stressed the importance of continuing subsidies and creating housing solutions that are available when youth age out of care.

Eviction Prevention: Frontline service providers suggested that life skills programs designed empower families and individuals to navigate housing challenges are needed. Continued financial subsidies and proactive measures to prevent evictions are also required. Additionally, front line service providers indicated that support for families in crisis, with increases in foster placements to meet the need of youth who are not able to remain with their family, are vital.

Summary of Key Findings for Frontline Service Providers

Service provider focus group participants provided valuable insights and perspectives into youth homelessness prevention. Two key areas of concern related to service provision emerged from this group: program capacity and collaboration with government agencies.



Service providers believe there is an urgent need to increase capacity within existing programs. Despite a wide array of services, many are operating at full capacity, leading to significant waitlists. Service providers noted that young people seeking immediate assistance often face lengthy delays, which may have tragic consequences.

The recent Victoria Foundation's *2024 State of BC's Non-Profit Sector: Under Pressure* report highlights the substantial burden that nonprofits in the homelessness serving sector shoulder. Front-line workers are dealing with inadequate structural policies and are continually asked to do more with fewer resources. Many nonprofits struggle with understaffing and underfunding, resulting in high burnout rates among workers, limited capacity and a reduced ability to provide services essential to youth who are experiencing housing precarity or homelessness.

Service providers also called for increased government engagement, emphasizing the need for policymakers to witness, firsthand, the challenges faced by those providing frontline services and vulnerable youth. This direct experience is crucial to understand the needs of the sector serving youth and drive meaningful change.

The participation of the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction in this mapping work is seen as a positive step, opening and fostering new connections and dialogue. However, more ministries, particularly the Ministry of Child and Family Development, must actively participate in discussions – such as those conducted as part of the Youth Homelessness Prevention Mapping Project – to strengthen relationships between frontline workers and decisionmakers. Effective change requires collaboration across ministries, as well as between the various ministries and nonprofit organizations in the CRD.

Results Cross-cutting Youth and Frontline Service Provider Themes

The feedback from both frontline service providers and youth highlight several common themes and reveal significant gaps in the current support systems. Both groups expressed a strong need for increased treatment beds and detox facilities, emphasizing the urgency of providing accessible substance use support. The demand for substance use and mental health services far exceeds the available spots. When individuals seek help, they need access immediately- not months or years later. The delays may have tragic consequences, with some young people falling through the cracks and, in the worst cases, dying while waiting for support.

Another prominent theme was the necessity for improved financial support for families. Service providers highlighted the inadequacy of current funding structures, while youth emphasized the need for social assistance that maintains family integrity rather than child removal.

Information from both groups underscored the high cost of living and the limitations of existing financial resources, such as PWD benefits and shelter allowances as these resources have not kept pace with the current housing market. Youth consistently stated that social assistance programs fall short of meeting their basic needs, particularly when it comes to essential expenses like phone and internet bills. They expressed frustration with the disability cap associated with the PWD assistance, which they feel restricts their ability to work and improve their situations. Many youths indicated that, while they want to engage in the workforce, their



mental health can fluctuate, making it challenging to maintain consistent employment. While both groups acknowledge the limitations of financial support, youth were particularly focused on the desire to work and engage in educational programs. They advocated for the removal of the disability cap, which would allow them to pursue employment when they are able, rather than simply relying on assistance.

The issues of stigma and systemic discrimination also resonated strongly across both groups. Service providers recognized the stigma existing within current systems that hinders access to necessary supports, while youth shared their experiences of racial discrimination and profiling. These shared concerns highlight the urgent need for reform to create more equitable and inclusive support systems that respect the dignity of all individuals, including youth.

Access to information and navigation within the system are other areas that the youth and frontline service provider participants both emphasized. Service providers noted barriers to information accessibility, while youth expressed frustration over the difficulties in finding essential resources and navigating the available services. This indicates a clear need for streamlined communication and support for young individuals and families to connect to the resources they require without unnecessary obstacles. Service providers specifically addressed the issue of service centralization, raising questions about its potential effectiveness in improving navigation and addressing the common challenge of "every door not being the right door," as frequently noted by youth. While centralization could streamline access to resources, the underlying issues of capacity limitations and the chronic underfunding of financial assistance programs remain significant obstacles. Without addressing these foundational challenges, simply centralizing services may not sufficiently resolve the difficulties faced by young people in accessing the support they need.

Finally, both groups highlighted the crucial role of life skills education, including essential areas such as employment, parenting and financial literacy. This shared recognition underscores the importance of educating young people with practical tools at an early age to build independence and increase feelings of mental and emotional strength. Service providers also noted the significance of life skills in addressing gaps in early intervention and eviction prevention, indicating that life skills education may serve as a vital preventative measure at various stages of a youth's journey within the system.

Summary of Overarching Cross-cutting Themes

The feedback from both youth focus groups and frontline service providers revealed six predominant themes and illustrate the needs within the current system. Underlying all themes is a need for safe, accessible, affordable and appropriate housing for youth. Housing is absolutely essential to ensure the effectiveness of all other support services.

The themes presented align closely with the top three priorities identified in each youth focus group. Primary themes shared by both groups are the critical need for easily accessible funding, affordable housing and life skills education.

Cross-cutting themes found, in no particular order, include:



Connection and Community: The desire for safe spaces, community opportunities, and connection.

Equity and Social Justice: Issues of racism and stigma within the system are of high concern, with both groups highlighting the negative impacts these factors have on access to services and the overall quality of care.

Funding and Financial Resources: Both groups of participants agreed that there is an urgent need for increased funding and financial resources, highlighting the pressing challenges posed by the high cost of living in the CRD. These groups stressed that current financial assistance programs are inadequate, particularly the restrictive working caps on the already limited PWD benefits. Additionally, shelter allowances haven't reflected the current rental market in decades.

Life Skills Development: Youth and frontline service providers emphasized the necessity for education in areas such as tenancy, financial literacy and employment readiness as an early preventative intervention, providing necessary skills to maintain housing stability and a way to prevent evictions.

Substance Use Support: Both groups highlighted a significant gap in substance use support services, particularly emphasizing the urgent need for accessible detox facilities.

Support for Families: Comprehensive support for families that includes financial assistance, counseling services and appropriate social programs is vital. These support networks are essential not only for young parents facing homelessness or at risk of it, but as another way to ensure stability for families.

Literature Review

Information found in the literature and the feedback from service providers and youth demonstrated significant similarities in perspectives regarding the challenges of and solutions for youth homelessness. Both information gathered from participants and results from the literature review indicated that early intervention strategies are the most promising and often lead better outcomes for youth who are experiencing housing insecurity. As well, life skills and employment training as seen as essential components of prevention in both the literature review and feedback from service providers.

Mental health support was also a significant focus in both sources. Information from the literature review stressed the integration of mental health services within housing programs, while the youth focus group participants emphasized the need for better access to mental health supports, doctors and counseling.

While the literature outlined broad frameworks for improvement, the youth and frontline service provider feedback offers detailed personal experiences. The combination of information from these perspectives informs a more effective response to youth homelessness in the CRD as it bridges the gap between theory and lived experience.



Surprises/What's Missing?

While the youth provided valuable insights into the gaps in the current system and potential solutions for reducing youth homelessness, some surprising factors emerged from our literature reviews. According to the McCreary Society's homeless youth survey, the primary reasons for youth homelessness are often linked to family breakdown, running away from home and conflicts within the family (McCreary Centre Society's Youth Research Academy, 2021). This theme resonates with other surveys reported in the literature but did not surface during our discussions with youth participants or frontline service providers.

In the two youth focus group interviews conducted, healthy family dynamics were rarely discussed as a factor in preventing homelessness. This appears to resonate with the service providers as they highlighted the need for increased support for families. However, this topic was briefly mentioned by one youth during the "what is not working" activity, where they referred to "family problems" without further elaboration. Further, although many of the youth participants had connections to the government care system, their feedback focused on concerns about insufficient funding, inadequate transitional support after care and the need for more financial assistance and support for families.

Service providers spoke of a necessity for more quality foster families to ensure appropriate placements. However, increasing the number of foster families appears to be in conflict with advocating for more family supports. This is in keeping with youth participants perception that the current system favours child removal over efforts to keep families intact.

The lack of discussion about family breakdown as a leading cause of youth homelessness may be due to the anonymous nature of the McCreary Society's survey, which might have provided an avenue for youth to more readily provide information about sensitive issues without fear of judgment or may be due to the large number of youths participating in the McCreary Society's survey.

While it's easy to criticize a system that allows youth to fall through the cracks, it's equally important to celebrate the organizations that provide invaluable programs making a significant difference in the lives of youth in the CRD. The nonprofit sector in the CRD is rich with dedicated and passionate service providers committed to fostering positive change and helping local youth thrive. These organizations form the backbone of homelessness prevention efforts for youth in the CRD. See [Appendix F](#) for a small selection of the exceptional prevention initiatives in the CRD.

Limitations

The Alliance acknowledges the need for diverse youth representation in our findings. Though two youth focus groups were facilitated, youth needs are complex and multifaceted, underscoring the importance of incorporating as many youth voices as possible in research going forward. By focusing on both immediate needs and long-term solutions, our goal is to create a framework that promotes stability and well-being for vulnerable young individuals in the CRD. Further outreach with youth is needed.



Conclusions and Recommendations

The challenges highlighted by both youth and service providers call for immediate action in several critical areas. To effectively address the urgent needs of youth experiencing homelessness in the CRD, the AECHR the following recommendations based on the findings from this system mapping project follow.

Recommendations to Prevent Youth Homelessness

Enhanced Mental Health and Substance Use Support

Mental health and substance use supports are vital for the well-being of youth, and access to these services must be significantly improved. This means building capacity within the health care system. There is an urgent need for more detox beds and integrated support services that address both mental health and substance use simultaneously.

Life Skills Early Education and Schools

Incorporating mental health and life skills education into school curricula starting at a young age is essential. Youth need to be equipped with knowledge about their rights as tenants before they face the challenges of independent living. Understanding tenancy rights, financial literacy, and life skills will allow them to navigate adulthood more effectively. Schools should also implement wraparound supports, ensuring that students have access to high quality counseling and other necessary resources. Family counselling should also be available within schools, as family breakdown is one of the leading causes of youth homelessness.

Transitioning from Government Care

The current structure of the MCFD is not meeting the needs of children and youth in government care. Many of the youth focus group participants reported that they are afraid to age out of the system as they do not have adequate transition plans. Youth exiting government care should never leave without a transition plan that includes stable housing. Just as parents would not abandon their children in such circumstances, governments must be held to the same standard. Housing must be built to fill the gap during this transitional period as youth look to find permanent housing.

Financial Assistance

It is crucial to raise the PWD benefit a livable wage, enabling youth to cover essential living costs and maintain a decent quality of life. Additionally, increasing the shelter allowance is vital for helping individuals afford stable housing in an increasingly expensive market. Research has shown that homelessness prevention is significantly more cost-effective than emergency responses to homelessness, ultimately saving money in the long run—funds that may be redirected back into the pockets of Canadians.

Affordable and Diverse Housing Options for Youth

Housing for youth must go beyond simply providing a roof over their heads; it needs to be stable, safe and tailored to meet the diverse needs of individuals. Therefore, the expansion and diversification of low-income housing options in the CRD is needed to ensure that all youth have access to safe and appropriate living environments. This means providing housing options that



are affordable to those living off social assistance with money left over to pay for utilities, food and other essentials without being at risk of homelessness every month.

Housing solutions must prioritize stability. This involves creating reliable living arrangements that prevent youth from falling back into homelessness. Additionally, housing must be unique to individual needs. Recognizing that youth come from diverse backgrounds and face different challenges is crucial. Some may require supportive housing that offers mental health resources and substance use support, while others might need family-friendly or pet friendly units. To do this we must ensure that youth with varying levels of substance use—whether actively using, in recovery, or not having used substances at all—are not placed together for the if the individual youth involved does not wish to be placed with other youth at a different stage in their substance use journey. Safety is an essential aspect of housing. Youth feeling safe is just as important as them being safe.

Finally, to meet the diverse needs of the population, there must be various types of housing options including, but not limited to, low-income housing, transitional units and permanent supportive housing. Further, policies should be designed to cater to the different youth demographics such as youth with disabilities, those exiting government care and young parents.

Recommendations to Support Nonprofit Organizations Serving Youth

To meet the needs of nonprofit organizations that support at-risk-youth several strategies for enhancing support for nonprofits are needed. This will allow these organizations to more effectively serve our community. These recommendations include:

1. Boosting the sustainability of the sector workforce: Establish a collaborative working group that includes representatives from the sector, government agencies, funders and other key sector partners to create a nonprofit labour force strategy.
2. Implement funding reforms: Ask funders to implement a flexible administrative fee of up to 30 per cent, empowering grant recipients to determine the specific percentage required to run programs; offer multi-year funding agreements embedded with inflationary increases; and establish a formal funders' collaborative to advocate for and implement funding reforms, share trust-based practices and collectively address the funding challenges within BC's non-profit sector.
3. Nurture a collaborative ecosystem: No one organization can do this alone. Encourage B.C.'s non-profit sector to develop cross-sector partnerships; establish information-sharing platforms; coordinate training and development; and align data collection efforts.

(Victoria News, 2024, <https://www.vicnews.com/marketplace/do-more-much-more-with-less-bcs-non-profit-sector-is-under-pressure-7485174>)

Resources to Support Youth Homelessness Prevention

The YHPM web-based database application created highlights organizations, programs and support systems tailored to the unique needs of youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The database application was designed to empower both youth and service providers by making low- and no-cost resource information easily accessible. Early access to such information is crucial in addressing issues that may lead to homelessness. As such the AEHCR, youth



organizations and the youth homelessness serving sector are committed to continuing collaboration with other resource directories.



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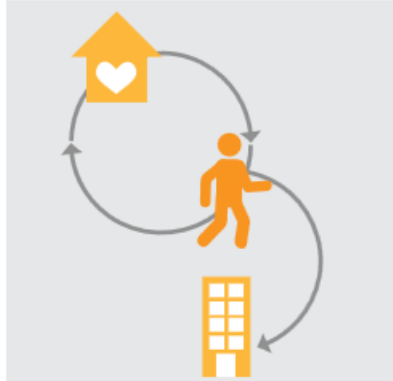


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Appendix A: A Typology of Youth Homelessness

(Gaetz, 2014, p. 16)

	<p>Temporarily Disconnected</p> <p>As Kuhn and Culhane (1998)³ point out, the vast majority of people who become homeless do so for a very short time, typically find their way out of homelessness with little assistance and rarely return to homelessness. This is as true for adults as it is for youth. The NAEH suggests that between 81 and 86 percent of homeless youth fit into this category (NAEH, 2012)⁴. This group is characterized as generally being younger, as having more stable or redeemable relations with family members, a less extensive history of homelessness and are more likely to remain in school. There is a strong need for prevention and early intervention to divert this population from the homelessness system.</p>
	<p>Unstably Connected</p> <p>This population of homeless youth has a more complicated housing history and is likely to have longer and repeated episodes of homelessness (Toro et al., 2011)⁵. They are more likely to be disengaged from school and will have challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment. Most will have retained some level of connection with family members and are less likely to experience serious mental health or addictions issues than chronically homeless youth. This is a group for which family reconnection interventions, as well as transitional housing programs are recommended, particularly for youth under 18.</p>
	<p>Chronically Disconnected</p> <p>In terms of numbers, this will be the smallest group of homeless youth, but at the same time the group with the most complex needs with the heaviest reliance on the resources in the youth homelessness sector. This group is defined by longer-term homelessness and a greater likelihood of repeated episodes. They will also be more likely to have mental health problems, addictions issues and/or a diagnosed disability. They will have the most unstable relations with families and in some cases there will be no connections at all. Young adults in this category may require more comprehensive interventions, as well as more supportive and longer-term housing programs.</p>

³ National Alliance to End Homelessness (2012). *An Emerging Framework for Ending Unaccompanied Youth Homelessness*. Retrieved from: <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/an-emerging-framework-for-ending-unaccompanied-youth-homelessness/>

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Appendix B: Three Main Types of Funding for Youth

Table 8

Three Main Types of Funding for Youth

Name of Resource	Description	Age
Youth Agreement	A legal agreement made between youth and the MCFD in cases of extreme need.	16 to 18 Years Old
Strengthening Abilities and Journeys of Empowerment (SAJE) Program	Services are available to support pre- and post-19 years of age with transition planning, income support, housing, medical and dental benefits, mental health benefits, and life-skills, training, and cultural connections funding.	19 to 27 Years Old
Person with Disabilities (PWD)	Disability assistance for youth who need financial or health support.	18 and Older



Appendix C: Youth Homelessness Prevention Mapping Project Outreach



Project Description: Youth Prevention System Mapping in the CRD

Preventing homelessness from occurring or reoccurring is an essential part of ending homelessness and decreasing the associated trauma and harm. Preventing youth homelessness is a critical part of ending homelessness and experience of chronic homelessness and is a key part of the 2025-2030 Community Plan to End Homelessness. With the support of the Victoria Foundation, the Alliance to End Homelessness in the Capital Region is carrying out a 6-month project to begin to map the homelessness prevention initiatives accessible to youth within the CRD. By engaging service providers and youth about resources in the community, we seek to identify what prevention efforts are currently in place and where the gaps are in the existing system.

Our project aims to achieve several key outcomes:

- Compile and share a comprehensive list of youth-accessible prevention initiatives, resources, and services available within the CRD.
- Engage with youth and service providers to gather firsthand insights into their experiences related to homelessness prevention.
- Identify connections and gaps in prevention efforts.
- Develop a template for conducting further regional homelessness prevention mapping.

With the results of this mapping project, we will achieving a clearer understanding of prevention strategies tailored to the youth demographic, enabling us to identify effective interventions and where resources can be allocated more efficiently. Lastly, our project aims to advocate for structural, systemic, and local changes by emphasizing the importance of early prevention as one of the key solutions to the homelessness crisis. This includes advocating for policies and programs addressing underlying causes such as poverty, housing insecurity, and family conflict.

As outputs, we plan to create a comprehensive database of resources, along with a presentation and a detailed report highlighting our findings.

The timeline will be focused between the months of May and September 2024:

May: Data Collection, database creation, Microsoft Forms created and distributed to service providers.

- **June:** Data collection, Service Provider focus groups.
- **July:** Data collection, Youth focus groups, data analysis of gaps & connections
- **August:** Deadline for data collection, drafting report, save the dates sent out for project presentation event.
- **September:** Database finalized, systems mapping report completed, event hosted to share results.

Interested in participating or including your program resources in our database? Reach out to Meghan Locke, Project Coordinator (mlocke@victoriahomelessness.ca) to learn more.

This project is made possible by the generous support of The Victoria Foundation



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HOPE HAS FOUND A HOME

Appendix D: Youth Funding Assistance

Table 9

PWD Funding by Unit Size

Unit Size	A	B	C	D
1	\$983.50	N/A	N/A	N/A
2	\$1,378.50	\$1,853.50	\$1,133.50	\$1,628.50
3	\$1,478.50	\$1,953.50	\$1,133.50	\$1,728.50
4	\$1,478.50	\$1,953.50	\$1,133.50	\$1,728.50
5	\$1,478.50	\$1,953.50	\$1,133.50	\$1,728.50

Key

A	Singles, couples, and two-parent families where one family member is a person with disabilities (PWD), and the other is not a PWD and is under 65.
B	Couples and two-parent families where both adults are PWDs.
C	One-parent families where the parent is a PWD.
D	Couples and two-parent families where one adult is a person with disabilities, and the other adult is not a person with disabilities and is 65 or more years of age.

Table 10

Province of British Columbia Shelter Allowance

Size of Family Unit	Minimum Shelter Allowance	Maximum Shelter Allowance
1 Person	\$75	*\$500
2 Persons	\$150	*\$695
3 Persons	\$200	*\$790
4 Persons	\$225	*\$840
5 Persons	\$250	*\$890

Notes

- All rates are monthly.
- An additional Transportation Supplement is provided to a person with the Persons with Disabilities designation as \$52 in cash or as an in-kind bus pass.
- In addition to the support allowance, families may also receive a monthly payment for each child under 19 years of age. For more information, see Child Benefits Top-up Supplement.
- Families of two or more that include someone on Old Age Security (OAS) are entitled to a maximum shelter allowance for the family size.
- *If actual shelter costs are less than the minimum shelter allowance, the minimum shelter allowance will be provided.
- *Minimum shelter allowance increments continue to increase by an additional \$25 for each additional dependant after unit size 10.
- Maximum shelter allowance increments continue to increase by an additional \$50 for each additional dependant after unit size 10.
- Disability assistance is paid in the month following designation. In cases where designation occurs prior to the individual's 18th birthday, payments begin in the month of the 18th birthday.

Appendix E: National Occupancy Standards

What is a “suitable” household?

Under the Standard, suitable housing is based on the following criteria:

- A maximum of 2 persons per bedroom.
- Household members, of any age, living as part of a married or common-law couple share a bedroom with their spouse or common-law partner.
- Lone parents, of any age, have a separate bedroom from their children.
- Household members aged 18 or over have a separate bedroom, except those living as part of a married or common-law couple.
- Household members under 18 years of age of the same sex may share a bedroom, except lone parents and those living as part of a married or common-law couple.
- Household members under 5 years of age of the opposite sex may share a bedroom if doing so would reduce the number of required bedrooms. This situation would arise only in households with an odd number of males under 18, and odd number of females under 18 and at least one female and one male under the age of 5.

An exception to the above is a household consisting of 1 individual living alone who may live in a studio apartment with no separate bedroom.



Appendix F: A Sample of Youth Homelessness Prevention Initiatives in the CRD

Education:

Burnside Gorge: Family Self Sufficiency Program

This program supports families by providing financial literacy skill building, goal setting, and action planning, so that families can strengthen their capacity to provide a more stable and healthy way of life for themselves and their children.

Health + Wellness:

Boys and Girls Club- Youth Prenatal & Parenting Program (YP3)

This program helps young women (aged 16-29 years) who are pregnant or in the early months of parenting to improve their chances to have healthy pregnancies, develop safe, positive parenting skills and increase coping and decision-making skills. The program specifically supports vulnerable youth who are at risk of becoming homeless and who may have substance use issues.

Outreach:

Island Community Services Salt Spring: The Family Development Outreach Program

This program provides vital early intervention for families with children in unhealthy or risky home environments. This outreach service targets families at risk of having their children removed due to concerns about safety, offering significant intervention to foster change. The program focuses on reducing risks and supporting the development or restoration of a safe and healthy home.

Youth Empowerment Society (YES): Youth & Family Support Services

This program offers crucial support to youth aged 12-19 and their families in need of immediate assistance. This outreach program provides emotional and practical support, along with crisis intervention, to help reduce risks faced by youth and their families.

Employment:

Worklink Employment Society: START Program

This program provides youth aged 15-30 with the opportunity to develop employability skills through a structured 6-week program. Participants earn a wage while working 30 hours per week, gaining essential life and job skills that enhance their readiness for the workforce. The program also offers the potential for an additional 8 weeks of work experience, supported by a wage subsidy, to further their professional development and increase their employability.



Indigenous Focus Programs:

NiŁ TU,O: Guardianship and Extended Family Programs

This program addresses the systemic challenges Indigenous families face within the child protection system. It prioritizes keeping children connected to their extended families and communities, providing culturally safe alternatives to traditional foster care. This approach mitigates the trauma associated with separation and reinforces the importance of familial support.

Victoria Native Friendship Centre: Youth Support Workers

Through the dedicated efforts of support and addictions workers, this program offers essential guidance and resources that empower youth to pursue their personal goals and improve their overall well-being. By addressing the unique challenges they face, including housing stability and addiction, the program fosters resilience and supports positive life choices for young individuals.

Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness Society: YEŁ,ÁUTW (Place of Hope) Indigenous Justice Program

This program focuses on housing stability for Indigenous youth involved with the criminal justice system. It provides essential support, for youth in maintaining stable housing while navigating the justice system. By prioritizing connections with Indigenous service providers, that includes respect and cultural sensitivity, while incorporating traditional healing practices, the program addresses unique challenges and fosters holistic well-being for Indigenous youth.

