



BUILDING COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE CHILD WELFARE AND STREET INVOLVED YOUTH SERVICES SECTORS IN HAMILTON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth with child welfare histories face challenges that put them at risk of becoming street-involved or homeless. In 2008, the Homelessness Partnership Initiative provided funding to The Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton in partnership with The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton and the Street-Involved Youth Planning Collaborative to develop a community plan for reducing the risk of street-involvement for former youth in care. The objectives of the project were:

- To identify the connection between child welfare involvement and youth street-involvement.
- To identify areas that provide an opportunity for child welfare agencies and community youth service agencies to collaborate in their work with street-involved youth.
- To develop a community plan involving child welfare agencies and community youth service agencies that will reduce the risk of street-involvement for former youth in care.

Methods

In order to do this research, a literature review, focus groups, key informant interviews and a community consultation were conducted. Four stakeholder groups were consulted- youth, child welfare management, street-involved youth services management and front-line staff from both sectors.

Key Findings

Eight key findings emerged from the literature and community research:

- 1) Youth indicate that they receive supports from both the child welfare and street-involved youth services sectors.
- 2) Youth indicate that supports and services need to be enhanced in certain areas.
- 3) The child welfare and street-involved youth services sectors work well together on a case by case basis to address the needs of youth.
- 4) Partnerships and initiatives that have already been undertaken by the child welfare and community services sectors have lead to a greater understanding of the benefits and processes involved in community collaboration.
- 5) Cross-sectored education, training and information-sharing can enhance the development of community collaboration.
- 6) The amount of time and resources available to individual agencies presents a challenge to collaborative work.
- 7) The differences that exist between the two sectors are a barrier to community collaboration.
- 8) Collaborative planning is challenged when different levels within individual agencies are not working together toward community collaboration.

Next Steps

We understand from the research that systems collaboration building is a progressive process that starts individually, moves to project based work and culminates in systems change. The next steps are organized by these three levels of systems collaboration building:

Case to case, individual level

The findings have led to an understanding that collaboration at the individual worker level is the easiest to attain and reflects the current situation in Hamilton. The research findings point to the following methods and processes for partnership building at this level:

- Cross-sectored educational opportunities
- Joint training
- Educational opportunities in the broader community
- Building relationships through regular networking opportunities
- Building partnerships between youth agencies

Cross-sectored project and service development

The findings have also revealed that the development of partnerships and projects between the two sectors is already underway in Hamilton. These partnerships have led to a greater understanding of the benefits and processes involved in cross-sectored project and service development. The next steps for achieving this objective are:

- Build on knowledge and partnerships developed through the after-care worker project
- Continue the development of shared projects
- Continue to work collaboratively to develop youth services

Systems Planning

A finding in our research is that collaborative work must address the differences between the two systems and develop methods for working across them. This involves systems planning on a larger scale and is an ongoing process of learning and developing. The next steps for achieving this objective are:

- Identifying service trends in Hamilton
- Long term relationship building across sectors
- Development of a strategic community plan