



# FRONT-LINE WORKER 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.

As part of our research, we held a consultation event on December 4, 2008 for front-line workers from the child welfare and street-involved youth services sectors. Our purpose was to find out how workers from the two sectors were working together to address the needs of the youth using their services. We asked them to identify assets and challenges in their work together and to point to opportunities for improving collaboration. This brief is a summary of the information gathered at the consultation and is meant specifically for front-line workers.

## WORKING TOGETHER

**How do workers from the two sectors work well together?**

*You told us:*

- We have the common goal of working in the best interests of youth.
- We have positive working relationships on a case by case basis to serve individual youth.
- We have the ability to respect the challenges faced by front-line workers and it extends across the boundaries of our perspective sectors.

## FACING CHALLENGES

**What are the challenges and barriers that workers face when working with the other sector?**

*You told us:*

- There are time constraints that affect our ability to communicate effectively with the other sector.
- There is a lack of knowledge about the services provided by other agencies.
- There are misconceptions and bias toward the other sector.
- It is difficult to work across the differences between the two sectors (such as policies, funding, mandated services, liabilities and underlying philosophies).

# BUILDING COLLABORATION

How can collaboration between the two sectors be improved?

*You suggested:*

## **Cross-sectored educational opportunities**

*Front-line staff identified that child welfare and street-involved youth services workers need to develop knowledge about the other sector in order to reduce misconceptions and biases. Suggestions for educational opportunities include:*

- Agency tours and presentations.
- A shared web information system.
- The use of accessible language and messaging.

## **Joint training**

*The consultation participants pointed out the benefits of joint training with workers from both sectors. They are:*

- Workers will gain insight into the ways that the two sectors operate and discover methods for working across their differences.
- Both sectors will receive the same messages and information.
- Youth participation can be encouraged in order to gain insight into their experiences and ideas.

## **Educational opportunities in the broader community**

*The front-line workers talked about the benefits of extending their learning to other systems in the community. They are:*

- Increase the understanding of street-involved youth issues in systems such as the education and health sectors.
- Improve the opportunities of youth when interacting with systems that have a greater knowledge of the challenges of street-involvement.

## **Building relationships through regular networking opportunities**

*The consultation participants discussed relationship building between workers in the two sectors. Suggestions for achieving this objective include:*

- Providing opportunities for workers to network and get to know each other.
- Setting up groups such as the Street-Involved Youth Network to meet monthly to discuss their work with youth.

## **Building partnerships between youth agencies**

*Front-line staff identified that the development of cross-sectored partnerships can enhance the coordination of services and decrease the likelihood that services are duplicated. Suggestions for partnership building are:*

- The continuation of the after-care worker project that houses child welfare workers in community service agencies to provide after care support to youth.
- Have on-site workers from other sectors within agencies to act as a resource for staff and youth.