

**YOUTH HOUSING SUPPORT PROJECT EVALUATION  
APRIL 1, 2012 – MARCH 31, 2014**

March 2014

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In partnership with:



Catholic  
Children's Aid Society  
of Hamilton



The Children's Aid Society  
OF HAMILTON

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**Canada**

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SOCIAL PLANNING  
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report is an evaluation of the Youth Housing Support Project (YHSP). The YHSP is led by the Youth Housing Support Collaborative (YHSC), which consists of the following partners:

- **The Street Youth Planning Collaborative (SYPC)**
- **The Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton(CCAS) \*Lead agency**
- **The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton (CAS), and**
- **Catholic Family Services (CFS)**

This evaluation reports on activities and outcomes achieved throughout the timeline of April 1st, 2012 to March 1<sup>st</sup> 2014. The entire timeline of the project is from April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014. The methods of data collection for this evaluation includes the review and analysis of the YHSP database, key informant interviews with youth project participants and review and analysis from YHSP documents or reports.

The YHSP is a project that consists of the following activity areas:

- Youth Housing Support Team & Early Intervention Program
- Youth Transitional Housing Support
- Collaboration Support

A description of each activity is provided in the evaluation findings section.

The YHSP is generously funded by the Government of Canada – Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

## 2. CONTEXT SETTING

The YHSP is an outcome from the following key recommendation within the 2005 report, **Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton**:

*“It is recommended that a working group made up of the SIYM, Family Services of Hamilton, Catholic Family Services of Hamilton, the Children’s Aid Society and the Catholic Children’s Aid Society examine child welfare policy and its impacts on street-involvement in youth. Additionally, this group could have the capacity to identify strategies for preventing street-involvement including primary prevention with supports early on for parents to limit the incidence of family conflict and abuse. Finally, the Children’s Aid Society and the Catholic Children’s Aid Society might have creative responses to early intervention with youth who have runaway that could be shared with the community.”*

Since 2005, significant work and progress has been achieved between the street-involved youth and child welfare sectors. Pillar achievements have been the partnership building and the project collaboration. The following timeline presents the events and activities that have been accomplished to date.

**2005** - The Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth report encouraged the street-involved youth and child welfare sectors to take a strategic approach to collaboration following the evidence and documentation surrounding the needs of street-involved and homeless youth with child welfare involvement in Hamilton.

**2008** – The SYPC with the CCAS, CAS and CFS initiated their partnership when they applied to the Homelessness Partnership Initiative (HPI) for a pilot project, called the **Aftercare Worker Project**. This project aimed to support street-involved youth to maintain housing through activities such as life skills enhancement, help with finding furniture and housing items, landlord advocacy and tenant education. This marked the first occasion where the sectors collaborated on a project planning, sharing resources and engaging together on the project implementation and evaluation work.

Also, this year marked the completion of the **Building Collaboration Between the Child Welfare and Street-Involved Youth Services**, which aimed to take a closer look at how well these two service sectors were collaborating. The assessment focused on the sectors various levels of engagement, such as on a case to case level up to a systems level. The report highlighted that each of the various levels could benefit from more collaboration, acknowledging that the systems level was an area in particular that required a “building of collaboration”.

**2009 - Evaluations of the Addressing the Needs report and the 2008 Aftercare Worker project** were completed. Both reports highlighted that outcomes and successes were being achieved, such as filling gaps in services and building relationships between the child welfare and street-involved youth sectors. In the Aftercare Worker Project, outcomes demonstrated that youth were maintaining housing and that project sharing between the two sectors was successful.

A significant accomplishment in 2009 was the **development of the YHSP** and the approval by HPI for the YHSC to receive project funding. (At this time HPI became the Homelessness Partnering Strategy or HPS). The YHSP offered a range of services, beginning with early intervention, direct housing support (finding/maintaining) and transitional housing support. The partners reached new successes in their aims to address the housing needs of street-involved youth with their newer and larger project, which provided a more comprehensive, coordinated, continuum of housing supports.

**2011** - The end of the YHSP funding period concluded with a **project evaluation** which reported the range of outputs and outcomes that were achieved. According to the report, successes included prevention of youth experiencing homelessness, assisting youth to find, attain and maintain housing, enhancing life skills, and supporting education and employment goals. The evaluation identified that the YHSP model proved to be successful based on its flexibility, resources, case management approach, being community based, client and youth centredness and for its teamwork/collaboration.

Additionally, **a one year extension was granted** to all projects funded by HPS, which included the YHSP.

**2012** - In early 2012, an **evaluation of the YHSP** was completed which primarily consisted of reporting on the data collected in the extension year. A review of the collaboration work was also included in the evaluation. This evaluation was more extensive on reporting outputs in order to provide a more robust profile of the youth engaged in the project and to demonstrate the range of housing services and activities that were achieved.

The YHSP responded to a next Call for Proposals by HPS for the timeframe of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014. The **project partners were delighted to have the project approved for an additional 2 years of funding**. However, their requested budget (based on the budget they previously received) was greatly reduced, by approximately 40%, which required making significant revisions to the project model and housing services. The major revisions to the project included: reducing all staff hours, removing the early intervention program, removing one of the transitional housing programs and focusing services on supporting youth to find housing.

**2013 & 2014** - In early 2013, the YHSC paid close attention to the announcement that HPS funding would be renewed for the timeframe of 2014 to 2019, but with a new direction towards Housing First approaches. Since HPS's report, efforts have been made by the YHSC to embrace the new directions. Beginning in late 2013 and currently, the YHSP partners have participated in consultations and visioning sessions to prepare for HPS's next Call for Proposals. In the first half of 2014, the partners will engage in project planning and working together as they are renewing their vision of the project which aims to better align within Housing First principles and programs.

### 3. EVALUATION FINDINGS – OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

The following section reports on the outputs and outcomes of the YHSP. This section of the evaluation reports data on the following activities: Early Intervention Program, Youth Housing Support Team and Youth Transitional Housing Support. An evaluation of the Collaboration Support is a following section. In the following table, an outline of each area of activity, staffing and expected results are reported.

**Figure 1**

ACTIVITY	PROJECT STAFF AND AGENCY	EXPECTED RESULTS
<b>Early Intervention Program</b> (Shelter and Street Diversion)	.2 FTE (January to December 2013 and 1.2 FTE January to March 2014) Good Shepherd Youth Services – Notre Dame House	A total of 60 youth supported through the Early Intervention Program
<b>Youth Housing Support Team (YHST)</b> (Finding and Attaining Housing)	1 FTE each <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Catholic Children’s Aid Society of Hamilton,</li> <li>▪ Catholic Family Services-St Martin’s Manor, Angela’s Place and Grace Haven</li> <li>▪ Children’s Aid Society of Hamilton (.7 FTE)</li> <li>▪ Good Shepherd Youth Services-Notre Dame House</li> <li>▪ Living Rock Ministries</li> <li>▪ Wesley Urban Ministries-Wesley Youth Housing, Brennan House and Brennan House ACTS</li> </ul>	A total of 450 youth supported through the services of the Youth Housing Support Team
<b>Youth Transitional Housing Support (WYH)</b> (On Site Program Staff)	1 FTE Wesley Urban Ministries - Wesley Youth Housing	A total of 64 youth supported through Wesley Youth Housing
<b>Collaboration Support</b> (Supporting the Street Youth Planning Collaborative and Youth Housing Support Project)	1 FTE Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton	Outcomes are based on the following supports: Service Coordination, Partnership Building and Data and Information Collection and Sharing

### 3. A. Evaluation Findings - Early Intervention Program

#### Program Description – Early Intervention Program

The Early Intervention program aims to divert youth who are new to the streets or shelter (first time experiencing) or for youth who are at imminent risk of becoming homeless. The program is offered through Good Shepherd Youth Services – Notre Dame Youth Shelter. A priority of the program is to connect with youth within their first 24-48 hours of contacting the shelter and to offer timely and intensive supports in order to prevent engagement with “street culture”. A key activity performed within the program is family mediation which supports the reunification of youth with their family. However, in situations where the family home is not a safe option, supports are provided to find the youth a safe housing placement. The premise of the program is based on research indicating that:

- 60 – 70% of youth flee their homes due to family conflict-however, there are family conflict situations that can be addressed through appropriate interventions
- Within 24-48 hours of a youth’s first experience on the streets/in a shelter can lead to engagement in “street culture”
- Prevention and early intervention supports are integral aspects to addressing youth homelessness

#### Total Youth Participants – Early Intervention Program

A total of 87 youth were supported with the Early Intervention program. The number of youth supported exceeded the project’s expected results for number of youth, which was reported to be 60 youth.

Figure 2

#### In Total:

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87

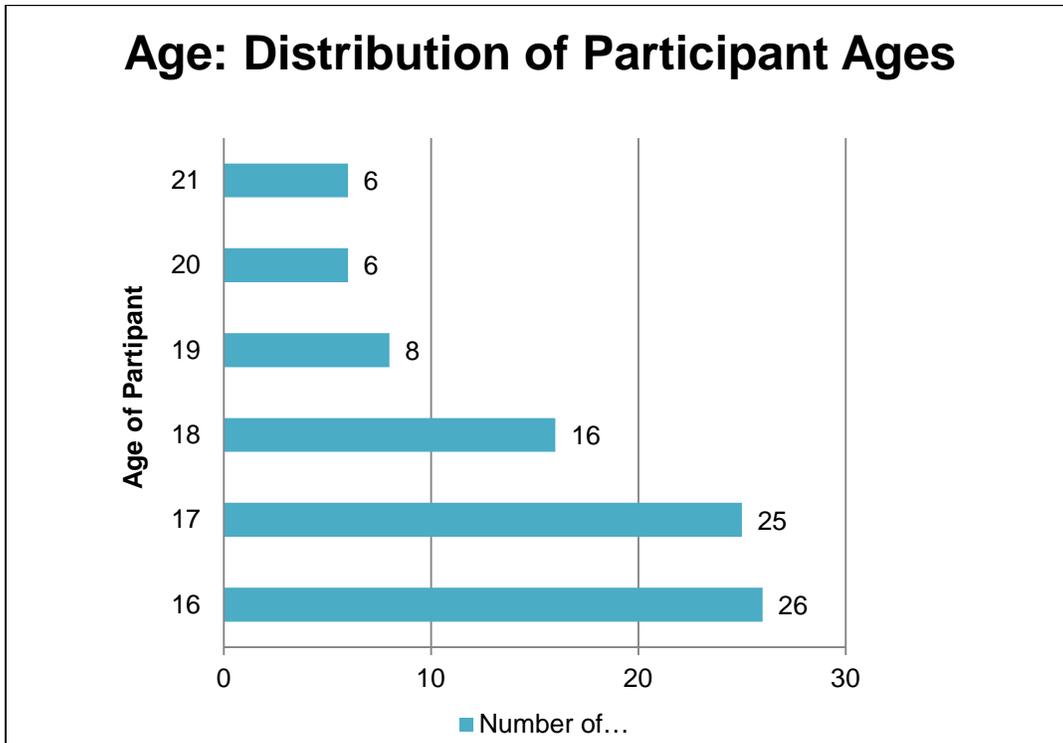
**YOUTH  
SUPPORTED  
THROUGH**

**The EARLY  
INTERVENTION Program**

## Youth Profile – Early Intervention Program

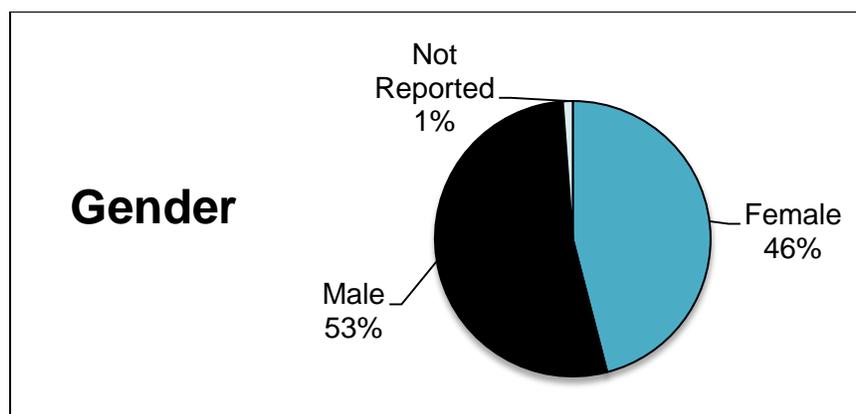
A range of characteristics are reported in this section to provide a profile of youth participants.

Figure 3



Most youth (59%) were either 16 or 17 years old.

Figure 4



There were slightly more males than females in the program (53% compared to 46%)

Figure 5

**STATUS AS A PARENT**

---

**1 OUT OF EVERY 22**

**YOUTH**

**HAS A CHILD**



**PERCENTAGE of YOUTH REPORTED**

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**CURRENT or FORMER  
CHILD WELFARE**

**28%**

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**41%**

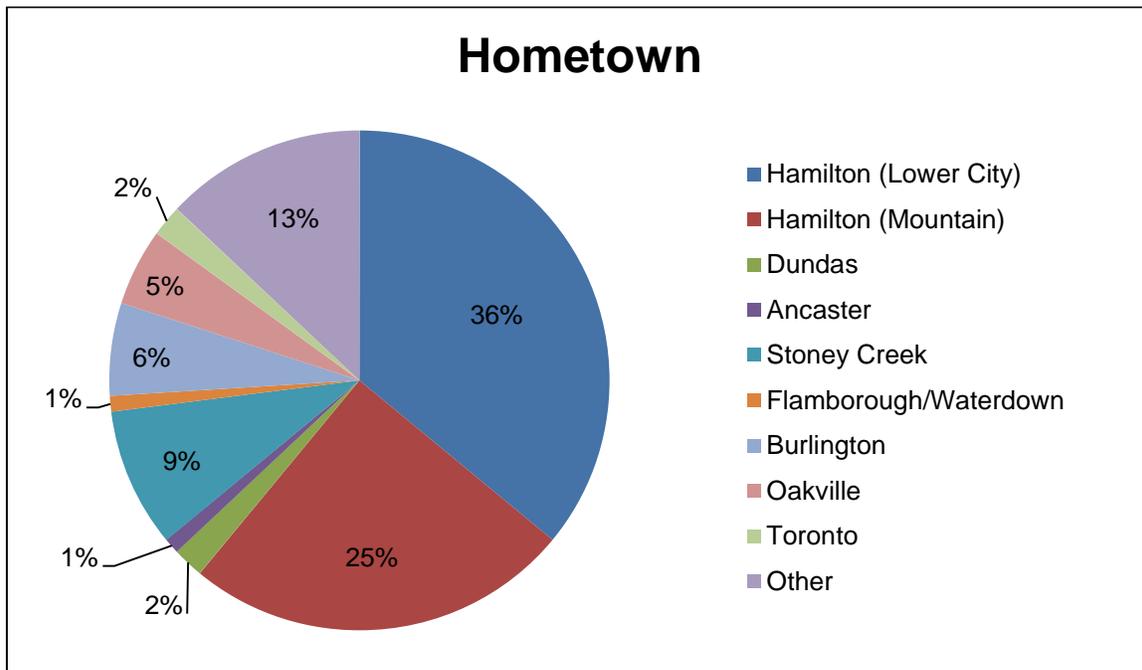
**MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS**

---

**YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM  
INVOLVEMENT:**

**17%**

Figure 6



A large percentage of youth identified that they grew up in Hamilton’s lower city (36%). However, one quarter of youth are from the Hamilton mountain area. Youth in the “other” category represent a diverse range of hometown places, including both national and international locations.

### Housing Challenges – Early Intervention Program

#### *“Housing is a Doorway to Addressing a Continuum of Youth Issues”*

Most youth who access the YHSP are addressing multiple issues in their lives which may have an impact on their ability to find and maintain housing. For each youth, we ask them to identify 2 key challenges that they are experiencing in addition to their housing needs.

An overwhelming majority of the youth faced challenges with **INCOME STATUS** at the point of intake. The next most prevalent challenge was **SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS**, followed by **LIMITED EMPLOYMENT SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE**. **MENTAL HEALTH** was the fourth most prevalent challenge experienced by the youth, followed closely by **ADDICTIONS**.

### Types of Housing Support – Early Intervention Program

In order to address the unique housing needs of youth, the YHSP provides a flexible range of services. The following data presents types of support that have been provided. The table displays the supports in a ranking of their occurrence. The types of supports are divided into two categories, which are services that assist youth to find housing or to maintain housing.

Figure 7

**TYPES AND RANK OF HOUSING SUPPORT PROVIDED**

**TO FIND HOUSING:**

**TO MAINTAIN HOUSING:**

1. CONNECTING TO OW/INCOME
2. FILLING OUT TRANSITIONAL/SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FORMS
3. HOUSING SEARCHES
4. VIEWING APARTMENTS
5. FILLING OUT HOUSING SUBSIDY FORMS

1. ENHANCE/INCREASE LIFE SKILLS
2. REFERRALS TO SERVICES (\*TIE)
2. OTHER (\*TIE)
3. TENANT EDUCATION
4. LANDLORD ADVOCACY

All youth participants in the Early Intervention Program received at least one type of support. Most youth accessed more than one type of support. Overall, the services most likely to be accessed included connecting to Ontario Works, help filling out transitional housing forms, enhancing or increasing life skills, making referrals to services and “other”. It should be noted that the “other” types of support primarily consisted of family mediation support for the Early Intervention Program.

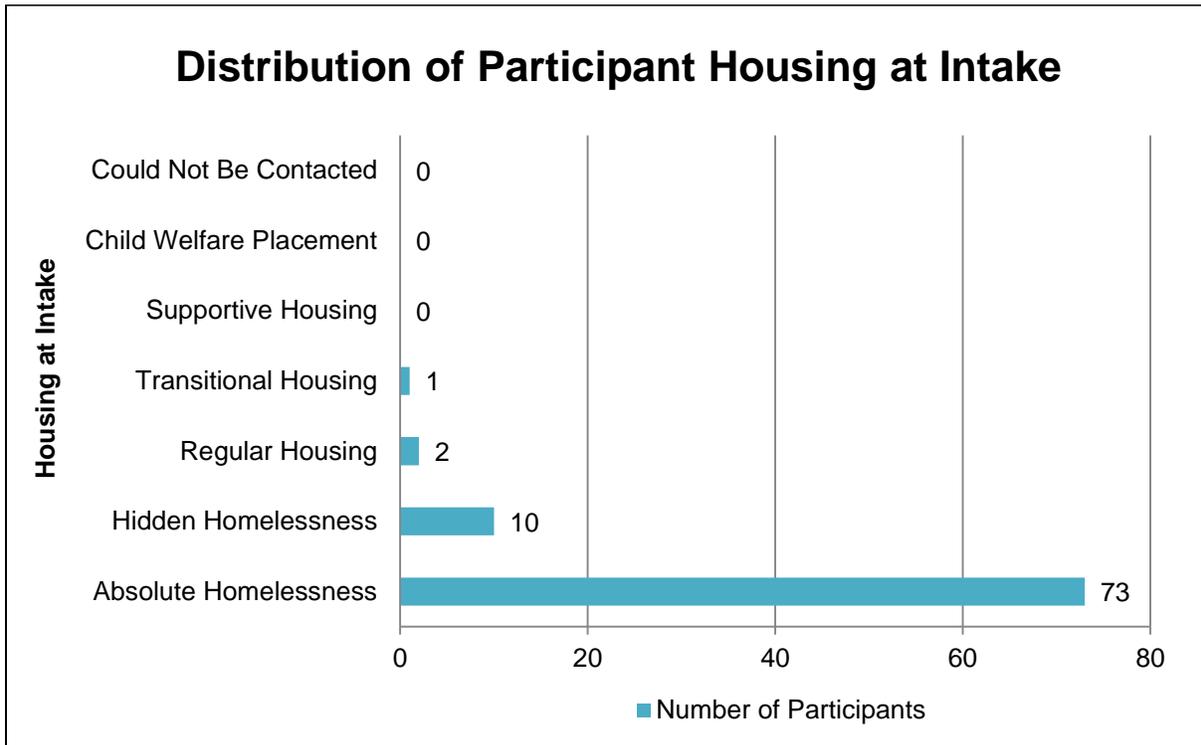
**Housing Status Tracking – Early Intervention Program**

Each youth’s housing status and progress is tracked through collecting the following data: housing status at intake (first point of engagement with the YHSP), type of housing placement (if placement occurred), and housing status at a follow up, which occurs 3 months after placement.

The youth’s housing status is reported as one of the following categories:

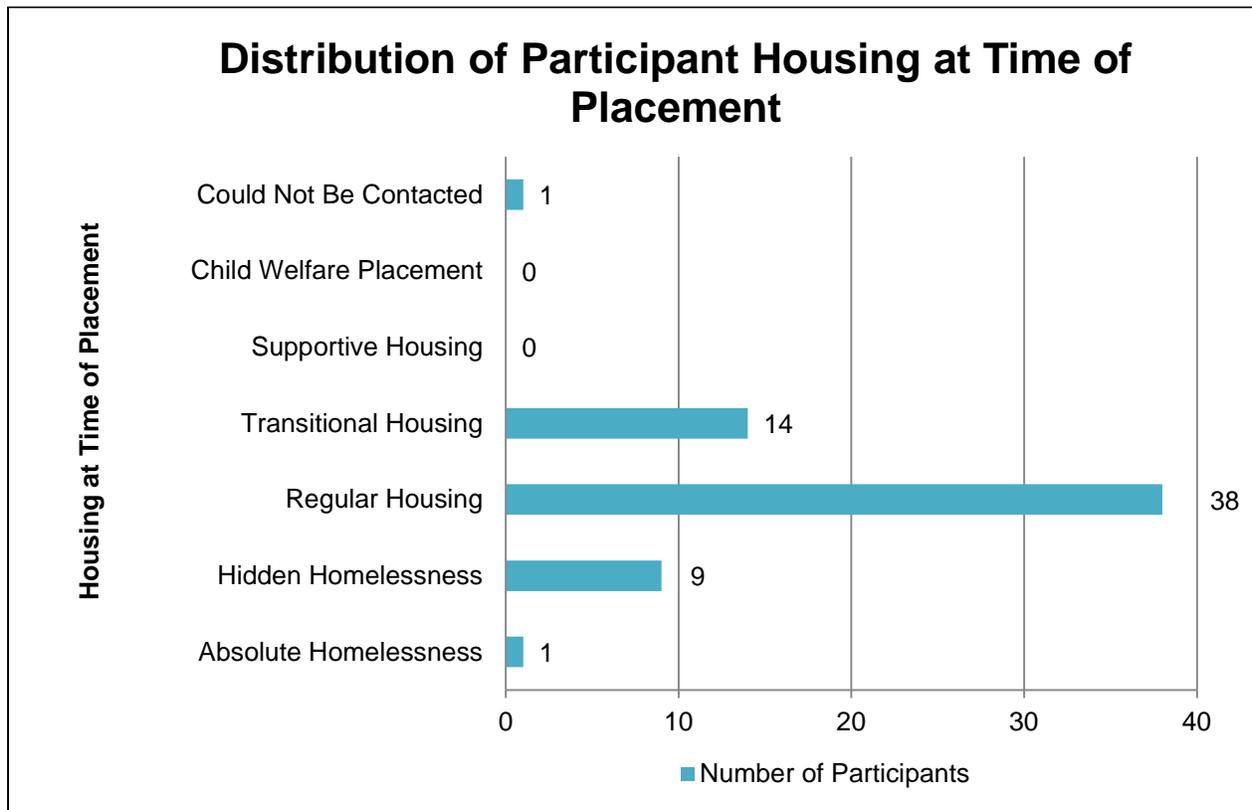
- **Absolute homelessness** – staying at a shelter or on the streets
- **Hidden homelessness** – living temporarily with family or friends, living in housing that is unsafe, inappropriate, inadequate, unaffordable or in jeopardy
- **Regular housing** - apartment, rooming house, returned to family home
- **Transitional housing**
- **Supportive housing**
- **Child welfare placement** (group or foster home)
- **Could not be contacted**

Figure 8



The majority of youth, 73 (84%), had a housing intake of either being on the streets or at the shelter. There were 10 youth (11%) who were living in hidden homelessness.

Figure 9



Among Early Intervention participants, 38 youth (43%) were placed into regular housing, which includes 20 youth being reunited back within their family home, and 17 moving into safe, affordable, appropriate housing. An additional 14 youth (16%) moved into a transitional housing placement. Although 9 youth were reported as being in hidden homelessness, this could include youth staying with family while awaiting placement in transitional or regular housing. Additionally, for youth in the Early Intervention program, staying with family or friends consists of youth who cannot return their immediate family home and who have made arrangements to stay with a next of kin.

### Youth Readmissions

There were 5 youth from the Early Intervention program, who sought support from the program for reasons of losing their initial housing placement. Three of the five youth returned to living in absolute homelessness and the other two youth were split between living in hidden homelessness and precariously living in regular housing with family. Upon reporting data for the evaluation, two youth were placed into regular housing and two were placed into transitional housing and with one youth unreported (no contact).

### 3. B. Evaluation Findings - Youth Housing Support Team (YHST)

The purpose of the Youth Housing Support Team (YHST) is to offer direct housing support to youth that will assist them to find, attain or maintain housing. Youth are connected with one of the 5.7 FTE housing workers, participate in an intake, identify their housing goals and work with the housing worker to meet their goals. The YHST aligns within a Housing First approach, whereby youth are moved from the streets and into housing, ensuring that youth's choices are integrated in their housing goals, and that, where recognized, other needs are addressed.

#### Total Youth Participants – YHST

A total of 517 youth were supported to find, attain or maintain housing. Some of these youth had been initially accepted prior to April 1<sup>st</sup> 2012, but had services continuing through the 2012-2014 timeframe. Overall, the YHST exceeded the number of youth expected to be supported. The YHST expected to support 450 youth to find, attain or maintain housing, however they exceeded that number by 67 youth.

Figure 10

**FROM 2012-2014:**

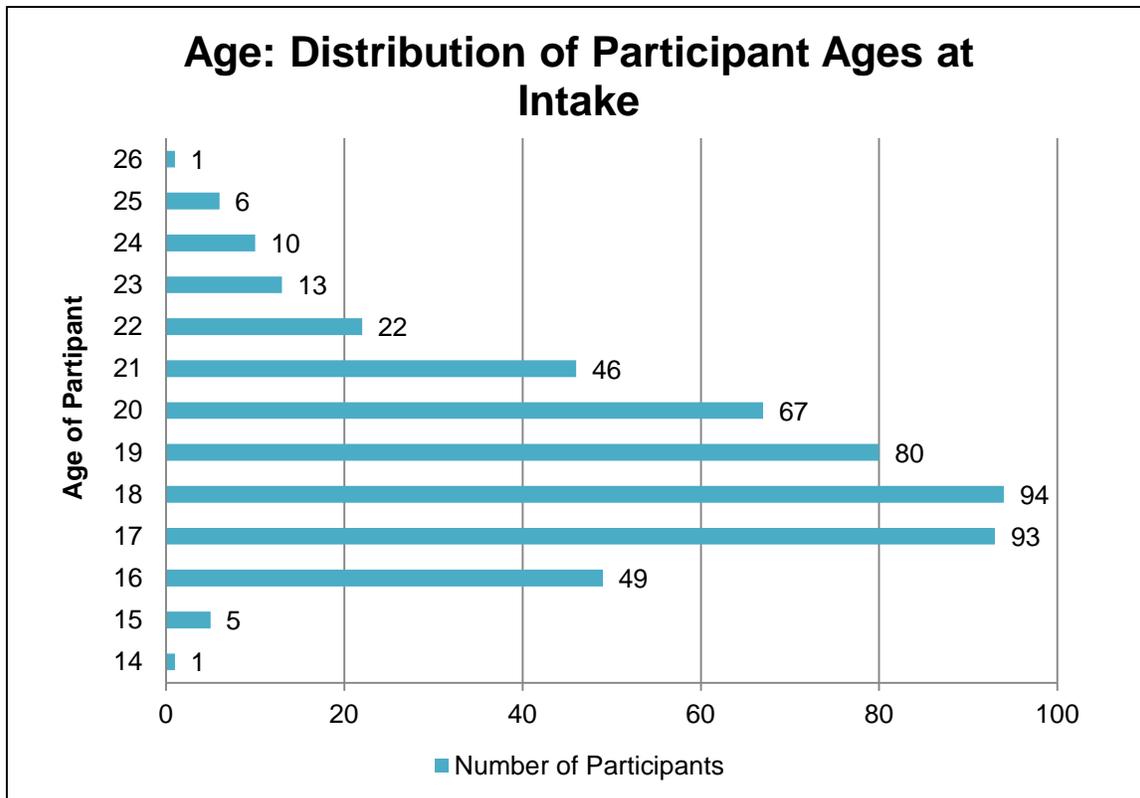
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**517** **UNIQUE YOUTH  
SUPPORTED  
BY THE YHST**

## Youth Profile – YHST

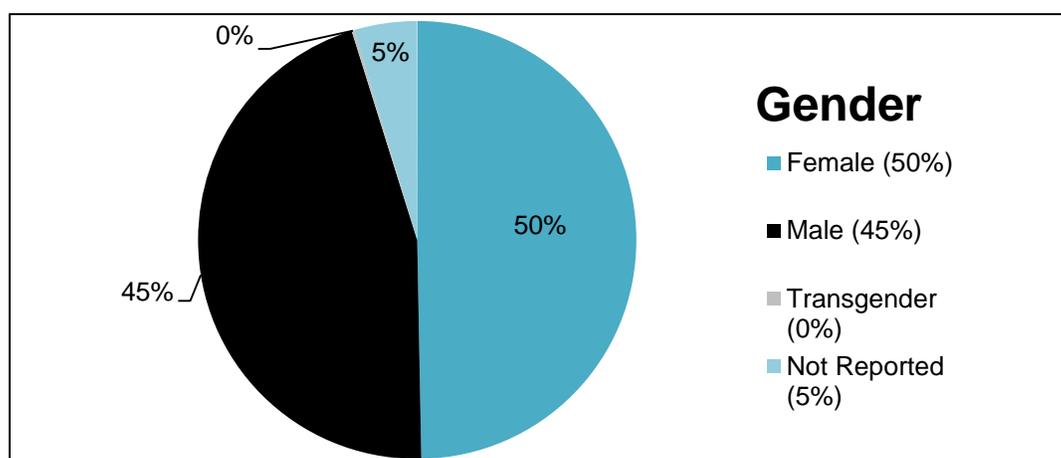
A range of characteristics are reported in this section to provide a profile of youth participants.

Figure 11



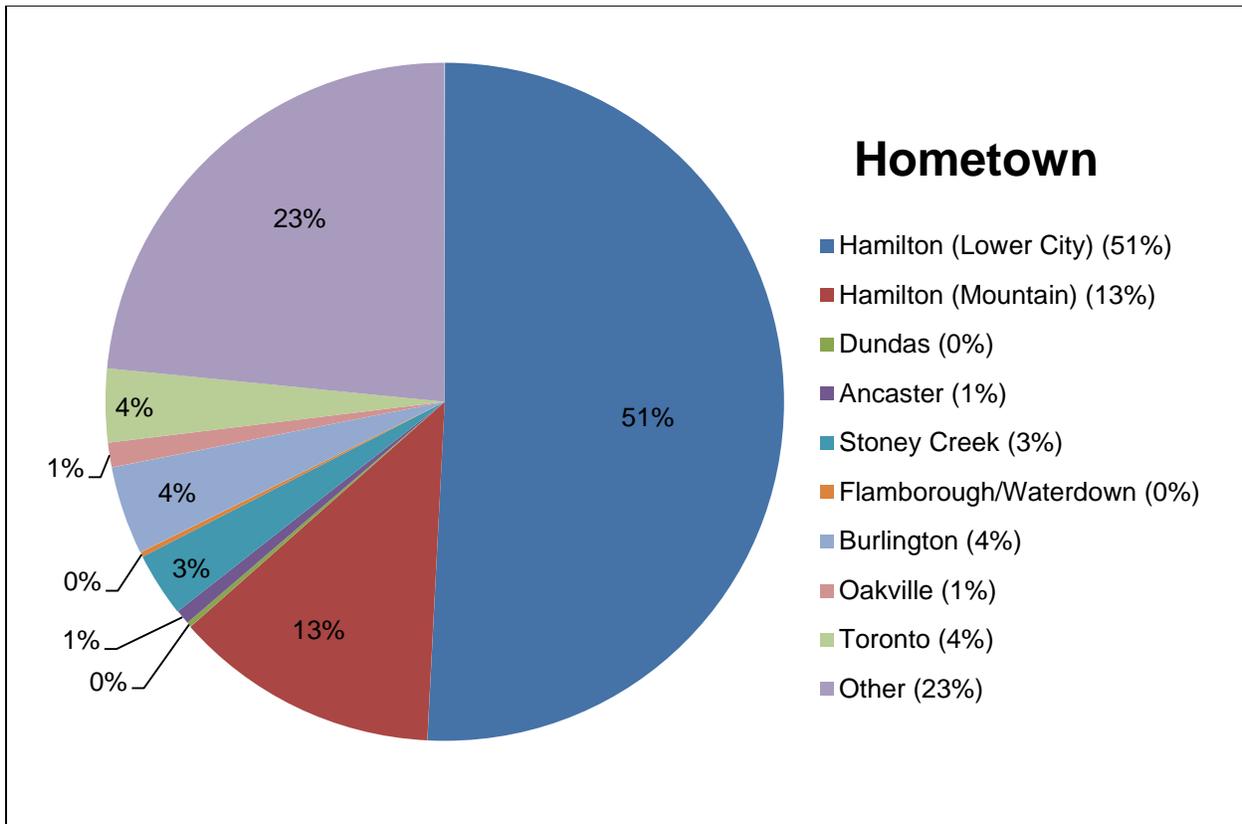
The age category with the highest number of youth was 18 years old, 94 youth, following closely by 17 years old, 93 youth. Overall, the 17 and 18 year olds make up 36% of all youth participants.

Figure 12



There were slightly more female than male participants with the YHST, at 50% vs. 45%.

Figure 13



Just over half (51%) of youth were from Hamilton's lower city area. Among the youth represented in the "other" category (23%), there was a very diverse range of places that were reported, including both national and international locations.

Figure 14

**STATUS AS A PARENT:**

---

**29%** **OF YOUTH HAS or is EXPECTING A CHILD**

**PERCENTAGE of YOUTH REPORTED with:**

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**CURRENT or FORMER CHILD WELFARE INVOLVEMENT:**

**51%**

**40%**

**MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS**

**YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT:**

**25%**

## Housing Challenges - YHST

### *“Housing is a Doorway to Addressing a Continuum of Youth Issues”*

Most youth who access the YHSP are addressing multiple issues in their lives which may have an impact on their ability to find and maintain housing. For each youth, we ask them to identify 2 key challenges that they are experiencing in addition to their housing needs.

An overwhelming majority of the youth faced challenges with **INCOME STATUS** at the point of intake. The next most prevalent challenge was **LIFE SKILLS**, followed by **FAMILY CONFLICT**. **MENTAL HEALTH, SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, and UNSTABLE HOUSING HISTORY** all tied for fourth greatest challenge experienced by youth.

## Types of Housing Support – YHST

In order to address the unique housing needs of youth, the YHSP provides a flexible range of services. The following data presents types of support provided with youth, which are listed in a ranking of their occurrence. The types of support are divided into two categories, which are services that assist youth to find housing or to maintain housing.

Figure 15

<b>TYPES AND RANK OF HOUSING SUPPORT PROVIDED</b>	
<b>TO FIND HOUSING:</b>	<b>TO MAINTAIN HOUSING:</b>
<b>1. HOUSING SEARCHES</b>	<b>1. TENANT EDUCATION</b>
<b>2. CONNECTING TO ONTARIO WORKS/INCOME</b>	<b>2. ENHANCE/INCREASE LIFE SKILLS</b>
<b>3. VIEWING APARTMENTS</b>	<b>3. LANDLORD ADVOCACY</b>
<b>4. FILLING OUT TRANSITIONAL/SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FORMS</b>	<b>4. REFERRALS TO SERVICES</b>
<b>5. FILLING OUT HOUSING SUBSIDY FORMS</b>	<b>5. OTHER</b>

All youth participants with the YHST received at least one type of support. Most youth accessed more than one type of support. Overall, the services most likely to be accessed included housing searches, connecting to Ontario Works, tenant education and enhancing or increasing life skills.

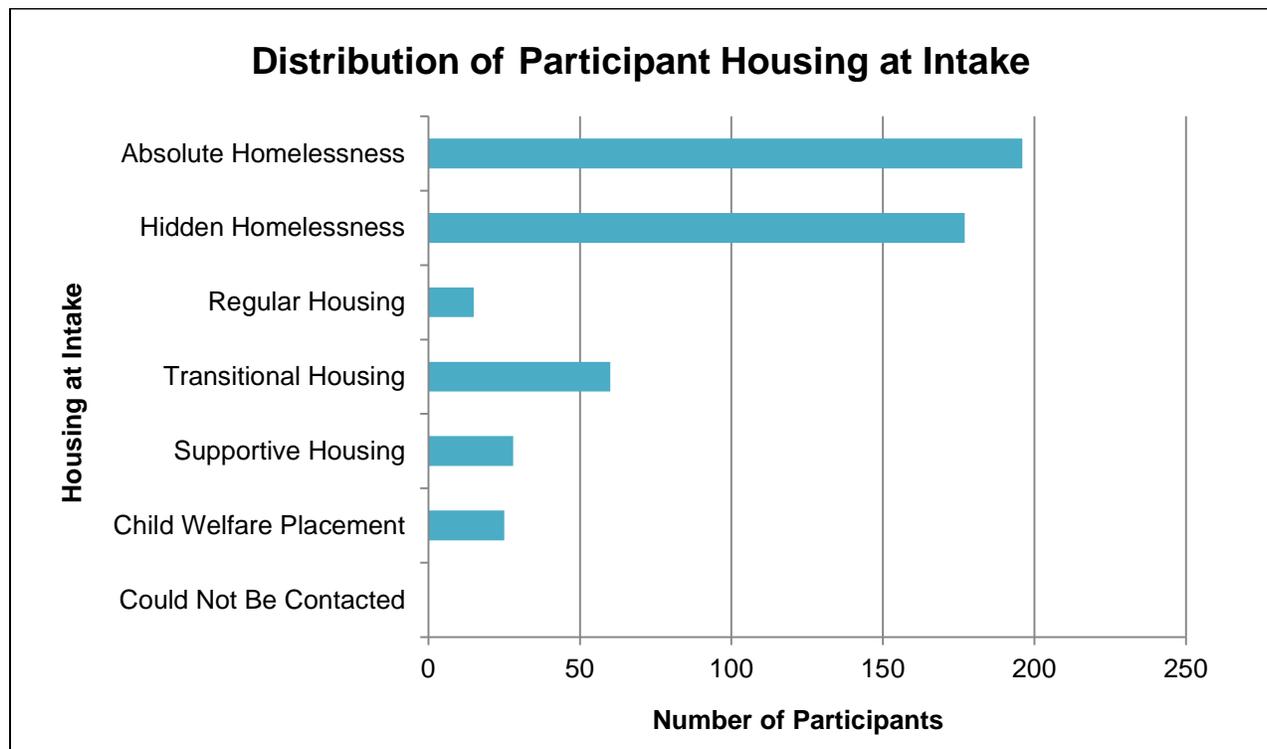
## Housing Status Tracking – YHST

Each youth's housing status and progress is tracked through collecting the following data: housing status at intake (first point of engagement with the YHSP), type of housing placement (if placement occurred), and housing status at a follow up, which occurs 3 months after placement.

The youth's housing status is reported within one of the categories:

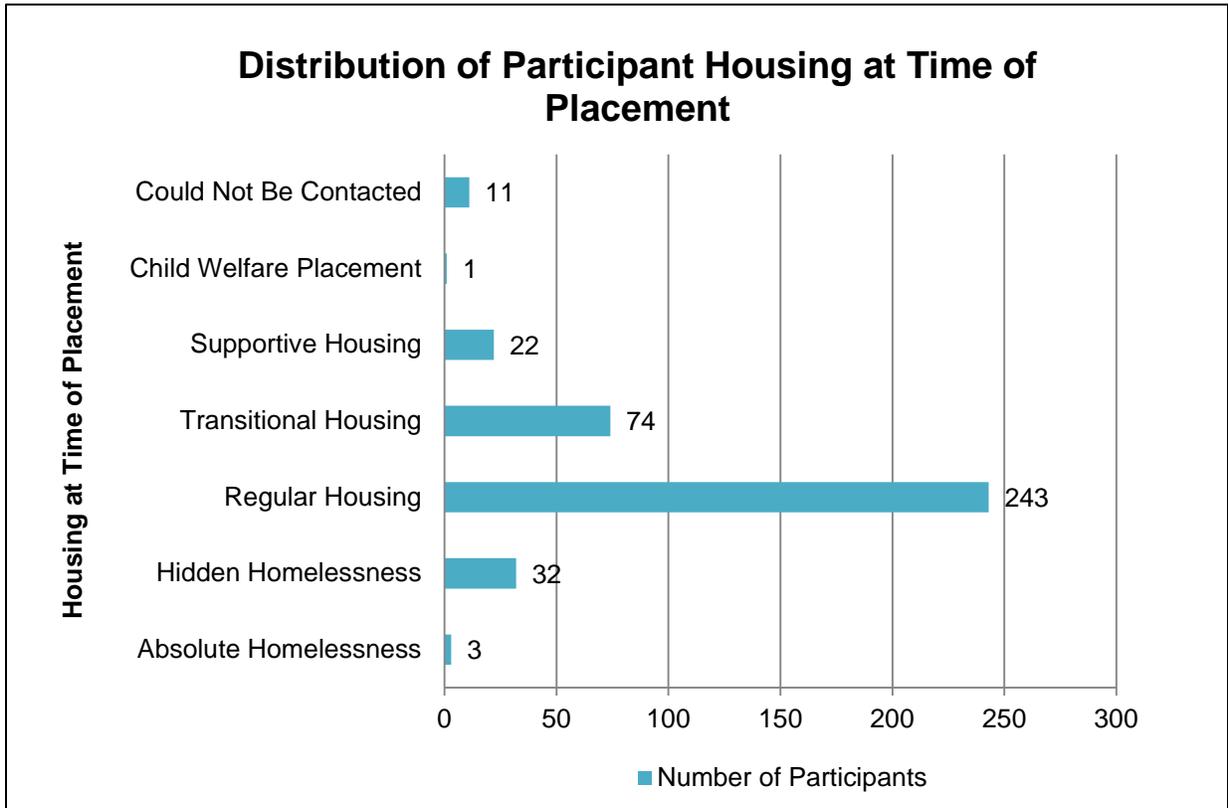
- **Absolute homelessness** – staying at a shelter or on the streets
- **Hidden homelessness** – living temporarily with family or friends, living in housing that is unsafe, inappropriate, inadequate, unaffordable or in jeopardy
- **Regular housing** - apartment, rooming house, returned to family home
- **Transitional housing**
- **Supportive housing**
- **Child welfare placement** (group or foster home)
- **Could not be contacted**

Figure 16



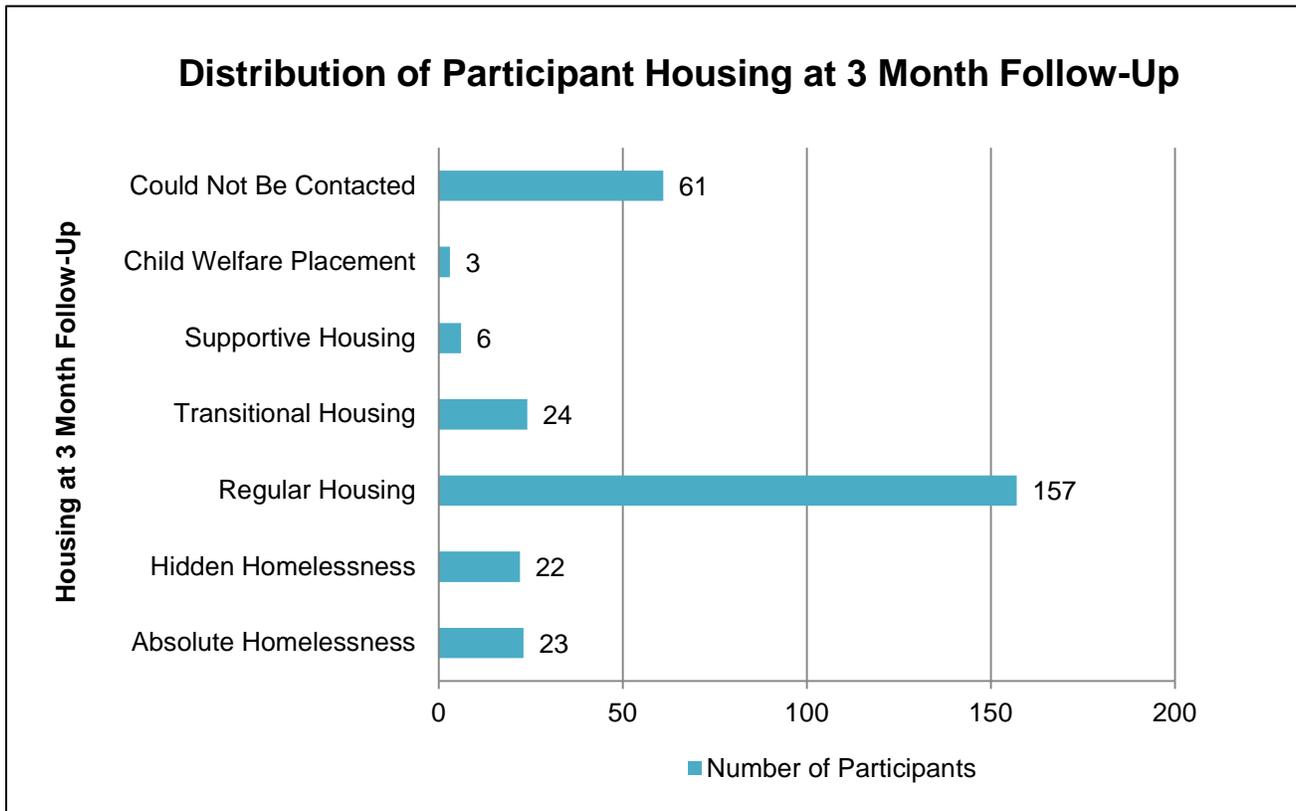
At the time of intake, there were 196 youth (38%), who were living in absolute homelessness which includes either staying on the streets or in a shelter. This statistic is followed closely by youth living in hidden homelessness, which includes 177 youth, (34%, who were either staying temporarily with friends or family, or who were living in housing that is unsafe, unstable, unaffordable, inappropriate or in jeopardy.

Figure 17



A total of 375 unique youth housing placements were reported, which means that 73%, of all participants with the YHST moved into some form of safe, affordable, appropriate housing. Most youth were placed into regular housing (243 youth) followed by transitional housing (74 youth). Not shown in the above graph are the 131 youth who have had an intake, have been accessing supports, but who have not yet reported a housing placement.

Figure 18



There was a total of 296 youth with a three month follow up report, which demonstrated the housing stability outcome among the 375 youth who received a housing placement. Among the 296 youth, there were 157 youth who reported that they had maintained a regular housing placement, which is 64% of youth who reported a regular housing placement. Unfortunately, although not uncommonly, a recognizable number of youth, 61, could not be contacted following their housing placement, in addition, there are 221 youth who have no follow up report, by the time data was requested for the purposes of this evaluation.

#### Youth Readmissions

Approximately, 158 of youth housed participated in a readmission, which consists of rehousing due to losing their initial housing placement. At the point of readmission, most youth were living in absolute homelessness or in hidden homelessness. By the time of readmission placement, the majority, 55 (35%), of youth were rehoused into regular housing. Contact with youth lowered consistently throughout the time of readmission, readmission placement, and follow-up, to the point where 13 youth were unable to be contacted for their three-month follow-up. Of those that could be contacted, there were 38 youth who reported to have maintained their regular housing placement.

### 3. C. Evaluation Findings – Wesley Youth Housing (WYH)

Wesley Youth Housing (WYH) is a 19 bed, transitional housing program for street-involved and homeless youth in Hamilton. WYH offers street-involved and homeless youth with access to safe, affordable housing and the ability to practice independent living. The program is a multi-staged, graduation program which supports youth to acquire life skills, address education and employment goals, connect with community services and obtain housing supports. WYH is a key component to the housing continuum for youth because it addresses the developmental needs of youth and offers them the time and support needed to transition towards adulthood. Youth can stay in the program for up to two years.

#### Total Youth Participants – WYH

Figure 19

#### Wesley Youth Housing:

---

**40** **YOUTH RESIDENTS**  
SUPPORTED AT  
WYH

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**85%** **YOUTH @WYH for 3+ Months**  
**REMAINED OR MOVED TO**  
STABLE HOUSING

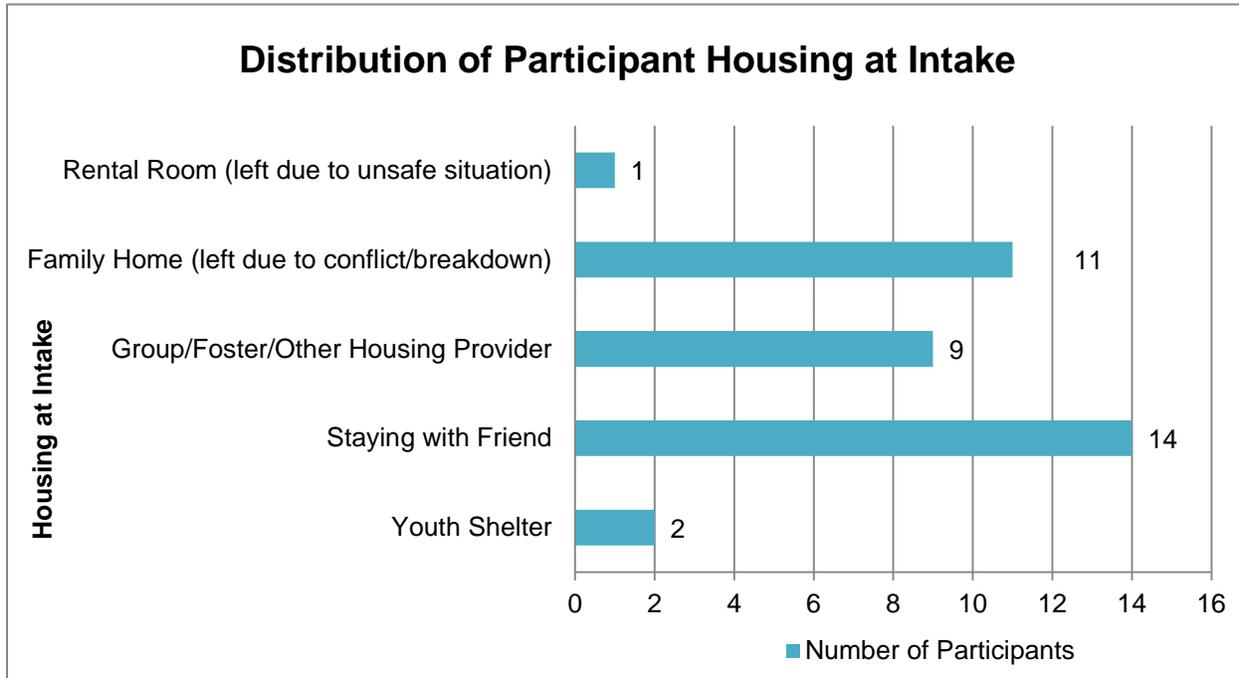
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**49** **NON-RESIDENT YOUTH**  
**SUPPORTED**  
AT WYH  
**POST-PROGRAM**

## Youth Profile – WYH

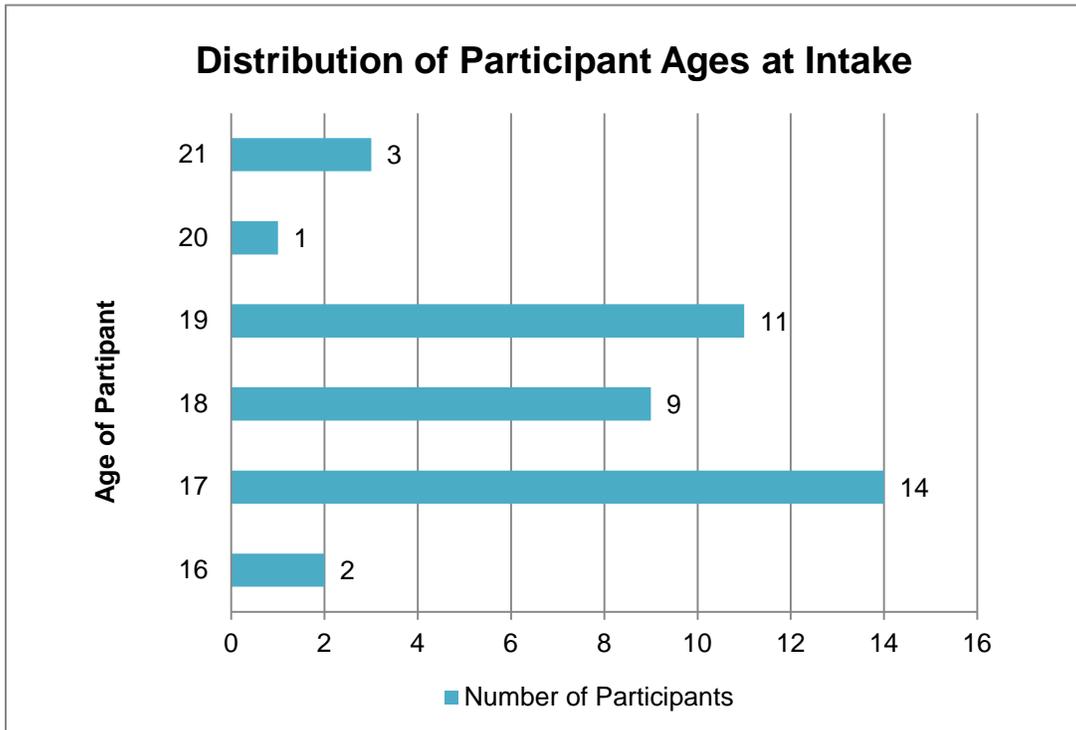
A range of characteristics are reported in this section to provide a profile of youth participants.

**Figure 20**



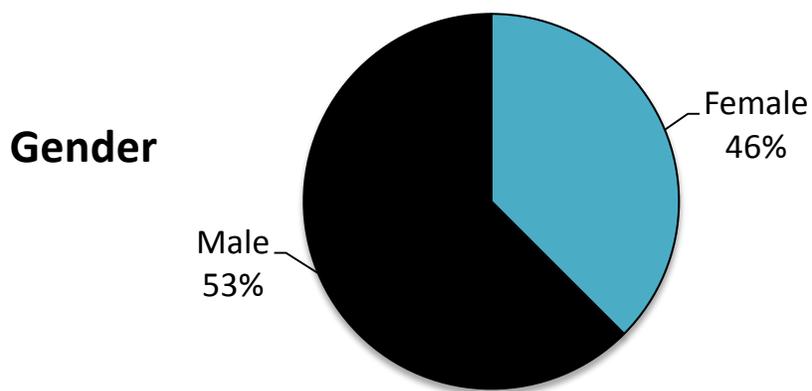
Youth accessing WYH were most likely coming from a situation of hidden homelessness, with 35% of participants identifying that they had been staying with a friend. Over one quarter of the youth accessed WYH after leaving their family home due to conflict and/or breakdown.

Figure 21



Most of the youth at WYH were 17 years old (35%), which was followed by youth who were 19 years old (28%).

Figure 22



There were slightly more male than female residents at WYH (53% compared to 46%)

**75% of YOUTH  
SUSPECTED or DIAGNOSED with  
MENTAL HEALTH or SUBSTANCE ABUSE  
CONCERNS**

Types of Support – WYH

Figure 23

**100% of YOUTH AT WYH  
ACCESSED:**

---

**LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMMING  
EMPLOYMENT & SCHOOL  
SUPPORT  
COMMUNITY SERVICES BY  
REFERRAL**



**...98% of YOUTH UTILIZED the YOUTH HOUSING SUPPORT  
WORKER**

### **3. D. Evaluation Findings – Youth Profiles: Housing Achievements and Outcomes**

Perhaps the best way to understand what is working and what isn't, what is needed and what has been accomplished, is to directly ask the youth engaged with the YHSP. What follows are the brief profiles of five young men and women who have participated with the range of housing supports offered by the agencies that are partnering for the YHSP.

#### ***\*Katie's Story***

Katie found herself on the steps of Brennan House (Good Shepherd Youth Services transitional housing) at age 17. Conflicts with her mother had led her to seek alternative living arrangements, but neither her peers nor her boyfriend at the time were supportive. While Brennan House provided secure housing and supports, Katie felt she needed a different form of stability and she felt she was ready for living on her own. Katie who is connected with a case worker at the Catholic Children's Aid Society (CCAS), was linked with the CCAS's YHST worker who helped her on the path to independent living. Initially confused about what to look for in a home, Katie told the worker some things on her wish list (location, size, amenities) and the housing worker helped her to understand other concerns she should focus on, particularly elements of safety. Katie confesses she may have been a bit stubborn about her wants, but praises the worker for "really knowing her stuff" and helping her use the computers at CCAS to look at units online. Now at 18, she has lived in her bachelor apartment for a little over a year, she continues to work with the housing support worker to address any issues or concerns she has.

Overall, Katie reflects on the housing support as integral to her transition. Recognizing that youth can sometimes be "gullible or naïve" when looking on their own, Katie recalls the housing worker ensuring she had help moving her belongings, access and help acquiring a list of items the worker knew she would need to set up her home and support in finding a clean unit in a safe neighbourhood where she could live in security. Katie applauds the worker's patience, determination and positive attitude, ensuring she had "the right fit" with her housing, being professional, but not authoritarian.

Katie's greatest challenges living on her own surround income. She outlined that the money available to youth is too little to afford rent in most decent accommodations, and there is little money available for furniture and start-up necessities. After paying rent on her bachelor and utilities, the remainder leaves few options for groceries and transit, though eating lunch at school and part-time babysitting is helping. She considers life skills and budgeting groups great assets for youth as they seek their independence, and would like to see more housing groups for youth, especially to learn about tenancy rights under the Landlord-Tenant Act and for learning how to prepare to move.

Katie will graduate from high school this year, and is looking to enter college to become a Child and Youth Worker.

#### ***\*Kevin's Story***

Kevin ended up on his own having aged out of foster care with the Children's Aid Society of Hamilton (CAS). Though he had lived in an apartment on his own, he had been kicked out, not knowing his rights, and had been directed to Good Shepherd's Notre Dame Youth Shelter. Kevin isn't sure if landlord intervention would have helped, but feels he definitely needed better life skills, especially around budgeting, noting that he did his groceries at convenience stores, paying double the cost of items and seldom making healthy choices. "You start the month okay, not thinking that money has to get you 30 days". Furniture is hard to come by and with a friend, he learned the hard way about bedbug infestations and that "Kijiji couches" are not the answer. Kevin also had no legitimate sources of income and received help getting on Ontario Works.

For Kevin obtaining the security of his own place was enhanced once he sought out a housing worker at Notre Dame. A previous roommate had stolen several of his belongings. "You never know what they might do, so I wanted my own place. I don't like being alone, but even if I'm not there most of the day, I know I have a place to go home to that's mine." The housing worker at Notre Dame worked with Kevin to assist him to find housing. He would print listings geared towards youth's expressed interests and helped him advocate against prejudices towards tenants receiving Ontario Works, as well as, accompanying him to his first few viewings. The worker helped Kevin understand what to look for in both a residence and a landlord, waving offers from substandard units and those with telltale signs of bugs.

Kevin had some serious addictions, including coke, however, a bad experience essentially scared him straight. A return to school through Notre Dame's Section 23 School had some initial missteps, but Kevin, now 21 years old, is on track to completing his diploma in the next year, with interests in broadcasting and music production.

### ***\*Aidan's Story***

Aidan, who is 20 years old, has transitioned through many of Hamilton's youth housing programs entering Brennan House first while waiting for placement in Wesley Urban Ministries' Wesley Youth Housing as he felt suicidal about a return to the youth shelter system. Aidan had become estranged from his family, locally, through their involvement with the police and his remaining family lived out of province, leaving him with few options but to "couch surf" as he was unaware of many available supports. Ontario Works and Living Rock were initial sources of housing help, "the Rock" providing timely, critical support.

At Brennan House, Aidan connected with Alternatives for Youth looking to end addictions which had distracted him from getting his life back on track. "It's a temporary fix." Now clean for over two years, Aidan remembers the sense of isolation he felt initially living alone and help he needed towards budgeting, life skills (cooking, cleaning, laundry), and dietary concerns. He comments, "I had NO skills for living on my own, even though I'd been doing it for a long time. Youth under 20 years old should have a stable life, be in school, preparing for their futures. They shouldn't have to have nowhere to go, or be threatened with losing everything. Physical and mental health need to be priorities." To this end, Aidan would like to see more follow-up care. "The look of your apartment says a lot about what's going on in your life."

Aidan highlights the importance of flexibility within programming and allowing youth to tailor supports to meet their unique needs, recalling a failed return to school owing mostly to anxiety issues which programmers failed to accommodate. The system is tailored such that "the strongest survive." Beyond his housing concerns, Aidan had numerous other concerns he wishes services had been better tailored to. "No amount of talking with clinicians really helped. When you tell your story over and over and over again... you become numb or desensitized to it. I think I could have used more help towards my abuse, trauma, and mental health. To this day, I've never really dealt with it."

For Aidan, a great benefit to Hamilton's continuum of Youth Housing Supports was "having a place to transition, to work through issues", though age restrictions can create some stress. With some of the key services mandated to serve youth aged 16 to 21, the age limit adds a stressor that could be addressed through expanding the service mandate. Money is a key issue, "limiting education and pathways out of poverty", but so is mental support, something Aidan views as key to success. "Youth are expected to pay their way in life on limited budget, meet a mandate to go to school, and yet serious issues aren't being addressed."

### ***\*Chris's Story***

Chris initially engaged with Youth Housing Support Project through the Notre Dame Youth Shelter, his only options continued "couch surfing" or the street. Noting Chris was very geared towards housing independence, the housing worker initially set up an interview with Wesley Youth Housing, transitional youth housing. When he was "invited to leave" for not adhering to curfews (a program requirement), the worker "fought tooth and nail" to get him placed. Chris underlines the worker's commitment to him, ensuring he asked landlords the right questions and providing a good variety of units for him to look at, making him "feel a part of the process – respected and valued. Having a worker who respected my independence was important." She attended his first viewings, highlighting things to watch for and consider, such as safety, space and quality.

Key challenges for Chris were getting furniture, connecting to Ontario Works and locating an apartment in a decent building and area. He notes that rooming with a co-worker at a landscape firm who wasn't as focused or independent caused a brief period of stagnation, but he soon moved forward on his own. Chris recognizes that motivation had been a problem in his early days of homelessness and credits the housing worker with keeping him motivated, working with him even after her mandate had passed. "Her dedication and commitment went far beyond my expectations, she built trust and confidence that gave me motivation to move ahead and get back on track. Success is as much about the person working with you as the program."

Having recently reconnected with his parents, Chris notes the importance of having time and security to examine his past and rebuild trust with his parents. Newly enrolled in Mohawk's welding program, his one wish is that youth supports were better informed about the Ontario Student Assistance Plan and school programs, to better help youth in moving ahead with their lives.

### ***\*Krista's Story***

Krista discovered she was pregnant when she was fourteen. She had been living with her grandmother, but was forced to move to her aunt's as her grandmother passed away. Krista connected with Catholic Family Services - St. Martin's Manor when she could no longer live with her aunt due to overcrowding in the home, which led to an initial placement at Good Shepherd Youth Services - Angela's Place. Krista appreciated that Angela's Place was located within the community she had grown up in and was close to family, friends and amenities, noting the frustration of negotiating overcrowded public transit with a stroller, sometimes being left behind at bus stops.

Krista initially found the mandatory programming of Angela's Place tedious and transitioned for a time to living with her boyfriend and his family. When this proved a less than ideal, she was welcomed back to Angela's Place. "Responsibilities like rent, bills and food hadn't hit until the baby was born. I still wanted to be a teenager. I lacked knowledge about baby needs and care, and about how to self-care for myself as a mom." Suddenly, programming around bonding/attachment, nutrition, cooking, and life skills had new value. The Mothers in Mind program explored how to balance motherhood with other aspects of life and Safe Sisters emphasized avoiding exploitive situations, while relationship counselling was available for those who needed it.

The young parent housing support worker had helped Krista procure items like furniture and dishes in addition to preparing paperwork. When she moved into Angela's Place the housing worker there accompanied Krista to Ontario Works – helping her to apply for the child subsidy – and explained items during her lease signing. When young women are ready to move out, the worker is on site to help with

preparations. Although Krista notes there are challenges to living with other moms and their children, “The staff settles conflicts fairly and is supportive in working through issues with other tenants.”

Some of the biggest challenges Krista has faced are the tripling of rent since she first moved into Angela’s Place four years ago and contemplating life on her own with her child as she transitions towards greater independence. Finishing high school, she hopes to become a counsellor, following in the footsteps of other family members, while putting her own experiences to good use.

Additional information from youth about the YHSP can be found in Hope in Homes: Youth Housing Video. The video, which was launched at the 2012 National Housing Day Hamilton event, contains interviews with 6 youth who speak about their housing journey. A link to the video is added below.

<http://youtu.be/CQHkx4BNV-U>

\*The real names of youth have been changed to protect confidentiality.

#### **4. COLLABORATION SUPPORT REPORT**

The activity of the Collaboration Support consisted of working with the Street Youth Planning Collaborative (SYPC) and the Youth Housing Support Collaborative (YHSC). The SYPC aims to address the needs of street-involved and homeless youth through working to provide a seamless, coordinated system of services. The YHSC strives to provide a continuum of comprehensive supports that address the housing needs of street-involved youth. The Collaboration Support aimed to enhance the capacity of the SYPC and the YHSC to collaborate and participate in systems planning and community development. Primarily, the Collaboration Support activities were focused on services and systems coordination and integration, partnership building, research and data collection and sharing, and other activities relevant to the SYPC and YHSC. Highlights of some of the Collaboration Support activities are listed below.

##### ***Services and Systems Coordination and Integration***

- The SYPC continued to meet on a monthly basis, which resulted in regular communication across services, discussing trends and gaps in services, seeking ways to address gaps in services, increasing each other's knowledge and awareness about community services and sharing resources. The support consisted of coordination with each of the three SYPC subcommittees: the Director's Committee, the Front Line Advisory Committee and the Youth Leaders Committee.
- Youth engagement maintained an active component of the Collaboration Support with SYPC. In early 2012, the SYPC sought to develop a framework for their youth engagement work. The framework leads to the recruitment of new youth to participate on the SYPC Youth Leaders committee. Since that time, a total of 8 youth have become members of the SYPC Youth Leaders Committee. The committee possesses the role of informants and advisors within the SYPC. As well as promoting awareness and education throughout the community regarding the realities of youth homelessness.
- Participation among various community planning tables and committees was a key activity which aimed at strengthening community investments towards addressing the needs of street-involved and homeless youth. Since April 1<sup>st</sup> 2012, the Collaboration Support has participated at the following community committees: Affordable Housing Flagship, City of Hamilton Housing and Homelessness Action Plan Planning Group, Youth Engagement Network, Youth Employment Network, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, Hamilton Youth Collaborative, People and Animal Welfare Solutions and Art Forms-Youth Arts Studio.
- Engagement with the YHSC continued to focus on overseeing the delivery of the project. Activity included preparing for and facilitation of YHSC meetings, assisting with administration/agreements, seeking and managing project resources, providing project updates, including programming activity. Engagement was either communicated at YHSC Steering Committee meetings or e-mails.
- Project Coordination also entailed developing staff orientation and training sessions, planning and facilitation of bi monthly project staff meetings, team building, acquiring access to resources (specifically obtaining funding for housing belongings, moving and life skills incentives) and communication of project activity to the YHSC.

##### ***Partnership Building***

- Broader community engagement and increasing partnerships has been a successful endeavor for the SYPC.

- The SYPC Director's Committee welcomed Hamilton Regional Indian Centre and the City of Hamilton-Emergency and Community Services Division as new members.
- The SYPC Front Line Advisory Committee welcomed Hamilton Police Services, YWCA, Art Forms, The Well – LGBTQ Centre, Hamilton Regional Indian Centre and Hamilton Wentworth District School Board as new members.
- Additionally, exciting partnering opportunities have been developing at a national level. The opportunities were presented through connection with Dr. Stephen Gaetz, Director of the Canadian Homelessness Research Network. Notably, Dr. Gaetz has championed the SYPC for its innovative and community led approach to systems integration. The outcomes of this partnership have been diverse and include:
  - Collaboration with Dr. Stephen Gaetz to develop and Housing First for Youth Framework, in conjunction with the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness.
  - Participation on a research project, Youth Homelessness Systems Framework Case Study, in conjunction with the City of Calgary
  - Invitation to the Home Depot Canada Foundation – Thought Leadership Advisory to assist with the foundations investment towards addressing youth housing needs.

### ***Research and Data Collection and Sharing***

- An initial revision of the data tool accessed by the Early Intervention Program and Youth Housing Support Team ensured that the project continued to collect the information required for reporting purposes, as well as the information sought by the YHSC.
- Informal research work was conducted upon follow up from HPS's funding/Housing First announcement in early 2013. During 2013, a consultation conducted with the YHSC, aimed to better understand how the current Youth Housing Support Project fit within a Housing First approach and to learn where improvements were needed. As well, the research included an assessment of current housing supports for youth in Hamilton; as well as learning what improvements were needed within the existing supports. Two reports were compiled: one was based on a focus group with the SYPC Youth Leaders Committee and a second report was based on a consultation with the YHSC Steering Committee and project staff. The research is a part of the planning process for the YHSC who are looking at revisioning/revising the YHSP to better align as a Housing First project.
- In addition to collecting and managing YHSP data, the Collaboration Support also undertook the reporting work on a newly developed data tool administered by the City of Hamilton, which included reporting monthly data about the project.
- They SYPC received many requests for presentations, workshops and/or meetings from various youth stakeholders, including service providers, schools, advocacy groups, youth stakeholders, planning committees. These requests were met whereby information was shared pertaining to topics including the SYPC and YHSP model, youth engagement, youth homelessness, systems integration, community development and collaboration.

## 5. ANALYSIS

The following section reports key findings that are reflective of all activities among the YHSP.

**1. *Youth accessing the project are experiencing issues with mental health and addictions, which may impact their ability to find and maintain housing.***

In each of the project's activity areas, youth were identified as having concerns, or a diagnosis of, mental health and/or addictions. The data captured indicates that there is a large proportion of youth with mental health concerns who engage with the project (reports of youth experiencing mental health concerns were 40% and 75%). Also, the youth profiles demonstrated that youth experience mental health and addictions issues at various points in time throughout their housing history.

**2. *Increasing or enhancing life skills are key to supporting youth to find and maintain housing.***

The YHSP data demonstrated that the most popular type of support that youth accessed were enhancing or increasing their life skills. In addition, throughout the youth profiles, youth articulated that they lacked having life skills and that those they acquired were integral to their housing outcomes. The youth indicate that they learn through engagement with life skills groups, or from their one on one work with a housing worker.

**3. *Family conflict is a key issue impacting youth's engagement with the YHSP.***

Family conflict was a key issue that was reported among each of the project activity areas. Over one quarter of youth in WYH were leaving homes where family conflict and breakdown were occurring. In addition, there was strong demand for early intervention support, which was indicated by exceeding the number of youth expected to support. There were 87 youth supported, however, the project expected to serve 60 youth. For many of these youth, family conflict brings them to the streets or shelter and family mediation has been a consistent support provided with the youth. Finally, family conflict was a challenge identified by the youth participants with the YHST when asked about key issues they were experiencing in addition to their housing situations.

**4. *More than one third of youth were readmitted to the program due to housing loss.***

Approximately 158 of youth engaged with the YHST were readmitted and required more than one housing placement. Although many of the youth readmitted were eventually reported to have maintained stable housing, there remains a significant portion of youth who cycle between homelessness and being housed. The reasons for youth's readmission, including, breakdown in relationship, incarceration, inappropriate housing conditions, rent increased, eviction due to impeding the enjoyment of others and others.

**5. *Housing follow up activity remains a challenge for the YHSP.***

There were a significant number of housed youth, 61, who were reported as "could not be contacted" following their housing placement with the YHST. There are a range of reasons regarding lacking contact, which could include youth declining ongoing engagement with support, loss of cell phone (main communication tool), or youth moving and losing contact. In addition, follow up support was reported to be a need by the youth in the profiles, who shared that it is helpful for youth to go access support (when needed), or to have the option of a worker "check in". Notably, there was a higher number of youth who were former WYH residents receiving ongoing support, who had transitioned into the community, than WYH residents during the project period (49 youth compared to 40 youth).

**6. *Engagement with youth transitional housing can lead to youth maintaining independent, permanent housing.***

The data from WYH indicates strong housing maintenance outcomes for youth, with 85% either maintaining their placement at WYH, or moving into independent housing. As well, in the youth profiles, the youth highlighted their engagement within a transitional housing program as predicated their moving into independent housing. The youth articulated that their participation with supports while in the program was beneficial including gaining life skills, one on one housing support, or having an advocate work with them to get into housing.

**7. *Systems challenges, particularly Ontario Works, continue to be a barrier to youth finding and maintaining housing.***

Youth participants were most likely to access supports regarding their connection to Ontario Works. For many youth, accessing OW is a first step towards obtaining housing, however, for many youth the complexity of the system requires some support to help with navigation of the policies and procedures. In addition to the complexity of policies, the lack of income available from OW is a challenge. The income that youth receive from OW limits their access to safe, affordable, appropriate housing. With the current income available, youth are more likely to afford renting units that are unclean, unsafe, and inappropriate.

**8. *The lack of affordable housing impacts youth's ability to find housing.***

A huge challenge to housing youth is the lack of affordable housing stock in Hamilton. The affordable options for youth tend to be unsafe, inappropriate conditions (i.e. units with bed bugs) or too small (for youth who are young parents). Alternatively, rooming houses are an affordable option, however their tenant rights become compromised, which can mean youth are in a vulnerable situation.

**9. *Collaboration support functions to enhance systems integration and service coordination work.***

A strength of the SYPC and YHSC has included the Collaboration Support that has enhanced the capacity of these services to work together. The SYPC and YHSC has maintained a commitment towards a Collaboration Support staff person, via the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton, who can focus their work on the systems coordination and planning, partnership building and research activities. The role has been a unique feature to the collaboration work, but has been successful for the Collaboration Support staff person's ability to provide services that are beyond the mandate of the partners who offer direct service delivery.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This conclusion reflects and comments on the status of the YHSP and the YHSC.

Comprehensively addressing the housing needs of street-involved and homeless youth requires understanding of the individual, systemic and structural factors at play and how they interconnect. In taking the further step, from understanding to responding to the factors, makes for a strong case to embrace a collaborative approach. However, the engagement of various services and sectors to perform under the mantra, “collaboration, not duplication”, comes with a unique set of issues.

Not unlike the youth participants of the YHSP, resilience, innovation and commitment have been driving factors throughout the transitions and successes of the project and the YHSC. As well, time and resources are elements that have contributed to the overall conditions and the current status of the project and partners. In further alignment with youth, flexibility, trust, transparency and respect aided in the development of relationships and contributed to the goals achieved. Interestingly, the integration of each of these attributes have benefitted both the YHSP and the YHSC, including youth making the transition from the streets into housing, or the partners planning, implementing and delivering a support service.

During 2014, the YHSC will remain dedicated to addressing the housing needs of street-involved youth. They will continue to engage in planning the next phase of the YHSP, which will require “tweaking” to enhance its alignment within a Housing First approach, as adopted by their funding partner HPS. However, the partners are mindful that Housing First lacks supporting the continuum of needs that youth require, which will involve more advocacy and strategic planning from the partners.