A Presentation for the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, 2015

Population-specific Service Integration and its Relationship to Systems Integration

Defining "Systems"

Technical and conceptual coordination:

- Across sectors;

- Within a service delivery system;

- Across policies;

- Horizontally across different ministries and vertically within a single ministry or government department; and/or

- Relationally across a group of professionals and/or service users who employ clear and deliberate methods for learning, planning and/or working together.

Population-specific services and coordinated service delivery models need to recognize fluidity between, and variation within, demographic categories

The Research

Building a Grassroots Response

They have:

- Identified and filled service delivery gaps to ensure 24-7 basic needs coverage (e.g., community meal programs);

- Coordinated fund-seeking endeavours;

- Improved inter-organizational communication and joint-working;

- Developed an array of housing options for youth;

- Implemented mobile mental health services and improved frontline capacity to identify and respond effectively to mental health needs;

- Created a number of shared housing support positions;

- Improved in-house addictions and mental health supports; and

- Engaged in ongoing research and data collection.

But they have not seen a dramatic reduction in the number of young people who are homeless or street-involved in their city.

Barriers to Communication, Collaboration and Coordination: Funding, accounting, administration and accountability

Transitionally Homeless Youth

Coordinated Institutional Transitions

"So the ideal process was for ... the hospital to bring the youth to us and introduce him to the program, talk about what we offer, talk about the expectations of the house ..."

"The hospital is very forthcoming with us with information ... We're doing case conferences. This is not taking one day. It took two weeks or three weeks before that could happen ... Everybody was involved and a decision was made around who was going to follow up with what piece ... that is the best-case scenario." (Jean, Supportive Housing Manager)

"I was discharged [from psychiatric care into Brennan House], and the next day I was back in the hospital ... [The problem] was being rushed into a new place I didn't even know" (Arianne, Youth Leaders Committee).

"... and because they're going to be 16 in two months, Child Welfare won't touch them." She adds "[this] is a challenge for us because unless they're involved with Child Welfare, they can't come in [to the shelter] under 16." (Suzanne, SYPC Director)

Youth Perspectives

"I started couch surfing … I was sleeping on the street and stuff like that … After a while couch surfing, it just gets to the point where like you're going to have to leave, right? So from there I went and lived at the Dame [youth shelter in Hamilton] … [I] Kept on getting renewals and stuff like that … [Eventually] my ex-girlfriend's stepmom … took me to the Living Rock where I filled out an application for Wesley at the beginning – or mid-April. It took till August until there was a spot available." (Evan, youth)

Discussion and Conclusion

1. Build relationships across organizations and sectors and design systems for ongoing communication, collaboration, and coordination that support and are supported by these relationships (e.g., shared staffing models);

2. Engage all levels of staff in training and professional development as well as ongoing on-site coaching and mentorship; and

3. Support the relational work with clear operational, administrative and accounting policies and procedures that operate across and link organizational contexts.

Thank you

Naomi Nichols, Assistant Professor

Dept. of Integrated Studies, Faculty of Education, McGill University

naomi.nichols@mcgill.ca