Shelter Diversion in Youth Experiencing Homelessness Across Six Communities

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Agenda

- Background and methodology

- What is shelter diversion?

- Our study

- Emerging data

- Developing themes

- Next steps

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Background

- Each year approximately **40,000 people under the age of 24** will experience homelessness in Canada (Gaetz et al., 2016).

- Youth experiencing homelessness (YEH) are **highly vulnerable to crime, violence, and sexual assault** (Gaetz et al., 2010).

- YEH are also at **high risk** for **multiple episodes** of homelessness or **chronic homelessness** (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2011).

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Methodology

- Mixed methods comparative case study

- Qualitative interviews with YPEH (n=45), staff (n=23), and natural supports (n=2).

- Quarterly follow-ups with young people

- Analysis of intake data and local shelter data to identify returns to homelessness

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Shelter Diversion

- Shelter diversion aims to **divert people before shelter intake** or **rapidly rehouse** them into safe and appropriate housing

- **Natural Supports Approach**:

    - Family reconnection and conflict mediation

- **Housing stabilization**:

    -Resources and supports

    - Case management

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Shelter Diversion in the Literature

- Evidence for **family reunification** and homelessness prevention (Gaetz et al., 2013)

- **Respite housing** as another form of shelter diversion (Gaetz & Dej, 2017)

- Shelter diversion is a less effective intervention for YPEH who are refugees (Oudshoorn et al., 2020)

- Overall, **limited scholarship** on diversion for YPEH

The Study

- Three-year comparative case study to assess **the effectiveness of shelter diversion programs** in six sites in Canada

- **Comparative analysis** of shelter diversion processes

- **Longitudinal outcomes** for clients who were diverted

- Human-centered design principles:

    - Youth advisory committee

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Study Objectives

- Create an agreed upon **definition of shelter diversion for youth**

- Conduct case studies of existing diversion programs and **develop a common but adaptable program model**

- Develop **recommendations for common intake questions**

- **Enhance existing program models** based on the project findings

- Develop recommendations, tools, and toolkits using plain language to **support other organizations to implement shelter diversion programs**

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Emerging Data

Interviews by Participant Type	Total	% of Grand Total
Young person	45	64%
Staff member	23	33%
Family member/natural support	2	3%
Other	0	0%
Grand Total	**70**	**100.0%**

Interviews by Organization	Total	% of Grand Total
Argus	9	13%
BGC Okanagan	3	4%
Covenant House	6	9%
The Raft	15	22%
Trellis	13	19%
Wyndham House	21	31%
Grand Total	**67**	**100.0%**

Youth Advisory Committee

- Lived Experience Experts & Academia

- Recruitment Process

- Relationship Building

- The Complexity of Consent

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Emerging Theme 1: Youths' Awareness of Shelter Diversion

I: *So, you call the diversion for shelter. How did you feel about speaking to the diversion worker?*

P: *They are really nice about it, and they actually got to meet with me.*

I: *Oh, that's good to hear. Did you understand why you're meeting with the worker? Was it pretty self-explanatory or-*

P: *Yeah, I just look at check in process, like that.*

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Emerging Theme 2: Hesitancy to Stay in Shelter

P1: *"I just want to find a place, a job, really, for the most part. And then I can handle everything from there."*

P2: *"It was, honestly, I didn't even stay a night. My anxiety was too through the roof. I couldn't do it. So,* **I did whatever I could to find my real buddies back in town** *or whatever, just to let me use their address and stay there and stuff. And I couldn't do it for some reason. I felt sick to my stomach.* **I felt homesick.** *I don't know. I knew nobody there, so it was tough for me not knowing anybody there either."*

P3: *"... I was like, I'm going home. I can't do this. These people are scary. They're talking to walls, they're screaming at shoes... and actually* **that was a point in time where I realized... I can't do this anymore. Like I can't go go back to addictions.** *Yeah. That at that shelter made me really realize like, I can't be like 40, 30 years old someday and screaming at the wall."*

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Emerging Theme 2: Insights from Staff

Raft Staff 1: *"…we have a very high diversion rate for youth who have never accessed shelter before."*

Raft Staff 2: *"Almost over 60% success rate with that group, compared to groups that have accessed shelter before, where we're sitting at about 20-30% for that group. **So, a very significant drop in our ability once people have accessed supports using shelter**. They tend to want to use shelter again as their support."*

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Covenant House Staff:

*"**Once [a youth] kind of accepts [their] position of becoming a person who's experiencing homelessness**, [they] tend to accept that and live in that for a little longer, and **it takes more work to get them housed** or find them a place that they can go to because they've gotten comfortable or they feel like they don't deserve more or they feel like they can't get there because of X, Y, Z barriers that have come up in the time that they've been in shelter. Yeah, there's definitely a lot of reasons, but **taking on that identity as well changes the person's outcomes..**."*

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Next Steps

- Continue to recruit and interview across each of the six sites
- Collect program data for quantitative analysis
- Moving to shared/common data and codebooks
- Iterative process of qualitative coding
- Identifying themes
- Quantitative data roll-up and analysis
- Making sense of the data and scaling up

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