

Rapid Rehousing Practice at a Shelter for Homeless Youth

by

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Abstract

This inquiry used an action research methodology to engage a youth emergency homeless shelter (YES) in Peterborough, Ontario, around better supporting their clients. Through this inquiry, the following research question was explored: What strategies can YES adopt to strengthen rapid rehousing, while still addressing the complex needs of clients? To address this question, four youth clients, eight YES shelter staff, and three individuals from an external stakeholder group were consulted via interviews and one focus group. The study came to the conclusion that youth clients need additional supports when searching for housing; YES could change its internal shelter structure, youth clients need support when in their housing, and the entire system should prioritize youth homelessness. These conclusions provided the basis for nine recommendations to be shared with the organization.

Key words: youth homelessness, emergency shelters, organizational change

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Chapter One: Focus and Framing

Homelessness has been steadily growing across Canada since the 1980s at an exponential rate (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, & Gulliver, 2013). Every year in Canada, an estimated 235,000 people experience homelessness, and youth make up 18.7% of this population (Gaetz, Dej, Richter, & Redman, 2016). Since homelessness is associated with a variety of negative consequences for the individual as well as for the society (Huey, 2012), many service agencies have been mobilized to offer shelters and other supports to the homeless. The YES Shelter for Youth and Families (YES) opened in 2000, and is one of these service agencies that has responded to the homelessness crisis by serving youth and families facing homelessness or housing insecurity in Peterborough, Ontario (YES, n.d.-a).

Over the last 17 years, YES has experienced an increased need to shelter homeless youth and families in the community and has been providing services to an increasing number of clients each year. However, research has indicated that emergency shelter services are not ideal for youth, and each day that a youth spends in an emergency shelter, there is an increased risk for substance misuse, mental health problems, general health problems, varying levels of victimization, and becoming entrenched in an unstable street lifestyle (Barker, 2016; Gaetz, O'Grady, Buccieri, Karabanow, & Marsolais, 2013; Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008). Therefore, finding permanent housing for youth as soon as possible is paramount. Acknowledging this need, the YES Executive Director, who was the Project Sponsor for this research, determined that it would be of value to learn how YES could quickly move youth into long-term housing and lessen their shelter dependence.

As the Shelter and Transitional Housing Supervisor at YES, I have seen youth remain in shelter for months at a time and have felt a concern that emergency shelter cannot be ideal for their personal growth and development. This issue led me to question how YES could serve youth clients so they can transition out of the emergency shelter and be rehoused quickly. Within this context, I began this inquiry with an aim to systematically examine the YES services, staff experiences, and most importantly the young clients' needs. The focus of the inquiry was to gather information from these sources and provide a series of recommendations as to what strategies YES could develop to rehouse its clients quickly, while still connecting them to ongoing community supports for their complex needs. The inquiry addressed the following question: What strategies can the YES Shelter for Youth and Families adopt to strengthen rapid rehousing practices, while still addressing the complex needs of clients? I also explored the following subquestions:

1. What brings youth clients to access YES's emergency services, and what encourages them to return for future stays, or remain in shelter past their maximum allowable one-time stay of 42 days?
2. What are the current effective rapid rehousing strategies?
3. What could an ideal rapid rehousing service look like at YES?
4. What supports and resources are required to successfully house youth?
5. What are the unique housing needs of youth?

For the purpose of this thesis, the term rapid rehousing means helping youth client exit the emergency shelter as quickly as possible and remaining housed. Rapid Rehousing generally refers to a quick rehousing program for clients who are low to moderate acuity, with Housing

First programs being reserved for the highest acuity clients (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2016). The motivation for this study was to rehouse all clients out of YES's emergency shelter as quickly as possible. Over the course of the study, it became obvious that a plan was needed for all clients, including those who are of highest acuity. As such, for the purpose of this study, the term rapid rehousing refers to YES getting its clients in and out of the emergency shelter as quickly as possible.

Significance of the Inquiry

YES is one of several small not-for-profit organizations in Peterborough, Ontario, serving the population facing homelessness, but it is the only organization providing emergency housing services to homeless youth and families. While YES serves both youth and family populations, in this inquiry I exclusively looked at the youth population who access YES services. I conducted this inquiry with the aim of finding best practices to support homeless youth in exiting shelter services earlier and to connect them to supports in the community to address their complex needs. These practices in turn would help break the cycle of homelessness that homeless youth often find themselves in as a result of extensive emergency shelter stays. If YES could adopt rapid rehousing practices, it would impact the internal and external stakeholders of YES.

Shelter workers who maintain core function of YES's emergency shelter services have become accustomed to having the shelter full or overcapacity. This inquiry provided shelter workers with the opportunity to explore how to support clients in exiting emergency services more quickly. This inquiry proposes a series of recommendations that could see less people needing emergency shelter and shorter stays for those who do need shelter. With lower capacity,

shelter workers at YES would be better equipped to support youth in their transition to permanent housing, rather than exclusively maintaining core function of the emergency services.

This inquiry was critical, as it offered directions to optimize YES services with an ultimate target to break the cycle of youth homelessness. The inquiry results and recommendations provide the Board of Directors and Executive Director with an opportunity to consider different funding models and advocate for change in order to support a process that is more likely to break the cycle of homelessness with clients in the community. Reducing the number of homeless youth would also positively impact the City of Peterborough and its residents, as homelessness often persists into adulthood if there is not an intervention (Coates & McKenzie-Mohr, 2010). Research conducted in Peterborough reported that the majority of homeless adults in the community had found themselves homeless for their first time under the age of 26 years old, indicating that homelessness often persists if nothing is done (United Way of Peterborough, 2016). If YES were able to better support youth immediately when they lose their housing, it would be possible that these young people would not require emergency shelter services as adults and could break the cycle of homelessness. Rapid rehousing when a young person becomes homeless for the first time is believed to be one of the best ways to support them in ending the cycle, and this was a priority that interested the YES Board of Directors (N. Powers, personal communication, May 7, 2016).¹

Had this inquiry not been conducted, YES would continue to offer short-term emergency shelter services to youth. However, shelter services would likely remain over capacity and be

¹ All personal communications in this report are used with permission.

unable to best support youth toward their long-term housing goals. Youth would likely continue to develop a dependency on the emergency shelter services and be more likely to become accustomed to instability. The greatest danger to not completing this inquiry is that youth in the community would continue to embody an identity of homelessness, which has lasting effects into their adulthood (Barker, 2016; Gaetz, O’Grady, et al., 2013; Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008; Rabinovitch, Pauly, & Zhao, 2016).

Organizational Context

YES is a small, not-for-profit organization in Peterborough, Ontario. YES envisions that “all youth and families in our community are supported to lead full and positive lives” (YES, n.d.-c, para. 2). Since YES’s inception in 2000 (YES, n.d.-a), the organization has worked to “reduce and prevent homelessness by providing shelter, education and transitional supports for youth and families in Peterborough and the Kawarthas” (YES, n.d.-c, para. 1). YES provides these services with a modest budget and a dedicated staff team (S. Galloway, personal communication, May 5, 2016). In order to accomplish the mission, YES employs 12 full-time staff, eight part-time staff, and five relief staff (YES, 2016; see Appendix A). YES has a dedicated Board of Directors that oversees the work of the Executive Director.

YES uses a hierarchical model with regards to decision making (YES, 2016; see Appendix A). Within the emergency shelter services, I am the Shelter and Transitional Housing Supervisor responsible for supervising five full time, five part time, and five relief staff. The shelter supervisor position reports to the executive director, who is directed by the board of directors. Other programs such as outreach services, and school programs are supervised directly by the executive director.

YES operates an emergency shelter, which shelters youth ages 16–24 years and families (any adult with legal custody of a child). While at the YES shelter, clients are provided with housing supports, a warm place to sleep, and three meals a day. In addition to the shelter, YES has a transitional housing program, which has the capacity to house up to six youth between the ages of 16–24 for a year, and a high school classroom called the Carriage House (S. Galloway, personal communication, May 5, 2016).

YES supports individuals in various capacities throughout the year. In the 2014-2015 fiscal year, YES provided 7,662 bednights to 248 unique individuals in their emergency shelter (YES, 2015). The organization fed 900 individuals from the general public with their food cupboard, provided 125 individuals with free clothing, had 44 youth from the Children’s Aid Society receive dedicated support from a youth worker, and offered transitional housing to nine youth for 1 year (YES, 2015). In addition, YES explored options to support families with youth who are living in crisis before the young person requires emergency shelter services (YES, 2015). The number of individuals served has continued to rise each year at an unpredictable rate (S. Galloway, personal communication May 5, 2016).

While YES has been providing emergency shelter services to families since 2007 (YES, n.d.-a), this inquiry focussed on the youth programs (16–24 years old), as the experiences of homeless youth are different from those of the homeless families (Holtschneider, 2016). As such, responses to family homelessness that have been successful look different from homelessness efforts designed for homeless youth (Tobin & Murphy, 2013). Like the youth population, homelessness is particularly damaging to families, as children spend their developing years in a chaotic, unsafe environment (Tobin & Murphy, 2013). Therefore, while it is important to study

how YES could improve its response to family homelessness, but this study focussed on rehousing strategies for the youth population.

At the YES shelter, youth are provided with a temporary place to live, prepared meals, and have access to staff 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. The Executive Director indicated that this provides youth with an opportunity to stabilize when necessary, to receive the care and support they need, and ideally to find a more permanent living situation (S. Galloway, personal communication, May 5, 2016). However, in many cases, youth end up finding the shelter to be a desirable place for them to live, and they are reluctant to move on and find permanent housing (S. Galloway, personal communication, September 27, 2016). The shelter provides new clients with a 42-day stay, if they need it (S. Galloway, personal communication, May 5, 2016). However, many youth cycle through several 42-day stays without finding permanent housing. The Executive Director shared that this keeps the shelter at overcapacity, and, consequently, YES turns away other clients who need support (S. Galloway, personal communication, October 27, 2016).

Due to workers' focus of providing the emergency shelter services to an overcapacity shelter, staff often have little time to provide significant support to youth in their housing search (S. Galloway, personal communication, May 5, 2016). However, with funding from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Peterborough now has a full-time youth outreach worker and a full-time youth in transition worker who work out of YES to provide support within the community. These positions are limited, as they endeavour to support all youth in the community, not only those who find themselves homeless and at YES. As such they can only

support one or two youth who are in the shelter at a time, leaving most youth in the shelter without this type of comprehensive support.

YES receives the majority of its funding from the City of Peterborough (S. Galloway, personal communication, September 27, 2016). Other funders include the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the United Way of Peterborough, and grants from private charities such as the Ontario Trillium Foundation. While YES's occupancy has risen 68% since 2012, its core funding for shelter services from the City of Peterborough has grown by less than 5% (S. Galloway, personal communication, April 21, 2017). This has left YES with rising occupancy and the same staffing capacity as in previous years when occupancy was low.

YES has traditionally focussed on its emergency shelter services with transitional supports and homelessness prevention being secondary to emergency shelter (S. Galloway, personal communication, September 27, 2016). However, the organization has been passing through a period of change, and the future vision is to invest more in community supports for homeless youth and prevention of homelessness (S. Galloway, personal communication, September 27, 2016). Exploring rapid rehousing practice was in line with this vision, as it could help youth who are currently homeless secure housing and become connected to community supports.

YES is fortunate to have external stakeholders, including other community agencies in Peterborough, that work with the same population and support the shelter effort. Four Counties Addiction Services Team (Fourcast, n.d.) is a main partner of YES, and since 2014 YES has had a half-time intensive case manager from Fourcast working at the shelter. The Fourcast worker has clinical skills, offers clinical supervision, and has an increased ability to collaborate with the

health and addictions systems (S. Galloway, personal communication, September 27, 2016).

YES and Fourcast also work very closely with the Brock Mission and Cameron House (Brock Mission, n.d.), the men's and women's shelters in Peterborough. These shelters are also funded by the City of Peterborough, and the collective agencies have been working together since YES's inception in 2000 (S. Galloway, personal communication, September 27, 2016).

Systems Analysis of the Inquiry

Systems thinking requires individuals to have an ability to see the systems they shape and are shaped by (Senge, 2006). The two important aspects to seeing systems include an ability to see patterns of interdependency and to consider the future (Senge, 2006). YES, like all organizations, is part of a complex system that includes both external and internal factors (Senge, 2006). YES is "a system of human action in which means and ends are guided by values and intended outcomes" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, p. 4). This section explores the internal and external systems that YES is apart of.

Bolman and Deal (2013) presented a framework that considers the reframing of situations and complex issues by looking through four different lenses. The lenses include the structural frame, the human resource frame, the symbolic frame, and the political frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013). These frames can be examined in the organizational systems of YES (2016; see Appendix A). Looking through the structural frame, YES is influenced by its employment structure and hierarchical structure. The team at YES receives direction from the executive director and shelter supervisor but otherwise works as a team. When examining the shelter workers, shelter supervisor, executive director, and board, the human resource frame appears. All of YES's work is influenced by the symbolic frame, as the agency representatives are both impacted by and

interpret and carry the vision of the agency (see Figure 1). YES's (n.d.-c) vision, mission, and values are set by the board of directors, executive director, and staff, which influence the external factors and the youth clients. Finally, the political frame influences all of the other three frames. The economy, government systems, community resources, and opportunities all influence YES's clients, affecting the organization's ability to serve these individuals. Bolman and Deal's four frames supported an analysis of the system that YES operates within and acted as a reminder that YES is a human system, with interrelated parts and wholes that influence one another (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004). These parts are continually growing and changing, but an understanding of them can support the change that this inquiry aims to accomplish (Senge et al., 2004).

The ability of YES to implement rapid rehousing principles is influenced by several external factors, including the global economy, funding at both a provincial and municipal level, the community of Peterborough, affordable housing options, employment opportunities for youth, increasing homelessness numbers and other community organizations. From an internal perspective, YES's ability to make change will be influenced by the staff and volunteer team including Board of Directors, executive director, shelter supervisor, shelter workers, and outreach services. The clients at YES are internal partners, who influence the inquiry, as well as the internal staffing structure at YES, the available staffing resources, and the support programs like the youth in transition worker, transitional housing program, youth outreach worker and the school program. These internal and external factors can be considered through Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frame structure, and particularly through human resources, political, and structural frames as noted earlier (Figure 1).

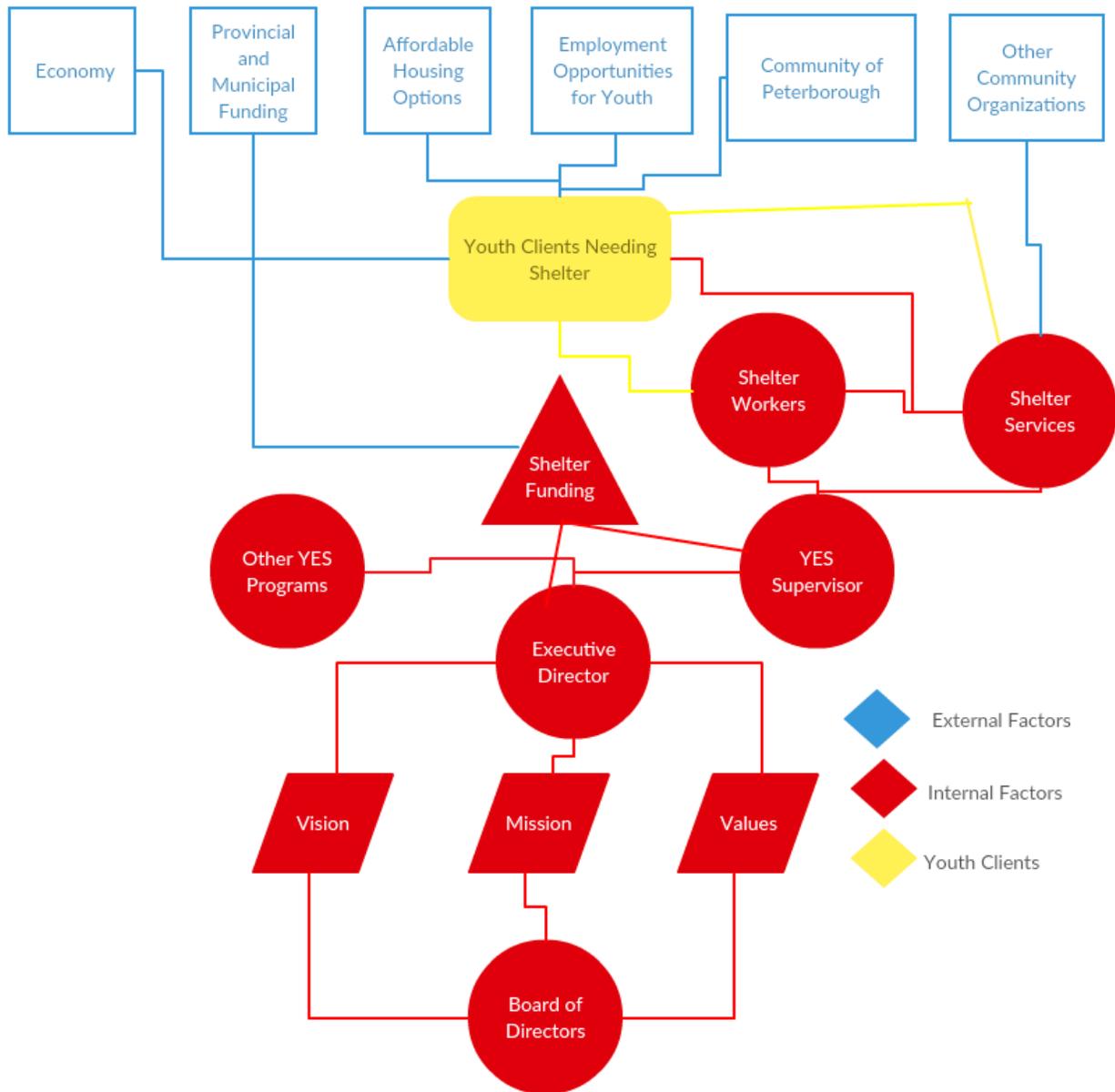


Figure 1. YES internal and external systems influences.

Note. YES = YES Shelter for Youth and Families.

In considering the human resources frame, I noted several pieces of the system that are interconnected (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Currently, YES workers spend the majority of their time keeping the emergency shelter operational, and do not have time to focus on rehousing support for clients. This loop becomes reinforced when the shelter is overcapacity, stretching staffing

resources and thereby providing even less support toward rehousing initiatives. The staffing capacity of the shelter is directly related to the core funding, which the municipality of Peterborough provides. The City of Peterborough, which receives funds from the provincial government, the federal government, and from the municipal taxing system, is an example of the external factors that have great influence over YES's internal system.

Human resource factors are influenced by the political climate at both global and local levels (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In a global economy, when people have stable employment, appropriate supports for their needs, receive a living wage, and also have access to housing that coincides with their income level, they are far less likely to require emergency shelter services (Rabinovitch et al., 2016). The global economy as well as the local economy in the city play a significant role in whether or not people struggle to maintain their housing (Rabinovitch et al., 2016).

YES serves the youth population and is, therefore, influenced by larger systems that support youth. There is a significant correlation between institutional involvement and homelessness (Nichols, 2008a). Youth who have been involved in the child welfare system are overrepresented in emergency shelters (Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd, & Schwan, et al., 2016). In some cases, youth are leaving group homes and entering the emergency housing shelters (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016). YES is also influenced by the Peterborough Regional Health Centre (n.d.), the local hospital. In particular, youth who enter the hospital in the psychiatric unit and are unable to return home enter the shelter. Finally, YES is influenced by the criminal justice system. When incarcerated, youth often lose their housing and they exit these systems homeless,

requiring shelter. These systems and how they interact with youth impact shelter numbers and the young people accessing YES services.

Currently, YES relies on the abilities of external partners in Peterborough to provide support services to youth in order to help them with their housing outcomes. YES workers do not have the capacity to support youth through their mental health or substance misuse challenges. Fourcast currently employs a half-time intensive case manager with clinical skills, who case manages YES clients, but the organization is impacted by the time constraints imposed on this position. Therefore, another piece of the system is how other organizations interact with YES and with youth clients.

Like many nonprofits, the structure of YES is highly influenced and organized by its funding sources (Nichols, 2008b). The City of Peterborough provides funding exclusively for emergency shelter services. It does not provide funding for prevention or housing supports when a client transitions from emergency shelter. This current model limits YES's main focus to providing short-term emergency support and is not conducive to supporting rapid rehousing practice. The YES shelter workers are unable to leave the shelter, as they must remain onsite to meet the needs of current YES residents. The shelter does not currently have the financial capacity to create a position to address this issue and support youth in the community during their housing search. The different programs at YES, outside of the emergency shelter, all influence the shelter services and the support that can be provided to those clients.

The youth clients are at the focus of all lenses in the YES organizational system, as examined earlier (see Figure 1). Clients often have unmet needs, such as support reconnecting to family, life-skills training, support finding and maintaining housing, access to affordable

housing, healthy food, mental health and addictions supports, and meaningful employment or school opportunities. All of these factors are critical for these youth to be successful in maintaining their housing (Barker, 2016; Gaetz, 2014b; Gaetz, Donaldson, et al., 2013; Rabinovitch et al., 2016). YES aims to help clients secure and maintain their housing so that external partners can support their other needs. When any change at YES is made, it is undertaken with the intention of better supporting youth and family clients.

Overview of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Following this chapter (Chapter 1), I present a literature review discussing youth homelessness, emergency shelter structure, and addressing clients needs (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, I describe the action research methodology, project participants, ethical considerations, and the data collection plan. In Chapter 4, I share the study findings as well as the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings and literature review. I end the thesis with Chapter 5, providing recommendations to YES, detailing how the inquiry will impact the organization, as well as considering future inquiries. In writing this thesis, I considered past academic research as well as this study's findings to create evidence-based recommendations for the organization.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review considered the evidence related to the inquiry question. The first topic considers youth homelessness, focussing on the specific vulnerabilities that youth face prior to, during, and after their exit from homelessness. I also look at the strategies that support youth in exiting their homelessness long term. The second topic examines youth shelters, what they are used for, how they are structured, and what supports and resources they could provide to homeless youth. The third topic considers how to address youth's needs, including preparing youth for housing, supporting high-acuity clients, and advancing the retention of housing.

Youth Homelessness

Historically, individuals experiencing homelessness in Canada were older, single men, but the crisis has grown to include rising populations of women, youth, and families (Gaetz, DeJ, et al., 2016). The crisis has grown rapidly since the 1980s, with approximately 235,000 Canadians experiencing homelessness in a year, and roughly 18.7% of this population are youth (Gaetz, DeJ, et al., 2016). Confirming this rate, Segart (2012) reported youth make up 20% of the homeless population in Canada. A study on emergency shelter use in Canada found that, in 2009, 147,000 different individuals stayed in emergency shelters, which means approximately one in 230 Canadians had accessed an emergency shelter that year (Segart, 2012). The numbers of those homeless and those presenting at emergency shelters differ because many people choose not to access emergency shelters for their needs (Gaetz, Donaldson, et al., 2013).

Gaetz, DeJ, et al. (2016) noted this increase in homelessness is a result of a large disinvestment in affordable housing, structure shifts in the economy (resulting in, for example, a rapid decline in full-time permanent well-paying jobs), and reduced spending on a range of

social and health supports in communities all across the country (p. 12). The rise in homelessness can be traced back to 1993, when the federal government gave sole responsibility to provincial governments to provide social housing in Canada (Johnstone, Lee, & Connelly, 2017). In Ontario, the 1995 conservative government further passed these responsibilities on to the municipal level; since 2001, Ontario has had the highest rate of homelessness in Canada (Johnstone et al., 2017). The neoliberal values that have guided approaches to poverty in Ontario have led to a homelessness crisis in the province (Johnstone et al., 2017).

Gaetz, O'Grady, et al. (2013) proposed that in order to address an issue related to youth homelessness, one must first understand the issue from several perspectives, because the way people see and think about youth homelessness impacts the way they address the situation. Individuals "experiencing homelessness constitute some of the most disadvantaged and socially excluded in society" (Walter, Jetten, Dingle, Parsell, & Johnstone, 2016, p. 366), and a full understanding of their needs is important. A consideration of the risk factors that increase the likelihood of homelessness, and are embodied once someone is homeless, will support an understanding of the population. The following section outlines these risk factors.

Youth homelessness risk factors. Youth homelessness has been growing each year in Canada, but because homeless youth are often a hidden population, the prevalence has been contested (Cheng et al., 2013; Karabanow & Kidd, 2014). However, the first ever pan-Canadian study on youth homelessness estimated between 35,000 and 40,000 youth experience homelessness in Canada over the course of a year and on any given night there are between 6,000 and 7,000 homeless youth (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016). It is estimated that the majority of homeless youth in Canada are not found in shelters or on the street, but are part of the hidden

homeless population, living in other precarious situations, such as living outdoors, in other shelters inappropriate for human residence, or couch surfing (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016; Raising the Roof, 2009). While the scope of this challenge has been contested due to its hidden nature, it is most important to look at youth homelessness from many perspectives in order to gain an understanding of the unique vulnerabilities that this population experiences prior to, during, and after experiencing homelessness (Cheng et al., 2013; Gaetz, 2014b).

Youth homelessness is rarely experienced as a single event, and often diverse factors influence their path to homelessness (Cheng et al., 2013; Gaetz, 2014b; Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016; Karabanow & Kidd, 2014; Kidd, 2007). According to scholars, two common contributing factors to youth homelessness include childhood trauma (Ferguson, 2009; Heinze, 2012; Karabanow & Kidd, 2014) and a negative experience in the school system (Cheng et al., 2013; Gaetz, 2014b; Karabanow & Kidd, 2014; Kidd, 2007; Martijn & Sharpe, 2006). Furthermore, sexual abuse when young is associated with an increased likelihood of abusing substances, participating in survival sex, substance abuse, and suicide attempts (Ferguson, 2009). In one study completed in Ireland, the path for the majority of homeless youth could be traced to early childhood disruptions of various kinds (Mayock, Corr, & O'Sullivan, 2011). This childhood trauma often included elements of physical abuse, sexual abuse, parental neglect, exposure to domestic abuse, and/or emotional abuse (Carmona, Slesnick, Guo, Murnan, & Brakenhoff, 2017; Cheng et al., 2013; Ferguson, 2009; Gaetz, 2014b; Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016; Heinze, 2012; Karabanow & Kidd, 2014; Kidd, 2007; Martijn & Sharpe, 2006; Mayock et al., 2011; Piat et al., 2015; Raising the Roof, 2009; Robinson, 2008; Slesnick, Zhang, & Brakenhoff, 2016). In addition to exposure to abuse when young, most homeless youth grew up living in extreme

poverty (Ferguson, 2009; Gaetz, 2014b; Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016; Heinze, 2012; Karabanow & Kidd, 2014; Kidd, 2007). Youth experiencing homelessness described feeling little sense of control over their environment when growing up and witnessing their parents struggle with mental illness, substance abuse, or homelessness (Ferguson, 2009; Karabanow & Kidd, 2014).

Kidd (2007) stated, as a result of their home environment, many of these children experienced poor performance in schools, had negative relationships with teachers, and often had conduct disorders. These disrupted childhood experiences initiated a process of stigmatization in which children were identified and labelled, leading to narrowed opportunities in Canadian society (Karabanow & Kidd, 2014; Kidd, 2007). These experiences are often similar among the majority of youth who are homeless in Canada (Kidd, 2007). Nichols (2008a) noted, "An inability to maintain safe shelter is an important manifestation of other interconnected forms of exclusion (Gaetz 2004)" (p. 687).

Within the population of homeless youth, several groups are overrepresented. Nichols (2008a) noted a correlation between institutional involvement and homelessness. In their study on Canadian youth homelessness, Gaetz, O'Grady, et al. (2016) found that 57.8% of youth surveyed had some kind of involvement in child protection services in the past. Gaetz, O'Grady, et al. (2012) further concurred that individuals involved in child protection services are overrepresented in the youth homeless population. Slesnick, Zhang, et al. (2016) estimated between 31% and 46% of foster care youth experience homelessness at least once before the age of 26.

In addition to youth connected to child protection, youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, or two-spirit (LGBTQ2S), or who are

Indigenous are overrepresented among homeless youth (Abromovich, 2012, 2016). Scholars noted youth who identify as LGBTQ2S may be overrepresented due to homophobia and transphobia in families, schools, and communities, making it more difficult for them to remain at home (Abromovich, 2016; Gaetz, O’Grady, et al., 2016; Karabanow & Kidd, 2014; Spicer, Schwartz, & Barber, 2010). While Indigenous people only comprise 4.3% of the Canadian population, they represent 30.6% of homeless youth surveyed in the first pan-Canadian study on youth homelessness (Gaetz, O’Grady, et al., 2016). The overrepresentation of Indigenous youth likely comes from historical roots of ongoing trauma, discrimination, and cultural genocide (Gaetz, Dej, et al., 2016). Youth homelessness seems to impact marginalized groups, and youth involved in child protection, who identify as LGBTQ2S, or are Indigenous have historically been overrepresented in youth homelessness. When considering how to solve youth homelessness, these overrepresented marginalized youth and their unique needs cannot be forgotten.

In most cases, youth experience an adjustment period into their adulthood, gradually assuming more responsibilities as they age; however, homeless youth experience a significant interruption in this transition (Gaetz, 2014b). They do not have the opportunity to gradually learn; furthermore, “at a time when these young people are experiencing loss and potential trauma, they are simultaneously charged with managing a diverse and complex set of tasks, including obtaining shelter, income and food, making good decisions and developing healthy relationships” (Gaetz, 2014b, p. 9). While trying to navigate adulthood, work within a complex social system, and manage structural factors beyond their control, these youth are exposed to a street culture that often leads to extremely risky behaviours (Carmona et al., 2017). All of these factors contribute to a complex situation for young people to manage and to exit.

Throughout their transition into homelessness, and while homeless, youth experience heightened vulnerabilities (Bender, Thompson, McManus, Lantry, & Flynn, 2007; Heinze, 2012; Mayock et al., 2011); in addition, individuals experiencing homelessness have a disproportionate rate of health and social problems (Walter et al., 2016). Youth who are homeless report significantly lower self-esteem than most youth who are housed (Patterson & Tweed, 2009). Problematic substance use, sex work, and difficulty accessing affordable housing are all indicators of a potential transition into homelessness (Cheng et al., 2013; Mayock et al., 2011). In order to meet their financial needs, homeless youth often engage in behaviours including panhandling, prostitution, survival sex (i.e., sex for food, shelter, and so forth), dealing drugs, and theft (Kidd, 2007). Substance use was cited as being a common way to cope with stress (Cheng et al., 2013; Gaetz, 2014b; Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016; Karabanow & Kidd, 2014; Kidd, 2007; Slesnick, Feng, et al., 2016), and the length of time of homelessness for youth correlates with higher rates of substance misuse (Kidd, 2007). In summary, several studies indicated homeless youth are “highly vulnerable to traumatic experiences while living on the streets, as well as health compromising behaviours” (Carmona et al., 2017, p. 63; see also Bender et al., 2007; Heinze, 2012; Mackelprang, Harpin, Grubenhoff, & Rivara., 2014; Mayock et al., 2011). These experiences throughout homelessness further exploit homeless youth and often reinforce patterns of trauma.

As a result of all their experiences, and the stress that young people experience while homeless, youth are 40 times more likely to experience depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and/or suicidal behaviours than young people with stable housing (Karabanow & Kidd, 2014; Kidd, 2007). In a recent Canadian study on youth homelessness, 85.4% of homeless youth

surveyed were experiencing a mental health crisis, 42.0% reported at least one suicide attempt in the last year, and 35.2% reported at least one drug overdose requiring hospitalization in the last year (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016). While not surprising, Karabanow and Kidd (2014) concurred that suicide and drug overdoses are the leading cause of death among Canadian homeless youth. A combination of these different factors are often present in youth who experience homelessness, and an understanding of the experiences of this unique population is key to informing potential solutions to youth homelessness.

The factors contributing to a youth's homelessness, coupled with the significant stress of being homeless, victimization, and engagement in street culture create a complicated, detrimental situation for youth. Karabanow and Kidd (2014) noted, "For the most part, these are young people who have rarely experienced a stable, loving family unit- rarely did they feel loved, cared for, supported or experience a sense of belonging" (p. 18). Once a young person is homeless and in an emergency shelter, a quick exit to housing is key to minimizing the trauma experienced while homeless. This trauma often exacerbates or creates a mental health crisis and can lead to substance use. The longer youth are left without appropriate and timely interventions, the worse their short- and long-term outcomes are in many domains (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016; Slesnick, Feng, et al., 2016).

Approaches to exit homelessness. Youth who experience homelessness are united by their young age and, therefore, lack independent living skills in comparison to homeless adults (Gaetz, 2014b). Further to this, homeless youth have often left a home where they were dependent on an adult caregiver; therefore, their homelessness means a loss of all the supports that come from that relationship (Gaetz, 2014b). As such, young people are often forced back to

the street an average of six times before they exit permanently (Karabanow & Kidd, 2014).

However, each exit brings them closer to a permanent removal from street culture (Karabanow & Kidd, 2014). Canadian programs for homelessness often focus on emergency supports; in studies of people who successfully exit homelessness, scholars placed an emphasis on the rapid exit from emergency shelter services and focussed on transitional supports (Gaetz, 2014b; Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016; Mayock et al., 2011; Robinson, 2008).

To address youth homelessness, a strengths-based approach must be implemented that both meets youth's immediate and long-term needs (Heinze & Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2009) and focuses on supporting youth to realize their self-worth (Patterson & Tweed, 2009). It is well established that the longer the duration of homelessness that a youth experiences, the greater the young person's susceptibility to several negative outcomes (Mayock et al., 2011). Youth who are homeless for prolonged periods of time have higher psychological distress and lower self-reported resiliency (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011). In the same study, higher self-perceived resiliency was linked to lower suicidality (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011). This further indicates that prolonged periods of homelessness "decreases protective factors and increases risk" (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011, p. 1053). Therefore, any interventions to support homeless youth should be timely and focus on eliminating homelessness as quickly as possible, while supporting the specific needs that a homeless youth experiences (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016; Mayock et al., 2011). The greater the length of time young people spend on the streets is linked to increased difficulty developing a sense of belonging in nonstreet communities (Kidd, Karabanow, Hughes, & Frederick, 2013). Due to the developmental needs of youth and their experiences of living independently, a different approach from the adult strategies is required.

Even when suitable housing is found, it can be difficult for youth to learn how to live in it. Successful exits from homelessness were often aligned with significant life-skills training, including support with the learning of cooking, cleaning, self-care strategies, hygiene skills, nutrition, financial literacy, budgeting, setting up a bank account, and so forth (Gaetz, 2014b; Gaetz, O’Grady, et al., 2016; Karabanow & Kidd, 2014; Kidd et al., 2016; Robinson, 2008). In addition, youth who feel socially connected are more likely to succeed in retaining their housing and have protective factors from the stress and trauma they experience (Walter et al., 2016). Without these skills, youth are often unable to maintain their housing past 6 months, which is not considered to be a successful exit from homelessness (Gaetz, 2014b).

Family circumstances of homeless youth are often framed as a major factor in their homelessness, and for many homeless youth this is true (Karabanow & Kidd, 2014; Mayock et al., 2011; Robinson, 2008; Winland, 2013). Homeless youth often experience the physical abandonment of either one or both of their caregivers, in some cases at several different times in their lives (Ferguson, 2009). As a result of the unhealthy family relationships, service providers often view youth clients as victims of the family unit and focus on independence from family (Bender et al., 2007; Winland, 2013). However, Mayock et al. (2011), Mayock and Parker (2017), and Robinson (2008) suggested that family contact and aid could serve as a support when helping youth out of homelessness. In a study of pilot programs in Australia and Ireland, Mayock et al. (2011) found, even if the young person does not return to the family home, supportive relationships with family members are key to “bolstering young people’s ability to exit homelessness” (p. 393). Regardless of how tenuous a young person’s tie to family was at the entrance to their homelessness, the majority of youth express an interest in maintaining some

contact with their family members (Mayock et al., 2011; Robinson, 2008; Winland, 2013). In the study completed by Mayock et al. (2011), the process of rebuilding relationships with family served an important function, regardless of the type of housing that youth moved into or whether they lived with family. Youth identified natural support systems, whether that be family ties, street families, or nonhomeless friends, as major contributors to their stabilization (Bender et al., 2007; Robinson, 2008).

While there are evidence-based approaches to adult homelessness, such as the housing first model (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2013), housing first for homeless youth is still a strategy that needs to be piloted and adapted (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016). However, researchers seem to concur that emergency services are not best for homeless youth in the long term; rather, a model is needed that supports them throughout their exit out of homelessness (Carlson, Sugano, Millstein, & Auerswald, 2006; Gaetz, 2014b; Kidd et al., 2016). Transitional housing, and family supports have been effective in supporting youth in exiting homelessness. To date, scholars have provided little evidence on how an emergency shelter can rehouse clients quickly; this research adds to the existing literature with concrete strategies to rehouse youth out of an emergency shelter as quickly as possible, while still addressing their complex needs once they are in stable housing. It is my hope that other emergency shelters will be able to adapt the strategies proposed in Chapter 5 to support youth in exiting emergency shelter services as quickly as possible.

Emergency Homeless Shelters

Youth emergency shelters emerged in the early 1980s after the realization that disadvantaged youth were not engaging with, and therefore not well supported by, other organizations (Karabanow, 2004). Despite their numerous vulnerabilities, homeless youth often

lack connection to social services and are underserved by other agencies and institutions (Carmona et al., 2017). Emergency shelters have played an important role in connecting youth to other organizations and mediating between youth and the structures in other agencies (Karabanow, 2004). Within Canada, the traditional approach to homelessness, however, has primarily been in the investment in emergency supports and shelters (Gaetz, Dej, et al., 2016). In addition, homelessness has been historically criminalized, placing pressure on law enforcement to respond and blaming homeless individuals for their situation (O'Grady, Gaetz, & Buccieri, 2011).

Over the last 20 years, Karabanow and Kidd (2014) noted a shift to young people who are homeless being understood as victims of social structures and receiving sympathetic responses. Emergency shelters are important, and will likely always be a key piece of the response to this crisis, but emergency shelters themselves do not help people exit homelessness or prevent it (Gaetz, Dej, et al., 2016). Additional investment in supporting youth is required.

Homeless shelters have typically been structured for “ideal clients” (Quirouette, 2016, p. 317), those who experience a short-term housing crisis but are motivated and have the skills and ability to move on without much support. However, as was highlighted above, youth who are homeless experience a series of additional complexities, including mental health issues, substance use, lack of life skills, and community stigma. YES is currently structured to provide youth with emergency housing, with minimal capacity for shelter staff to support youth through a rehousing process in the community. The following section explains the role that emergency shelters have come to play in the social services sector and how staff in nonprofit social service agencies are called to respond to the complex social problems that clients experience. I used this

understanding to develop recommendations to help YES structure its internal system to support best outcomes for youth and maintain a positive staff environment.

Role of emergency shelters and challenges. Over the past few decades, responses to homelessness have consisted primarily of temporary shelter and supports, with little emphasis on prevention or housing support (Quirouette, 2016). This has led to a situation in which shelters in Canada are operating at over 90% of their capacity, putting a real strain on the shelter system (Gaetz, Dej, et al., 2016). Since their inception, youth shelters have evolved to be a referral source for large institutions such as hospitals, group homes, schools, the courts, police, and even other shelters (Karabanow, 2004). In addition, aging out of child welfare care is often a marked trajectory leading to homelessness (Piat et al., 2015; Slesnick, Zhang, et al., 2016).

Shelters also take on clients with significant health needs without the medical capacity to appropriately deal with them, which is often due to inappropriate discharge planning in hospitals (McNeil & Guirguis-Younger, 2014). Emergency shelters have become the inappropriate solution to several complex social problems, despite the fact that cycling in and out of homelessness increases entrenchment in street culture (Quirouette, 2016). This has dramatically changed the clientele youth emergency shelters serve (Karabanow, 2004). These shelters are now tasked with supporting clients who are Crown wards, cope with mental health concerns, have significant justice involvement, and often struggle with addictions (Karabanow, 2004; Nichols, 2008a, 2014). Emergency shelters cannot be expected to fix the very complicated social problem that is homelessness (Quirouette, 2016), and without significant support out of homelessness, shelters will remain full with clients' needs being poorly addressed.

Youth shelters, which house the most difficult to serve and often pick up the pieces where the formal system has failed, are the least powerful player in the larger organizational system (Karabanow, 2004; Nichols, 2014). Shelter staff have reported themselves to be very low in the organizational hierarchy (Nichols, 2014). Shelter workers are required to report information to government bureaus such as Ontario Works, child protection agencies, and probation, but receive very little information in return (Nichols, 2014). When discussing a youth emergency shelter in Ontario, Nichols (2014) explained that the consistent demands of a shelter environment, and the organizational hierarchy left shelter workers unable to “facilitate timely institutional connections for the young people they work with” (p. 89). Shelter workers are expected to navigate the complex system with little time, training, or resources to do so well.

Like most small not-for-profit organizations, YES’s staffing capacity and capability to provide the most effective shelter environment rides on the organization’s ability to secure adequate funding levels to have adequate human resources. YES operates in a large neoliberal system, in which state responsibilities are dispersed among a variety of small not-for-profit agencies (Nichols, 2014). In order to effectively gain funding to perform the work these agencies intend to do, nonprofit organizations have to demonstrate accountability and complete evaluations to allow comparison during competitions for funds (Nichols, 2014). In order to survive financially, organizations like YES organize their activities in ways that will speak the language of funders and governing bodies; consequently, they are not always set up based on client need (Nichols, 2014). “The political consequences of intensive, long-term institutional monitoring” (Nichols, 2014, p. 126) shapes YES’s work, and, like other youth emergency shelters in Ontario, this directly impacts YES’s staffing capacity (Nichols, 2014).

Nonprofit social service agencies and staff teams. Nonprofit organizations play an important role in the social services sector, and services are typically offered at no financial cost to those being served, leaving agencies tasked with funding their activities through other streams (Kosny & Eakin, 2008). Positions in nonprofit organizations are often difficult, challenging, and characterized by high demands, long hours, low pay, and at times exposure to violence and infectious disease (Kosny & Eakin, 2008). Youth shelters have emerged as not only a safe space for young people fleeing the home and the street, but also as a referral source for larger formal systems, like the hospital, police, and child welfare agencies. This has resulted in overcrowding within the shelters, leaving staff feeling overwhelmed and ineffective (Karabanow, 2004; Quirouette, 2016).

Quirouette (2016) completed a study on Toronto shelters and found that shelter workers reported they are often left to their own devices without the training needed to successfully support clients. These poorly funded organizations resort to relying on the values and commitment of workers in order to serve their clientele (Kosny & Eakin, 2008). Despite these significant challenges, those working in nonprofit organizations gain significant satisfaction from their work, and while they are guided by strong values, working in such conditions often comes at a cost to their health and well-being (Kosny & Eakin, 2008). Therefore, any successful approaches must take into consideration the demands on shelter workers as well as their health and safety (Kosny & Eakin, 2008).

In a study within a youth emergency shelter, youth described their satisfaction with the agency around the quality and nature of their relationship with staff (Heinze & Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2009). Frontline staff spend extensive time with youth clients with the knowledge that

developing positive relationships with clients is the most important thing they can do to support a client in moving forward (Heinze, Hernandez Jozefowicz, & Toro, 2010). However, these staff are often tasked with overcoming significant barriers including a lack of staff capacity, training, and experience as a result of low funding (Heinze et al., 2010). Like other shelters, frontline workers at YES receive poor pay, work in shifts and in some cases have unpredictable relief shifts, and experience regular staff turnover (Nichols, 2008a). They are expected to do so much with so few resources and in such little time (Quirouette, 2016); without the staffing resources in place, staff become emotionally exhausted, distanced, and ineffective (Heinze et al., 2010).

Given the relationship-based work that occurs in the shelter, ensuring staff are well taken care of and are not experiencing burnout is important not only for the staff team but also for the youth YES serves. Heinz et al. (2010) found that ensuring staff have the time they need to create and foster relationships with clients leads to youth feeling empowered to make positive life choices. Workers in an emergency shelter environment are consistently dealing with significant problems facing their clients. A worker at a shelter in Toronto described his or her role as a “battle or war against homelessness, addiction and poverty” (Kosny & Eakin, 2008, p. 156).

Youth clients require significant case management and support to navigate their situations. YES shelter workers are expected to provide some of this case management, which includes finding a route through the complex social service, health care, and justice systems, which is not an easy task (Nichols, 2008a). Similar to the youth shelter Nichols (2008a) studied in Ontario, YES’s shelter workers complete their casework while they prepare three meals a day for all clients, clean rooms, wake residents up, and deal with daily crises (Nichols, 2008a). Due to their competing demands, shelter workers in Toronto were far more likely to invest energy and

resources where positive outcomes with clients were more likely, and did not invest as much time in the clients with the highest needs (Quirouette, 2016). This seemed to be related to an inability to spend the time required to find positive outcomes over a long period of time with complex individuals (Quirouette, 2016). This study found that for shelter workers to feel fulfilled and successful with clients, an appropriate level of staffing resources to meet clients' needs is required and critical (Quirouette, 2016). Toronto shelter workers voiced significant frustration over an internal system that expected high-acuity clients to move forward with the basic supports that shelter workers could provide while they cook dinner, clean, and maintain client and staff safety, rather than enabling staff to provide effective case management (Quirouette, 2016).

Further to this, frontline shelter workers and the clients they serve engage in a relationship that is charged with power imbalances (Quirouette, 2016). Shelter workers have the ability to withdraw services, removing clients' access to basic needs including safe shelter and food (Quirouette, 2016). In order to maintain a communal living situation that is safe for most people, shelters often require that clients comply with rules and are motivated toward changing their housing situation (Quirouette, 2016). When shelter workers are involved in the case management work of their clients, they have to deal with these competing priorities, which can impede on their ability to effectively support clients (Quirouette, 2016). With shelter workers able to remove clients' basic needs, clients often wish to demonstrate compliance to the shelter rules, and to do this clients often omit key information that YES workers need to know to effectively manage clients' cases (Quirouette, 2016). For example, a client may be using substances, but will not disclose this to the staff for fear of being kicked out of the shelter.

Frontline shelter workers should be viewed “as ‘street-level bureaucrats’ who make real and important policy decisions every day” (Quirouette, 2016, p. 319). Emergency shelters have been set up to provide clients with their basic needs, and staff roles are incredibly diverse. Setting up the shelter with appropriate staffing and developing an emergency shelter structure that is conducive to rapid rehousing are key to this organizational change being successful.

Emergency shelters and rapid rehousing. Heinze et al. (2010) found that positive relationships with staff were instrumental in helping young people to feel accepted in the agency and encouraged participation in moving forward. While the emergency shelter meets clients’ low-level needs (i.e., food and shelter), supporting youth to realize their self-worth plays an important role in supporting people in exiting homelessness (Patterson & Tweed, 2009). This is work that can begin in the emergency shelter, but shelter staff require the time and skills to do so.

Youth thrive on clear, consistent structure, and negative behaviour is reduced when this is provided alongside supportive relationships and physical and psychological safety (Heinze & Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2009). It is critical that the shelter create expectations and communicate these clearly to clients (Nichols, 2017). Individuals who are subjected to unfair treatment experience further social isolation, deprivation of dignity, reduced faith in institutions, and an increase in risky behaviours (Nichols, 2017). In one study of a youth emergency shelter, both the staff and youth clients agreed that consistent structure and expectations increased youth’s feelings of safety (Heinze & Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2009). While in the shelter, the number of resources and services that were offered by staff did not correlate with higher client satisfaction (Heinze et al., 2010). However, taking the time to create and develop youth–staff relationships enhanced development and growth and was found to be a main factor in empowering youth to

make positive life choices (Heinze et al., 2010). In terms of service delivery in a shelter, Heinze et al. (2010) found “balancing caring, supportive staff-participant relationships with clear expectations and limit setting” (p. 1371) to be most effective for youth’s personal growth.

Due to the power imbalances between clients and shelter workers, and the competing demands shelter workers deal with to keep the shelter safe and clean and to provide clients with food, the need for specialized positions is clear. Further, workers who are able to be in the community, meeting youth where they wish to be met, have produced positive results when engaging at-risk youth (Carmona et al., 2017). This specialized position could effectively assist people who require higher levels of support, be removed from providing clients with their basic needs (thereby reducing the power imbalance), and have the time to navigate the complex social, health care, and criminal justice systems (Quirouette, 2016).

Addressing the Complex Needs of Youth Clients and Housing Retention

Youth homelessness is a systemic problem that requires a systematic response (Karabanow & Kidd, 2014). Similar to the adult population, the YES shelter sees youth clients in a range of circumstances. Consistent with studies done in Toronto and Ottawa (Aubry, Farrell, Hwang, & Calhoun, 2013), YES serves youth experiencing episodic homelessness while also assisting clients on the other range of the spectrum, youth who are chronically homeless, with significant unmet needs. While housing plays a significant role in escaping homelessness, “it should not be assumed that housing alone is a sufficient pathway to independence” (Patterson & Tweed, 2009). Depending on their situation, different strategies can be used to support their exit out of homelessness (Aubry et al., 2013).

A large proportion of those who experience homelessness have serious mental health situations and/or substance use disorders (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016; Piat et al., 2015). Within the adult population, Piat et al. (2015) estimated up to one-third of homeless individuals experience a serious mental health crisis. However, within the homeless youth population, individuals experiencing a mental health crisis make up 85.4% of the population, with 42.0% reporting at least one suicide attempt in the last year (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016). Due to high prevalence of mental health crises, addictions, lack of life skills, and their young age, homeless youth require more significant supports than their adult counterparts (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016). For the clients experiencing episodic homelessness, an immediate intervention to rehouse them as quickly as possible with limited, short-term supports is needed (Aubry et al., 2013). Approaches for higher acuity clients who experience chronic homelessness should include more intensive supports and over a longer period of time while clients are in their housing (Aubry et al., 2013).

Individuals who have co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders are substantially overrepresented in those experiencing chronic homelessness, and those who support youth cannot ignore this (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016; Slesnick, Feng, et al., 2016; van den Berk-Clark, 2016). Youth who find themselves in these situations must learn skills that others have learned over the course of their entire lives in a very short amount of time. While attempting to get ahead, they are faced with victimization, mental health disorders, substance use disorders, a lack of natural supports, trauma, and living in poverty. Without significant support and appropriate housing, it is unrealistic to expect an exit from shelter without subsequent shelter stays (van den Berk-Clark, 2016).

While all individuals experiencing homelessness require support, the youth population experience further consequences as a result of being homeless. They also have less life experience and require support with skills that adults have already developed (Gaetz, 2014b). These supports include support finding, securing, moving into, and maintaining their housing (Aubry et al., 2013). They also require case management supports based on their needs after they enter their new housing (Aubry et al., 2013). As discussed above, this staff member should hold no power over clients' basic needs, and the position should be provided with the necessary time to complete this work well, rather than having several competing job priorities (Quirouette, 2016).

In the overall homeless population, individuals who are motivated, cooperate with case management, and are capable of working towards rehousing without very much support make up the majority of the homeless population (Quirouette, 2016). However, youth who cycle in and out of institutions face considerable challenges, even when compared with other youth, and without someone working closely with them, these clients can take the bulk of the entire shelter team's time (Quirouette, 2016). Transitions out of institutions often lack concrete plans, leaving emergency shelters as the only option available to youth (Piat et al., 2015). In addition, individuals who transitioned from institutional environments described themselves as lacking the skills needed to be successful living in the community, as they have rarely cared for themselves independently (Piat et al., 2015).

Shelter exit to long-term housing. As the shelter transitions to a rapid rehousing goal, it will need to consider how to support youth in leaving the shelter as quickly as possible and setting them up with what they need to be successful. For people who have experienced insecure

housing, the opportunity to make connections in a new home are short lived, and intensive supports to integrate people into their new community are important (Ecker & Aubry, 2017). In the studies I reviewed, I found transitional supports mentioned as an intervention that worked for several youth who exited their homelessness (Carlson et al., 2006; Gaetz, 2014b; Kidd et al., 2016; Mayock et al., 2011). These supports were put in place to aid youth in navigating the various systems to enable their recovery.

Gaetz (2014b) found that only one in three homeless youth graduate from high school, in comparison to nine out of 10 housed youth. Without an attachment to work or school, youth are far more likely to experience negative outcomes (Dublanc, 2010) and fall behind in their education compared to their housed peers (Buccieri et al., 2016). Having the transitional supports has been found to help youth find an alternative education plan or to enable them to reintegrate into the high school system (Gaetz, 2014b). Throughout the transition, support workers also provided youth with addiction services, health care, mental health services, housing services, and correctional services system navigation (Kidd, 2007). Carlson et al. (2006) found youth who received health care services during their transition into housing were more likely to maintain their housing for more than 6 months than those who did not. These supports were made available after youth had been engaged in emergency shelter services to support them in exiting homelessness. Without these supports, Gaetz (2014b) believed that a successful exit would not be possible for youth.

Youth who successfully exited homelessness were also supported in their physical and mental health care. Housing and mental health are intrinsically linked, and several scholars have indicated that youth who are homeless most often experience a significant mental health crisis as

well (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016; Slesnick, Zhang, & Brakenhoff, 2017). Individuals experiencing homelessness have higher rates of emergency department use, which is often attributed to having complex needs that are not appropriately coordinated (Rodriguez, Fortman, Chee, Ng, & Poon, 2009). When clients experienced intensive supports they were far less likely to present at the emergency department and more likely have their mental health, physical health, and subsistence needs met in the community (Rodriguez et al., 2009). The system does not currently support youth in a holistic way, and without assistance from staff who have the time and expertise to navigate the system, youth quickly enter homelessness again (Nichols, 2008a). However, if appropriate housing retention supports are in place, youth will ideally have their complex needs addressed and can avoid reengaging with the homeless shelter.

Housing retention. In a Canadian study on housing retention, youth reported that several service providers had told them that their lives would be dramatically improved once they were housed (Kidd et al., 2016). While housing is necessary, it is not sufficient on its own to support a transition out of homelessness (Kidd et al., 2016). In fact, after being housed, most youth struggle with creating a meaningful life away from the streets and dealing with their physical and mental health (Kidd et al., 2016). When entering housing, youth report finding themselves in a situation where they do not feel a sense of belonging and cannot get ahead (Kidd et al., 2016). Youth who have exited homelessness would benefit from continued case management after their exit from shelter (Kidd et al., 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2009). Case managers could provide support with social assistance, education, employment, criminal justice, mental health, physical health, and possibly aid in family reunification if necessary (Kidd et al., 2016). Ideally, case

management could be provided in an outreach capacity to support youth in their own space (Carmona et al., 2017; Kidd et al., 2016).

Social inclusion and having meaningful ways to spend time have been noted as key to successful housing retention (Dublanc, 2010; Frederick, Chwalek, Hughes, Karabanow, & Kidd, 2014; Mayock & Parker, 2017; Robinson, 2008; Slesnick, Feng, et al., 2016). In one study, social isolation was directly correlated with eventual housing loss (Ecker & Aubry, 2017). Individuals require social inclusion in two realms: in the various social services that they trust and in informal social networks (Robinson, 2008; Walter et al., 2016). These connections to support services have been shown to independently predict well being (Sinyor, Nozloff, Reis, & Schaffer, 2017).

One way to foster relationships in both of these spheres for at-risk youth is through drop-in programs with low demands and few institutional restrictions (Slesnick, Feng, et al., 2016). Service connections and inclusion have demonstrated an increased likelihood that those experiencing homelessness will exit the streets (Slesnick, Feng, et al., 2016), and those who feel isolated and do not integrate into their community often reexperience homelessness (Ecker & Aubry, 2017). Often youth are tasked with creating a new identity, as they transition from the streets and have to rebuild relationships with others after years of traumatic experiences (Kidd et al., 2016). Having supports available was of great benefit to youth as they created a new way of life and an identity outside of homelessness (Kidd et al., 2016).

In their study contrasting homeless youth with access to a drop-in centre against youth in a homeless shelter with no access to a drop-in centre, Slesnick, Feng, et al. (2016) found the youth accessing the drop-in centre experienced an increase in self-confidence, secondary school

outcomes, reduction in drinking to intoxication, and greater HIV knowledge. In addition to drop-in centres providing a space for social inclusion, they also reduced homelessness by keeping youth attached to service providers and supports (Slesnick, Dashora, Letcher, Erdem, & Serovich, 2009). Regardless of the type of neighbourhood, individuals who felt included in a social group viewed their neighbourhood as safe, likely because there were several elements in place that contributed to their perception of security, including relationships in their community and supports when things do not go well (Ecker & Aubry, 2017).

With case management supports being provided to youth and social inclusion considered, youth will ideally be better supported to transition into housing stability. In a Canadian study on housing stability for homeless youth, Frederick et al. (2014) noted six key elements that predict stability: (a) the type of housing, and whether the housing depends on roommates paying rent; (b) whether the individual has maintained their housing; (c) whether they spend time in their accommodations; (d) rent is sustainable, and can be confidently paid with their income level; (e) the person is engaged in employment or education, increasing self-esteem, supporting the creation of a daily routine, and social inclusion (Mayock & Parker, 2017); and, (f) finally, whether or not there was harmful use of drugs or alcohol or criminal justice involvement that could lead to incarceration. As both are often attributed to a loss in housing. Frederick et al. (2014) found if shelter workers considered and planned for these six items, then homeless youth were more likely to achieve housing stability. However, the stability is best understood as a continuum that is subject to change and is always requiring work (Frederick et al., 2014).

Chapter Two Summary

Homeless youth have often experienced several traumas before they present at an emergency shelter for support. Their pathways into homelessness are diverse and unique. Perhaps if shelter resources were “abundant and practices were flexible, we might not find it necessary to describe people as being complex or hard to service at all” (Quirouette, 2016, p. 323). However, currently most emergency shelters can offer very limited supports, which do not work for youth clients who are young, inexperienced, and need significant support to exit homelessness. If clients had access to the intensity of support that they require, it would impact how quickly youth are rehoused and whether they can remain housed and achieve housing stability. Increased supports would also impact shelter workers who often feel overwhelmed by their inability to manage all of their tasks and by their ineffectiveness in helping youth in the long term. Youth also require support after exiting the emergency shelter to maintain their housing, develop community, and move forward with their goals.

This study considered how YES may implement best practices, including rapidly rehousing homeless youth, while supporting their complex needs. To do this, I consulted youth, YES staff, and Fourcast staff. The following chapter details how I consulted these groups, gathered the data, and analyzed the information gathered to inform the research question and subquestions.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In this chapter, I introduce action research engagement (ARE) and describe the project participants, followed by a summary of the data collection methods used, the study conduct, and data analysis. Finally, I discuss the ethical implications of the study.

Methodology

Action research and action research engagement. To conduct this research I used the AR methodology, which is a collaborative, democratic partnership between the researcher and inquiry participants (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Armenakis and Harris (2009) noted change initiatives in organizations often fail due to lack of employee investment in the change. AR involves the completion of several cycles of acting, evaluating, thinking, and acting again (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Stringer, 2014). By using this methodology, I provided participants in the present study with an opportunity to create new knowledge throughout the inquiry process, and I embraced all participants as experts on the topic of orienting YES towards rapid rehousing.

AR encourages employee motivation by personally engaging organizational members early on in the change process (Rowe, Graf, Agger-Gupta, Piggot-Irvine, & Harris, 2013). AR is a qualitative methodology that focuses the research on the why and how of human interactions at YES (Agee, 2009). Like Glesne (2016), I believe in the wisdom of the people involved in the issue and see value in qualitative research being used to “translate life into text” (p. iv). In using AR, I provided clients as well as staff of YES with opportunities to contribute to inform the research, thereby influencing organizational changes and increasing the likelihood of a successful change initiative.

While keeping within the frame of the AR, in this research I embraced Rowe et al.'s (2013) action research engagement (ARE) model as the overarching inquiry methodology.² The ARE model focuses on engagement and building momentum for change within the organization, and then passes the action recommendations back to the Project Sponsor. This was done through a meeting with the Project Sponsor and a board member, at which the implementation of recommendations was planned. The research focussed on the first phases of change, in which members of the organization are engaged in preparing for the change initiative (Rowe et al., 2013). This study plan included completing one cycle of AR, and the recommendations to be passed on to the Executive Director to carry on with (Rowe et al., 2013). As the project sponsor, the Executive Director received the study recommendations and has plans to begin implementing them as soon as possible. The Executive Director has the authority and support of the YES Board of Directors to complete the recommendations and move YES toward a rehousing practice.

The AR process was valuable for the staff of YES because it allowed participants to build inquiry skills within the organization and acknowledged all of the participants as active, valued members (Rowe et al., 2013). As an employee of YES, I was able to ensure the process was collaborative, inclusive, and appropriate for the organization's internal culture (Glesne, 2016). Collaborative inquiry encouraged participants' personal development and may better equip them to use inquiry skills in their future work (Glesne, 2016; Stringer, 2014).

Multiple qualitative methods. As a researcher, I played an active role in collecting the data. In order to ensure the data produced were representative of the participants' opinions, I

² For the remainder of this thesis, all references to AR encompass the overarching methodology of ARE.

used multiple qualitative methods. A multimethod approach was used in order to triangulate the data, and to ensure validity (Glesne, 2016). Accordingly, the methodology included three sources of data: (a) interviews of the youth clients, (b) a focus group session for YES staff, and (c) interviews of with the staff from YES's external collaborator agency (Fourcast).

Inquiry team. An inquiry team supported me in conducting this research. Inquiry team members' roles included reviewing questions for the interview and focus groups, providing feedback on completing data collection, and facilitating the data collection for the focus group with YES Staff. I held power over some of the project participants, as their direct supervisor; therefore, the inquiry team completed data collection with the YES staff to ensure my position of power did not impact the data.

The inquiry team consisted of one board member from YES, the Youth Outreach Worker at YES, and a colleague from my cohort in the Master of Arts in Leadership Program. The board member from YES has earned a Master of Social Work degree and has years of experience in the social work field. In addition, she is the Vice Chair of the YES Board and has the ability to support the Project Sponsor in implementing the recommendations.

The board member reviewed the research questions and provided feedback on the methods design. The youth outreach worker holds no power over any shelter workers or outreach services employees at YES. He also reviewed the methods questions and organized the YES staff focus group. The youth outreach worker ensured the recordings were sent to a transcriptionist and secured the staff consent forms in a locked cabinet for 12 months. My colleague from the Master of Arts in Leadership program reviewed the focus group questions and facilitated the

focus group with YES staff. The youth outreach worker supported this process as someone who is internal to the agency.

Project Participants

The participants included (a) four youth who had accessed YES services, (b) three employees from Fourcast, an external support agency, and (c) nine frontline employees from YES. I selected these population groups as these stakeholders could provide unique insight into the inquiry topic.

The inquiry embraced youth as experts and aimed to allow for an opportunity to shape the YES shelter to better meet their needs (Nichols, 2008a). A key element to qualitative research is understanding a person's experience of events or their condition as well as what happened (Agee, 2009). Social service institutions are rarely organized from the standpoint of a youth service user; in particular, those who experience homelessness and marginalization are often missed, so their involvement was key (Nichols, 2008a).

The first participant group of four youth included previous YES clients who have been living independently of YES for at least 6 months. Only clients who had not accessed YES's emergency shelter service for at least 6 months were invited to participate so that they had time to stabilize and did not feel dependent on YES for their basic needs. As the researcher, I completed the interviews with all youth clients who consented to participate and met the recruitment criteria.

For this study, I defined youth clients as any young person over the age of 16 years and under the age of 24 years. Any young person entering the shelter at the age of 16 years old is considered of an age to make his or her own choices and is independent of a legal guardian.

Therefore, these clients consented to their own participation in the research. These participants were known clients who had previously accessed emergency shelter at YES and remained connected to YES through the school program, outreach services, or the food cupboard. I contacted these clients via YES staff working in the Carriage House School program, the outreach services, and the Food Cupboard program. The staff approached clients who they knew had been out of shelter services for at least 6 months and invited them to participate in the research. If the client expressed interest, the staff connected the client to me, as the primary researcher. I selected clients on a first-come, first-served basis. The first four youth who indicated interest and met the participation criteria participated in the interviews.

The second group of participants comprised of three employees from the Fourcast, a social service agency actively partnering with YES to support homeless youth. These individuals worked in the homelessness sector in Peterborough and also had significant experience with the homeless shelter system. Their input was important, as it provided a voice from outside of YES, offering a different perspective. As I have no power over any of the individuals from Fourcast, I invited the participants via email to take part in the interviews. The positions I invited included the intensive case manager assigned to YES clients, the intensive case manager assigned to Peterborough's men shelter, their clinical supervisor, and the Regional Housing First Coordinator. All but one agreed to being interviewed.

The last participant group was the frontline services team at YES. As experts in their work, YES staff provided insight into how the work environment at the shelter may be arranged in a way that supports rapid rehousing. To invite participants to the focus group, a member of the inquiry team sent an invitation to all full- and part-time employees, 18 people in total. Of those

invited, nine staff members chose to participate in the focus group. The inquiry team member assured potential focus group attendees that their choice to participate, or to not, would remain completely anonymous and would not be shared with me, the researcher, or the Project Sponsor. As the Shelter Supervisor, I held power over the shelter team employees. Hence, I arranged for the focus group to be facilitated by a Master of Arts in Leadership colleague, who is not involved in YES. The focus group facilitator sent the recordings of the session directly to a transcriptionist who removed all identifying information prior to sending the transcripts to me for analysis. This process ensured that I did not have access to identifying information on individual employees and encouraged them to share their honest opinions during the data collection.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods included interviews with former youth clients and Fourcast employees and one focus group session with YES staff. I chose to conduct multiple methods with three different stakeholder groups in order to triangulate the data, increasing trustworthiness of the results (Glesne, 2016). Triangulation of the data included using multiple methods and three stakeholder groups, which allowed me to validate the claims through varied lenses (Glesne, 2016). With the help of the focus group facilitator, I collected the data over the course of 6 weeks. First, the facilitator held the focus group with the YES staff. I then conducted the interviews with youth clients and Fourcast employees.

The focus group allowed the participants to respond and build on the comments and reactions of the other participants present (Liamputtong, 2011; Morgan, 2012). Not only was the data from a focus group valuable, but I also found studying the interaction between participants provided rich information (Morgan, 2012). Focus group participants not only brought their own

opinions and thoughts, but they were influenced by those around them (Liamputtong, 2011; Marrelli, 2008; Morgan, 2012). The YES focus group participants all had something in common, as staff from the same organization, and were able to talk openly and explore unexpected views (Glesne, 2016; Liamputtong, 2011; Marrelli, 2008). In addition to rich data collection, Marrelli (2008) asserted focus groups generate “feelings of involvement and buy in among participants” (p. 39), making it a logical method to use when proposing organizational change. It was important that I include this stakeholder group in the inquiry, as the YES staff will be involved in implementing and enacting the proposed changes at YES, which I discuss in further detail in Chapter 5.

I chose to conduct interviews because this method provides the interviewee with an opportunity to explore the events in their lives and contextualize them in their own way (Doody & Noonan, 2013). For the youth population, I employed a semistructured interview style, as it provided interviewees with flexibility and an opportunity for me to be supportive of their needs (Wilson, 2012). The interview method also allowed me to remove any literacy barriers, did not require the participant to use any tools, and could be accommodative of the participant’s schedule (Wilson, 2012). Liamputtong (2011) noted, in the case of an interview there is no space for participants to build off of one another, which is a benefit that comes with group methods. However, due to the sensitive nature of the interviews, it seemed best for me to ensure that all participants were not exposed to other’s experiences to reduce potential negative impacts. In the semistructured interviews I asked the youth clients six questions (see Appendix B), allowing for adaptation to support the youth’s success in completing the interview (Rowley, 2012).

When interviewing the Fourcast employees, I used a structured interview so that I could effectively compare and contrast the results with the data from previous methods (Glesne, 2016). I found the interviews to be an effective method, as they allowed for an understanding of experiences, opinions, attitudes, values, and processes (Rowley, 2012).

Study Conduct

In this section I detail how my inquiry team and I recruited participants, developed and tested the methods, determined the order and conduct plan for each method, achieved trustworthy data, and secured sponsor engagement. Following ethics approval from Royal Roads University, I finalized my inquiry team, and asked each member to complete the inquiry team agreement (see Appendix C). My inquiry team and I then began data collection with the YES clients, Fourcast staff, and YES staff.

I created the questions for each method in consultation with my inquiry team. I asked the inquiry team members to not only answer the questions from the perspective of the specific participant, but to also consider the usability of the questions with the target participants (Glesne, 2016). I then modified the questions (see Appendices B, D, and E) accordingly, and reviewed them one last time with the inquiry team and my Academic Supervisor before proceeding with data collection.

In order to recruit youth clients, a member of my inquiry team placed a post on the YES Facebook (YES, n.d.-b) and Twitter (YES Shelter Ptbo, n.d.) pages asking for any previous clients who are interested in research participation to connect with him (see Appendix F). The inquiry team member also spoke with other staff at YES, asking them to spread the word about the research opportunity. The inquiry team member then set up a phone conversation with

potential participants and explained in plain language what the research is about and what their involvement would look like (see Appendix G). If the client chose to engage, the inquiry team member connected me with the participant, and I set up a time to meet with the individual. Before beginning the interview, I explained the introductory letter (see Appendix H) and consent form (see Appendix I) to them. The participants were able to choose a location from a list of community agencies or the high school classroom near YES. All youth chose to have their interview completed at the high school classroom, and the interviews were between 8 and 13 minutes long. I audio-recorded all interviews with participants' consent, I offered all interviewees the opportunity to read their interview transcripts (Glesne, 2016); however, none of them chose to do so, citing that they felt they had provided all the information they could.

The next stage was to recruit interview participants from Fourcast. To this end, I sent the introductory letter (see Appendix J) and consent form (see Appendix K) to the Fourcast intensive case managers at YES, the intensive case manager at Brock Mission Men's Shelter, their clinical supervisor, and the Housing First Coordinator. Three individuals chose to participate. I held each interview at a location of the interviewee's choice. Two chose to be interviewed at YES's main site and one asked to be interviewed at the Brock Mission men's shelter. The interviews were between 12 minutes and 22 minutes in length. Once again, I offered participants the opportunity to read through their interview transcripts (Glesne, 2016); however, none of the participants chose to make any changes.

Upon my request, a member of my inquiry team organized the YES staff focus group to ensure their identities remained unknown to me, since I was in a supervisory role of the participants. In order to recruit participants, an inquiry team member sent an email (see

Appendix L) and attached the introductory letter (see Appendix M) and consent form (see Appendix N) to all YES frontline staff asking for an expression of interest. The inquiry team member informed the individuals who responded about the location of the focus group, which was held in a community space approximately 10 minutes away from the YES shelter. The focus group was 1 hour long, and nine staff members took part. As previously noted, a member of the inquiry team facilitated the focus group; once completed, the focus group facilitator sent the audio recording directly to a transcriptionist, who removed all identifying information before forwarding the transcripts to me. The focus group facilitator explained this process to the participants prior to beginning the session.

I then analyzed the data to provide the source of recommendations for the YES administrators. I arranged a make-it-happen meeting with the Project Sponsor and one board member. During this meeting I presented the recommendations, facilitated a discussion about how best to implement them, and received feedback on them; I incorporated the Project Sponsor and board member's suggestions into the study recommendations presented in the final chapter of this report.

Data Analysis and Validity

To uphold the trustworthiness of the data, I utilized a number of strategies including triangulating the data, analyzing information in a two-tiered system, and employing negative case analysis and a reflective process (Saldaña, 2016). Triangulating the data from three population groups using two methods (focus groups and interviews), allowed me to examine complex perspectives (Glesne, 2016; Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007; Stringer, 2014). Throughout all methods, I ensured all participants had the opportunity to explore and present

their experiences in order to allow the fullest possible engagement (Stringer, 2014). Through engaging internal and external stakeholders, this inquiry included representation from several parts of the YES system (Stringer, 2014; Weisbord, 2012).

As previously noted, after the data collection, either I or the focus group facilitator sent the audio recordings of the sessions to a transcriptionist who created anonymized transcripts. In the case of the interviews, following the advice of Glesne (2016) and Stringer (2014), I offered the transcripts to the participants, either via email or read over the phone, to check for accuracy; none of the participants chose to do this. The focus group facilitator had member checked the captured themes during the focus group session. The next step was for me to analyze the data from the interviews and the focus group.

I analyzed the data using a two-level approach. First, I pooled data from all three sources (the youth clients, the YES staff, and the Fourcast employees) to examine the common themes that emerged across all three groups of participants. Next, I examined the three participant group data sets separately to identify unique, group-specific themes that may emerge.

Throughout the coding process I attempted to apply the verbatim principle whenever possible, which involved using terms and concepts drawn directly from the words of participants, rather than paraphrasing (Stringer, 2014). I began by looking for word repetitions and key words taken in context (Ryan & Bernhard, 2003). This supported me in identifying themes and assigning them codes (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011; Glesne, 2016; Ryan & Bernhard, 2003). I then used these codes to look for themes, patterns, and processes to see links in the data (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011; Glesne, 2016; Ryan & Bernhard, 2003; Saldaña, 2016). I went through the data and considered whether there was missing information or themes that

appeared in one of the methods but not the others (Ryan & Bernhard, 2003; Schwandt et al., 2007). As outlined by Glesne (2016), I looked at each method on its own, and then compared and contrasted the information taken from the three different participant groups. At the end of data collection, I analyzed all the data together to compare and contrast information and triangulate the data (Glesne, 2016; Schwandt et al., 2007; Stringer, 2014). While analyzing the data I looked for quotes that represented the common experience to highlight the topic in participants' words. While considering emerging themes I looked for outliers and considered the consensus to the emerging themes.

When analyzing the data, I looked specifically for negative cases in addition to emerging patterns (Glesne, 2016; Schwandt et al., 2007). As I analyzed the data, I followed Glesne's (2016) advice and asked myself reflective questions to ensure that my biases were not influencing the perspectives that are reflected in this report. I discussed these biases with my inquiry team and Academic Supervisor, encouraging a reflective process (Glesne, 2016; Schwandt et al., 2007). Lastly, I used rich, thick description to allow readers to understand the interpretations I arrive at (Glesne, 2016; Schwandt et al., 2007). Through personal reflection and utilizing validity strategies with project participants, I was able to demonstrate that the information collected is trustworthy to the reading audience.

Ethical Issues

My inquiry began with an ethical review by the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board. This process ensured that all participants were protected from any negative consequences as well as possible. I received permission from the Research Ethics Board on December 21, 2016. Throughout my inquiry, I was tasked with following three core elements of the *Tri-*

Council Policy Statement's ethical guidelines, which include respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014).

Respect for persons. In alignment with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2014), I ensured respect for persons was at the forefront of the entire inquiry project. My data collection method involved interviewing previously homeless youth. In order to ensure they could exercise their right to autonomy, I wrote all documents to be shared with YES clients (e.g., invitations and consent forms) in a way that was developmentally appropriate for the youth and easy to understand. While working with YES staff members and Fourcast employees, I requested ongoing consent and delivered the consent materials in advance of the data collection so they had an opportunity to review and consider all information regarding the research before deciding whether or not they would participate. All participants had access to the consent forms, which provided clear information on the research.

Concern for welfare. Concern for welfare involves the impact on individuals' health as well as their economic and social circumstances (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2014). In order to best support the youth clients being interviewed, I began by asking questions about their current situations rather than their past experiences (Doody & Noonan, 2013). This allowed interviewees to ground themselves in their current reality, develop some trust in me as a researcher, and demonstrate to me whether they felt comfortable enough to progress (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Although I had their signed consent forms, I again sought interviewees' verbal consent prior to asking about their past experiences. I ensured youth had access to a counsellor

after the interview and provided them with information on the crisis support line, which is available 24 hours a day. The inquiry team member reminded YES staff of confidentiality within the focus group session and that the facilitator and I could not ensure their anonymity, as they were taking part in a group method. I also ensured that I was not involved in the data collection with YES staff to respect their wellbeing.

Justice. Justice refers to the obligation a researcher has to ensure that all people are treated fair and equitably (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2014). In order to ensure that youth were treated equitably I chose not to make assumptions of their abilities or access to goods (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2014). I ensured that plain language was used at all times, and I checked for understanding often. When completing the focus group, I ensured power-over issues were thoroughly addressed by engaging a front-line staff member to organize the focus group and a Master of Arts in Leadership colleague to facilitate the group session. The YES staff participant information was never shared with me, providing anonymity to all employees. This ensured that all employees of YES had equal opportunity to participate in the research.

Chapter Three Summary

In this chapter, I described the AR methodology, which I chose for this inquiry. I described the study conduct, project participants, and data collection plan. I closed the chapter with details of how I managed ethical considerations that arose in the research process. The following chapter describes the research findings, the conclusions derived from the findings and literature review, and the scope and limitations of the study.

Chapter Four: Inquiry Project Findings and Conclusions

In this chapter I provide an overview of the findings, followed by a detailed discussion of each finding. I then outline the study conclusions, melding together results from data collection and the relevant literature. I close the chapter by discussing the scope and some limitations of the study.

The purpose of this inquiry was to answer the research question: What strategies can the YES Shelter for Youth and Families adopt to strengthen rapid rehousing practices, while still addressing the complex needs of clients? The inquiry question was addressed through a series of interviews with youth and Fourcast staff as well as a focus group with YES staff. I conducted the interviews and focus group session to gather data in an effort to answer the inquiry question as well as the following subquestions:

1. What brings youth clients to access YES's emergency services, and what encourages them to return for future stays, or remain in shelter past their maximum one-time stay of 42 days?
2. What are the current effective rapid rehousing strategies?
3. What could an ideal rapid rehousing service look like at YES?
4. What supports and resources are required to successfully house youth?
5. What are the unique housing needs of youth?

Study Findings

During data analysis I looked at all three participant groups together, and then considered each group separately. I present the findings by first sharing the three main themes found among

all participant groups, and I close this section with findings that were specific to each participant group. The data analyses involving all three groups of participants resulted in three main themes:

1. Increasing staff capacity is critical.
2. The shelter environment needs to equip and encourage youth to find housing.
3. Youth need help to be successful in their housing retention and prevent repeat shelter visits.

Within each of the three common themes, several subthemes emerged. These subthemes provide a deeper perspective on each theme, and in some cases propose a solution to the situation. Each finding begins with a summary figure outlining each subtheme, which were the codes I used when analyzing the data. Following the figures, I discuss each of the findings and subthemes. In presenting the data I used the following participant codes maintain participant anonymity: IY for data from youth interviewees, IF for data from Fourcast interviewees, and FG for information from the YES staff focus group session.

Theme 1: Increasing staff capacity is critical. In all three participant groups and in every single interview, staff capacity at the YES shelter arose as the main theme. In the focus group, participants mentioned this theme 53 times (see Figure 2). The focus group of YES staff spoke of their role being too diverse to manage and having difficulty balancing immediate shelter needs with their case management responsibilities. YES staff, youth clients, and Fourcast staff all noted the need for a full-time case manager role and a rehousing worker as key positions if the shelter wishes to rehouse clients while still addressing their complex needs. The participants were confident that with additional capacity, youth would be better equipped to move forward, maintain their housing, and staff satisfaction would likely improve as well.

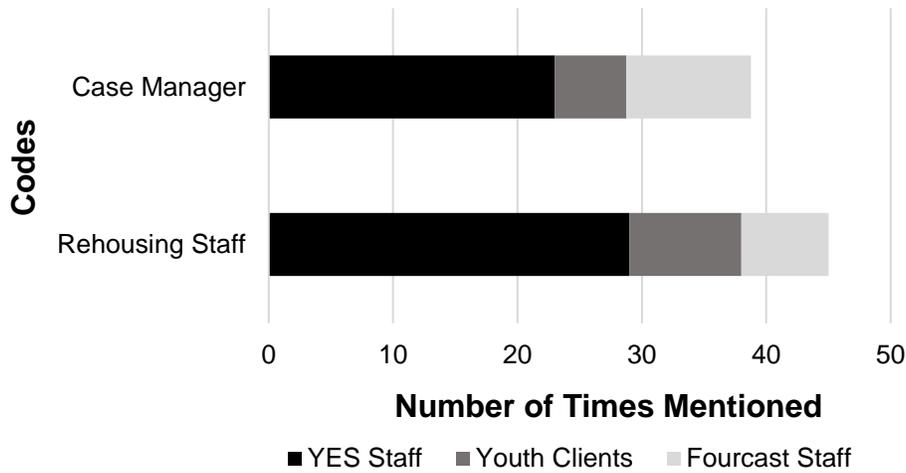


Figure 2. Staff capacity codes.

YES staff currently experience their role as being too diverse to be effectively supporting clients and completing case management duties. In the focus group, a YES shelter worker explained, “It’s hard to sit down with the client and talk to them about housing when you’ve got toilets overflowing, dinners to be made and the phone ringing, kids in crisis.” Several staff members also discussed the difficulty in case managing when they complete shift work with varying hours (FG). The shelter staff talked about how cohesive support takes a back burner, when YES is “cobbling [case management] together from various roles that have so many other things to do” (FG). The YES staff seemed to recognize that funding is a barrier to these needs being met and expressed frustration that they operate in such an underresourced situation (FG). YES staff mentioned that their requests for increased staffing are not extravagant; rather, they are “just asking for the basics” (FG). YES staff felt that, due to the skeletal staffing, they were unable to hold clients to clear expectations, since so many things get missed when a staff member is being pulled in several directions (FG). When the facilitator asked YES staff what the

shelter could do to increase the staff's effectiveness, the focus group participants discussed the need for at least one full-time case manager and a full-time rehousing staff member.

The youth clients and Fourcast staff participants were in agreement with YES staff that a rehousing worker was key to supporting youth into their housing (IY; IF; FG). One participant stated, "YES should find a way to free up enough resources to have a point person for rapid rehousing within the shelter so that the kids who came through would have access and support to immediately be looking for housing" (IF). When I asked youth what could have made the move from shelter to housing easier, each youth interviewee mentioned a staff member to help them call landlords, go to viewings, and help them move in. One youth interviewee explained, "Housing searches are embarrassing, landlords are rude and don't understand you. They don't care. It's so hard." When I asked this same young person what would have helped, the participant said, "Honestly, if the staff were able to connect to landlords and basically just tell them what's going on, so then it's not like a miscommunication type thing and they would understand better" (IY).

Two of the four youth I interviewed experienced having a staff member support them in their housing search. One of these young people was fortunate to be connected to YES's transitional housing program, and the other had access to a youth outreach worker. One youth felt that receiving the support from the youth outreach worker during her housing search was the only reason why she was able to move out of the shelter easily (IY). She said she felt this kind of support should be offered to everyone at YES (IY). YES staff described the situation youth deal with: "Landlords don't want to rent to 16 year olds, landlords don't want to rent to 17 year olds, landlords don't want to rent to 18 year olds, and they definitely don't want to rent to nobody

who's on OW [Ontario Works support]" (FG). The consequence of this situation is that "16 year old females [are] moving in with 70 year old males that are drug users, and it's very unsafe for them" (FG). While talking about what youth need to move out of the shelter quickly, a Fourcast staff interviewee shared that YES would need "a point person for rapid rehousing within the shelter so that kids who came through would have the access and support to immediately be looking for housing and reaching their goals." This rehousing worker could also provide some support once clients have moved on, which I discuss in more detail in Theme 3. YES staff also mentioned a rehousing worker as an important resource for YES to invest in.

For higher acuity clients, Fourcast and YES staff recommended hiring someone with dedicated clinical skills (IF; FG). All three Fourcast interviewees talked about the need for YES to further develop a relationship with Fourcast to have a full-time case manager at the shelter. This position would provide intensive supports using clinical skills and help youth navigate the complex mental health and addictions system. YES staff also saw the value in having someone with intensive support capabilities full time (FG). One YES staff member said, "We need a case manager, somebody that stays during the day, that's there full time, stays focussed on housing and supports, and doesn't have other responsibilities" (FG). The rehousing support staff and case manager could also support youth while they are in their housing, "to help them problem solve, because a lot of the times these kids are coming from very dysfunctional families and have not had the foundation" (IF). While YES currently has a half-time case manager from Fourcast, "a lot can happen in the shelter in 24 hours, and YES has a lot of clients needing intense supports" (IF). The Fourcast employee is embedded at YES for half of a position and provides case management support to YES clients. Changing the Fourcast position to a full-time case

management position and creating a full-time rehousing position seemed a desirable solution to all participant groups to rehouse youth quickly and support their complex needs (IY; IF; FG).

Theme 2: The shelter environment needs to equip and encourage youth to find housing. While youth are in the shelter, they engage with an institutional environment that has three meals a day, little supervision, 24/7 staffing for emotional needs, a social atmosphere, several expectations, and an assumption that youth are motivated to find housing quickly and exit the shelter. The focus group and interview participants shared that there are a number of things the shelter could be doing to provide youth with the tools they need to find housing and to create an atmosphere that encourages them to move on from the shelter to long-term housing. The shelter environment was discussed in two ways: (a) not doing and providing enough to allow clients to move on and (b) providing an environment that youth wish to be in. The codes that grouped these comments include physical resources, a full understanding of the client, shelter expectations, client motivation, and connecting clients to supports (see Figure 3).

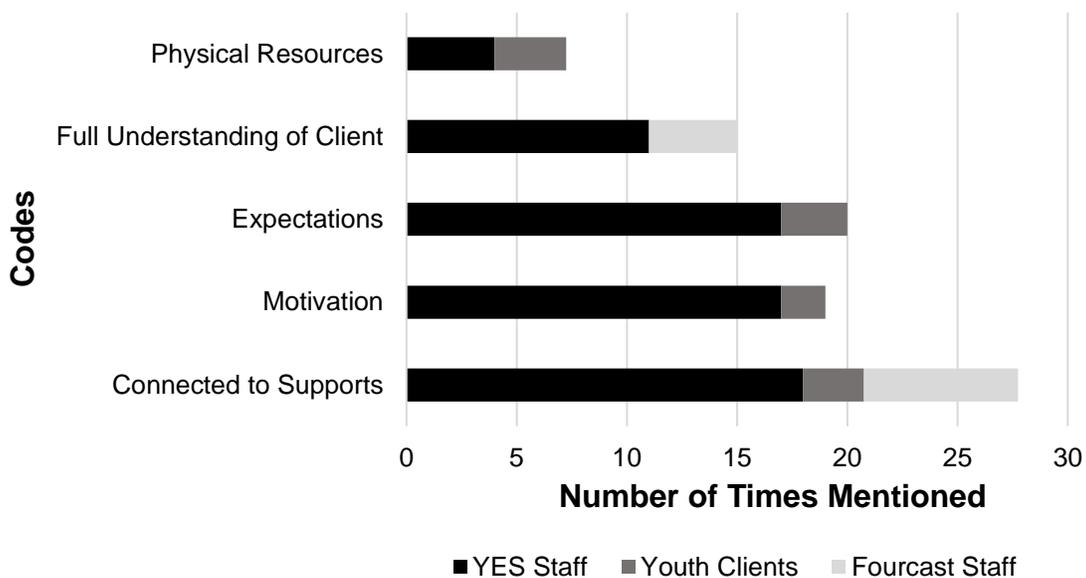


Figure 3. Shelter environment codes.

Computers and/or wi-fi. In a society that embraces technology, searching for housing has changed from when the shelter opened its doors in 2000 (YES, n.d.-a). For the most part, housing listings can be found online, and landlords often expect people to email them to arrange for viewings. The shelter currently does not have Internet or computers for clients to use while they are inside the shelter. Clients are expected to go to the library or other resource centres in Peterborough to use computers and find housing. One youth explained that this can be difficult, because some places require identification to use their services, while others are often closed and not available when clients need them (IY). The focus group participants also highlighted that it is often helpful for YES staff to be aware of clients' housing searches, and if clients do this offsite, the staff cannot support them through the process. All youth clients felt that YES needed to provide wi-fi, computers, or both (IY), and YES staff were in agreement (FG). The YES staff and youth clients stated that this would need to come with clear rules on how wi-fi and Internet should be used (IY; FG).

Wake-up calls and out-of-shelter times. Youth clients also talked about the importance of rules and clear expectations when in the shelter (IY). All four youth interviewees mentioned wake-up calls from shelter staff as one of the main ways they stayed motivated to go to school and look for housing. One youth client said that wake-up calls at YES used to be mandatory, "But now it's more loose. My friends say you can just go back to sleep, and like you obviously need that push, you're in a homeless shelter" (IY).

When asked, what was most helpful to you in finding housing, another youth immediately replied, "The fact that the staff got us up in the morning" (IY). Two youth interviewees went on to talk about a period at YES when youth had to leave their rooms for the

day and could not go back in until late in the afternoon. They felt this encouraged them to go out and look for housing and meet with staff (IY). YES staff also spoke about making it mandatory to leave the shelter for a certain length of time during the day, unless the client had a meeting with a staff member (FG). Staff who had been at YES for several years said they used to do this and felt it pushed clients a bit further in their housing search (FG). When asked how it currently is at the shelter, the staff explained that wake-up calls happen, but most clients just go back to sleep, and some clients rarely leave their rooms (FG). One staff felt that without a mandatory time to be out of the shelter, clients do not move forward (FG). Taking a youth's perspective, one staff member said, "I got someone cooking for me; I've got somebody doing everything. . . . Why would I be looking [for housing]? . . . So comfort level with clients is huge where they just get comfortable and don't want to move on" (FG).

Participants identified wake-up calls and expectations to be out of the shelter as ways to motivate clients to move forward and to support clients in being accountable to their goals (IY; FG). Participants described client motivation to leave the shelter and find housing as the main element that set apart those who have repeat shelter visits and those who do not (IY; FG). Not only would wake-up calls and expectations to leave the shelter support a client's ability to find housing, but staff also noted this would allow them to engage with clients during the day in a more meaningful way (FG).

Full understanding of client. Without a full understanding of the client, the youth's needs were not well met (IF). Shelter staff talked about how often they missed key pieces of information as their role is so diverse and makes it hard to work intensely with one client and follow the youth's entire situation. One participant suggested that the case manager would gain

“a better understanding of what’s happened in the past, what breaks down, how can we prevent that. You really need to get a full picture of who these kids are” (IF). This fulsome picture of the young person’s needs would allow for the most appropriate supports to be connected. However, all participants indicated that supports that disappear after a client receives housing is not helpful; they found this to be a reverse incentive, encouraging youth to remain in the shelter, or to return in the future (IY; IF; FG).

The participants all offered ideas for how the shelter could be improved upon to support a rapid rehousing process. They suggested access to computers and wi-fi would provide youth with fundamental tools needed to find housing (IY; IF; FG). In addition, clarity and expectations on wake-up calls and times out of the shelter seemed to impact client motivation and support youth’s success (IY; IF; FG). Finally, a full understanding of the client was discussed as a pivotal part of supporting a successful exit out of homelessness (IF; FG). Furthermore, participants advised YES to consider how to combat recidivism once a client is housed, as this is an important part of ensuring youth are not forced back into homelessness (IY; IF; FG).

Theme 3: Youth need help to be successful in their housing retention and prevent repeat shelter visits. Through conducting this research I sought to look not only at how to rehouse homeless youth quickly, but also how to address their complex needs. The goal, when a client leaves the shelter, is to never have them return to the shelter, if possible. The data highlighted the importance of support when clients have exited the shelter. One shelter worker was quick to say that youth return to the shelter because

they don't have the skills to cook for themselves, or to budget to buy toilet paper, or they're living in a rooming house that they don't want to be in . . . it's unsafe . . . so they come back to a place where it is safe and they have things provided for them. (FG)

The shelter workers elaborated and explained that YES is often the youth's "home" (FG); at the shelter "there's a sense of family . . . they're comfortable" (FG). The subthemes that emerged include food, social inclusion, appropriate housing, independent living skills, financial support, and the case manager and rehousing worker positions discussed in Theme 1 (see Figure 4).

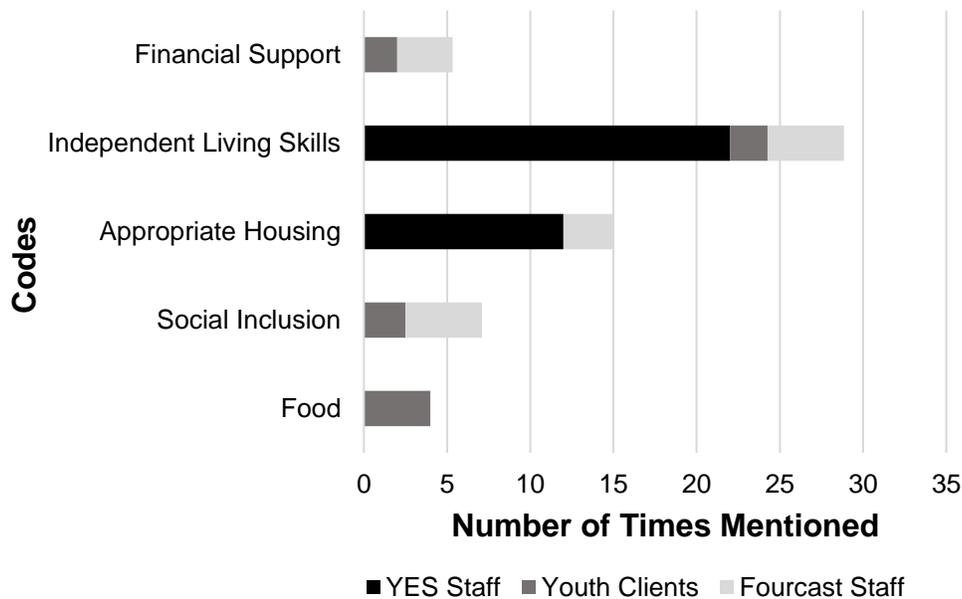


Figure 4. Success in housing codes.

Food. Youth clients talked about food often. When asked why they think clients return to the shelter, or remain in shelter passed their 6 weeks, all four youth interviewees said that YES provides reliable food. YES clients said the reason people stay at the shelter and come back is because of the food (IY). "It's comforting you know that you're going to have that food there all the time instead of having to worry about when am I going to have my next meal, you know?"

(IY). When discussing food, one youth interviewee stated YES's food cupboard "has been like a huge help for me and my friends." The YES clients also talked about grocery shopping and food preparation being their biggest learnings and struggles when they were living on their own (IY).

Client interviewees cited food insecurity as both a reason to return to the shelter and an area where youth would like support when they leave the shelter. Shelter workers and Fourcast staff did not talk about food as a reason for youth to be in the shelter, but they did talk about food in connection with life skills (IF; FG). A Fourcast interviewee suggested that a rehousing worker could "take them grocery shopping once a week at first just to make sure they have food that's reasonable for eating or healthy for them to eat, and making sure they know how to properly store that food." YES staff also noted the shelter used to provide cooking classes and that most youth do not have the skills to cook for themselves (FG). Any plan to keep youth housed should consider food, access to it, and skills to prepare it as key elements of successfully being housed.

Life-skills training. Alongside food are several other essential life skills that homeless youth have often not yet learned. The importance of continued support for youth who have left the shelter is paramount; they need someone "kind of checking in on them as much as they can and making sure they have everything they need to stay in that housing and be successful" (IF). One Fourcast interviewee noted that understanding the youth's capabilities allows for a plan to be put in place: "A lot of times they're coming in with little life skills, and they're expected to kind of move into their own independent housing, and be expected to kind of maintain that on their own."

Budgeting was another life skill that youth said was hard at first. YES and Fourcast staff recognized this as well (IF; FG), and Fourcast staff indicated that youth-specific trustees would

support youth (IF). Without life-skills support, housing is a challenge and not pleasant. It is understandable that youth would return to the shelter if their basic needs are not met, despite being housed.

Social inclusion. Youth clients and Fourcast staff talked about social inclusion throughout all of their interviews (IY; IF). Youth explained that one benefit to being at YES was making friends and meeting people going through similar experiences as them (IY). They also talked about feeling safer and more connected to youth at the shelter than they do in other spheres of their lives. Fourcast employees discussed setting youth up with spaces to be engaged and become a part of various communities, including school, work, and among other service providers. One Fourcast employee described YES as an environment that naturally creates community:

It's kind of like that university analogy. You go away to university—new town, you don't know anybody, you make friends in residence, and then you decide to share a house with them. And then you have a community, and you figure out how to cook together, and pay rent together, and all those things. And in an ideal world all those pieces kind of slowly fall into place until you're able to live independently. And I think that homeless youth are looking for some of those same things. Like a place, a group of people to belong to, people who have interests and that kind of thing. They can find that at YES. Cause they have a common experience. (IF)

Youth also discussed the isolation they felt when living on their own, including isolation from YES staff when they left the shelter (IY). One youth interviewee suggested one reason youth do not want to leave the shelter is “because they have the support they need here,” and

“when they take that step forward they lose some of their supports.” Another Fourcast staff recommended that youth “be connected with an education or work or apprenticeship—something like that, something to keep them focussed” (IF). YES staff talked about some sort of way to engage with the organization outside of being a resident in the emergency shelter (FG). One idea that YES staff mentioned is a drop-in night; the staff also proposed youth who are living outside of the shelter be able to still meet with the case manager and rapid rehousing worker (FG). YES staff felt that the youth accessing the emergency shelter did not feel well connected to other places, which was one of the many reasons for them to return to YES often (FG). Focus group participants mentioned the Carriage House and food cupboard as positive ways youth remain connected without being in shelter.

Findings specific to each participant group. To summarize the pooled data, I utilized software to look at the most commonly used words by all three participant groups. Figure 5 presents these terms in a word cloud, illustrating the 50 most frequently used words—the larger the word, greater the frequency of use.

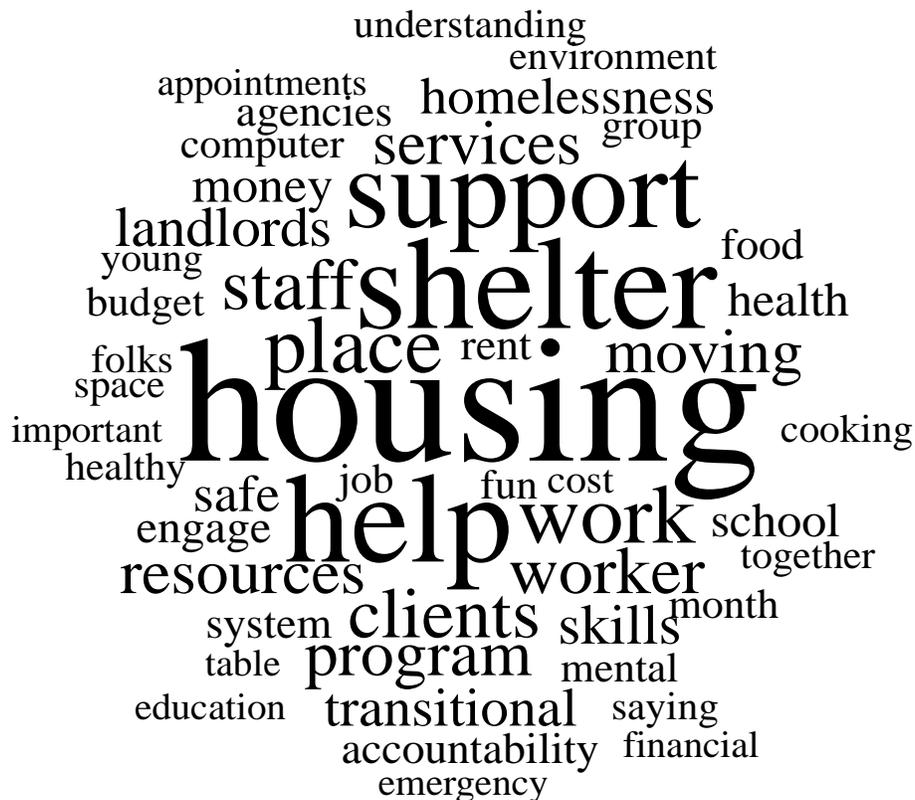


Figure 5. Participants' 50 most frequently used words.

While examining the data separately for each participant group, some specific themes emerged for the youth clients, YES staff, and Fourcast employees. The following subsections describe these.

Youth clients. The youth participants spoke about the support that the Carriage House on-site school and Abbott House provided (IY). They also discussed food, how that had an impact on how they adjusted to their housing, and also why they felt people like to be at YES (IY). All youth interviewees mentioned food; this was a main topic for them when discussing the positive aspects of YES and reasons why it can be difficult to live independently.

When youth interviewees were asked about what allows youth clients to move out of the shelter quickly, three of them mentioned having a specific “mindset.” They discussed certain

people having a sense of motivation, and that some people were hopeful that their lives would change, and this helped them to move out faster (IY). One youth interviewee said,

If you have that mindset that is all your life is ever going to be type thing, then that's all it's ever gonna be—like you need that motivation and some people just don't have that, especially when they're in drugs and like they just don't go to school or like do the things they need to do to be part of a society.

When they were asked what creates this motivation, youth clients said some people are just like that, or that luck creates it (IY).

YES staff. YES staff talked about the lack of appropriate supports for youth in the community (FG). They talked about using an assessment tool that determines the youth's needs upon their intake into the shelter, and that most clients rate really high on the spectrum. “These youth need supportive housing” (FG), but “where the hell do you find supportive housing in Peterborough?” (FG), staff asked. Some kind of transitional housing program that involved the teaching of life skills within youth's new home came up in relation to supportive housing as well. Throughout the YES focus group, workers expressed frustration by the lack of resources available not only in their organization but also in other agencies that they felt should be serving youth clients. Shelter staff felt that they were not well respected by other agencies or the City of Peterborough (FG). One worker said, “It'd be nice to raise our profile and have what we do be recognized as one of Peterborough's essential services” (FG). Focus group participants went on to explain that they feel “like the community regard for our services feels like we're excluded a little.”

Fourcast staff. One Fourcast staff member spoke a lot about how a youth expertise is key to providing support to youth clients: “YES is really the only landing place with any specific expertise around youth homelessness” (IF). Fourcast interviewees also talked about how the youth-specific space is key to youth exiting homelessness more quickly. One worker talked about better preparing youth by having a

second stop between emergency shelter and independent living. Even if it’s for a few months. When you look at students who are coming out of fairly “normal homes” and going to university or college, they often stay in for a year in residence and that scene is their transition spot. Why? Because there is some supervision, some help with developing the skills necessary—some pressure taken off from paying rent monthly, things like making your own food and that kind of thing. (IF)

All three Fourcast staff mentioned that youth need rent subsidies in order to access appropriate housing (IF). They pointed out that “youth are a totally different population” (IF) and that rooming housings were not an appropriate living environment for them (IF). Interviewees suggested youth-specific subsidies as the solution to this (IF).

Summary of findings. To summarize, the study findings highlighted the need to (a) address staffing capacity, (b) create a shelter environment that is conducive to rapid rehousing, and (c) provide supports to encourage success in housing. I considered these themes when developing the study conclusions, which I present in the following section.

Study Conclusions

The findings from interviews and focus groups resonated with the information identified in the literature review in Chapter 2. Through integrating the literature review with the data of this research study, four concluding themes emerged:

1. Youth need support to find housing.
2. The shelter environment could improve to support rapid rehousing.
3. Recidivism will not change unless there are out-of-shelter supports.
4. Youth homelessness should become every service sector's issue.

Conclusion 1: Youth need support to find housing. Due to their age, youth lack life experiences, which is one of the main differences between homeless youth and homeless adults. In addition, youth often come to homeless shelters having acquired a series of complexities during their pathway into homelessness. This could include mental health crises, substance use, trauma, and experiences of abuse (Piat et al., 2015). Given that 85% of youth who are homeless are experiencing a mental health crisis (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016), it is reasonable to assume that youth will need support for mental health issues. Youth explained during their interviews that landlords are not often empathetic to their situations (IY), and Fourcast staff highlighted landlords are often more interested in renting to postsecondary school students (IF). Youth are often stigmatized when competing in the housing market, and this further isolates them from the community. Given all of these barriers to finding and securing housing, expecting them to do this on their own is an unattainable goal for most.

Currently, YES expects youth to find their own housing with the support of shelter workers, who are also tasked with cooking food, cleaning the building, providing surveillance,

and managing the day-to-day operations of the emergency shelter. These workers are pulled in several directions and cannot leave the shelter to go into the community with youth clients to look at housing and liaise with landlords. However, youth identified that if a staff member could go into the community with them, they would be better prepared to secure housing (IY).

YES staff spoke about a pilot study the shelter recently completed in which one shelter worker was relieved from shelter duties for half of her full position and focussed on rehousing youth (FG). This worker met with clients, looked for housing, called landlords with clients, took youth to viewings, and helped them with applications and following the landlord's process (FG). The YES staff spoke about this as a success, and that they felt the shelter team was much more successful in supporting clients when this worker had been allotted dedicated time (FG). A study on landlords also indicated that if clients have supports in place, a landlord is more likely to overlook what they perceive to be potential behavioural problems (Aubry et al., 2015). This theme came through in the present study and was also highlighted in the literature.

The transition into adulthood is challenging, even for individuals who have housing. Youth who are often stigmatized and excluded from society will not be equipped to compete in the rental market without support. YES staff, Fourcast staff, and youth clients all felt that a dedicated worker would solve this problem (IY; IF; FG). If youth clients had support in finding housing, their rehousing process would be more successful, especially when paired with changes to the shelter environment at YES.

Conclusion 2: The shelter environment could improve to support rapid rehousing.

The YES shelter currently offers youth a safe place to sleep, access to staff, three meals a day, and has the expectation that youth will find housing and move on from emergency shelter. The

shelter workers try to support youth in looking for housing through Kijiji (n.d.) searches, generally encouraging them and reminding them of different appointments or housing viewings. The youth have little structure around how they spend their days, and shelter workers have found that some youth spend a lot of their day sleeping or watching television in the common room (FG). YES staff wondered if this lack of structure encourages youth to remain in the shelter for long periods of time, or if it encourages future stays by youth (FG). As highlighted in Chapter 2, at another youth emergency shelter, both staff and clients found that consistent structure and expectations were supportive of youth's feelings of safety and staff's work satisfaction (Heinze & Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2009). Both YES staff and clients noted the agency is not very structured (IY; FG); the need for structure was also noted in the literature review in Chapter 2 (Heinze & Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2009).

Wake-up calls. When youth were asked about what encourages youth to leave the shelter quickly, they spoke of YES's past wake-up call rules (IY). Clients seemed to be in agreement that the mandatory wake-up calls often felt annoying at first, but when reflecting on their experience, they reported this practice motivated them to find housing. One youth spoke of another shelter where clients had to be out of the shelter for certain periods of the day (IY). He explained that he has anxiety, so without the push into the community he likely would have remained in the shelter until he over stayed his welcome (IY). YES staff also spoke about the mandatory wake-up calls and periods out of the shelter that had been in place when the shelter first opened, and they indicated that these practices allowed staff to get their tasks done and encouraged clients to meet with staff about their housing (FG).

Changes in the staff role. Heinze et al. (2010) talked about the importance of positive staff relationships and structuring homeless shelters to be conducive to relationship development. YES staff mentioned their inability to spend quality time with clients due to competing demands and not being able to keep up with their other responsibilities like cooking and cleaning (FG). Perhaps a period when most clients are expected to be out of their rooms would allow staff to spend one-on-one time with those clients who wish to meet with them for their housing search. When there are no client meetings, staff could complete other tasks and prepare for when clients return to the building. This could also mitigate some of the feeling of burnout experienced by the YES staff. YES has only one staff member working during the day shift, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. At times, up to 30 clients are in the building, making this shift often unmanageable. If YES clients had to be out of the building for a few hours each day, it could make this shift more manageable for the staff, and likely more productive for the clients who choose to meet with staff regarding their housing.

While these structures are important, staff will need to balance “caring, supportive staff-[client] relationships with clear expectations and limit setting” (Heinze et al., 2010, p. 1371). At times, this could look like altering the rules or expectations to meet a unique need and to provide equitable service. This is most supportive of youth’s personal growth. Youth clients and YES staff discussed the increased structure at the shelter as one way to support youth in exiting the shelter quickly and as a deterrent for youth to return to the shelter in the future. The literature also highlighted that structure and clear expectations are supportive of a youth’s development (Heinze & Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2009).

Internet access. The shelter could also provide youth with the tools they need to succeed in finding and obtaining housing, through providing Internet and computer access. The ability to connect to the Internet is becoming an important resource for homeless youth to receive social supports (Buccieri & Molleson, 2015). Not only can Internet access support youth's social capital by exposing them to nonstreet relationships, but it is also seen as a coping tool while youth are homeless (Buccieri & Molleson, 2015). Although youth client and YES staff participants noted Internet and computer access as key to youth being able to rehouse themselves quickly, YES does not currently provide youth with access to these technologies. Scholars concurred that technology is an important resources to provide for youth who experience homelessness (Buccieri & Molleson, 2015).

Conclusion 3: Recidivism will not change unless there are out-of-shelter supports.

Youth are inexperienced with independent housing and have a series of vulnerabilities that make it particularly challenging for them to maintain housing. The acquisition of housing alone is not a sufficient pathway to independence (Patterson & Tweed, 2009). In the absence of out-of-shelter supports, youth clients, YES staff, and Fourcast staff reported youth will likely continue to return to the shelter for repeat visits and stay past the 42-day limit at the shelter (IY; IF; FG). Out-of-shelter supports are needed to help youth stabilize in their housing, to address their physical and mental health needs, and to integrate into their new community and learn life skills.

Both Fourcast and YES staff emphasized the importance of out-of-shelter supports (IF; FG). YES staff pointed out that it is simply lucky if a client does not return to the shelter for future stays when they are not connected to out-of-shelter supports (FG). Currently, YES's only living program outside of the emergency shelter is its transitional housing program. The

transitional housing program provides youth with a safe place to live for 12 months while they move forward on their goals, learn life skills, and receive YES staff support to maintain their housing. YES staff talked favourably about this program, conveying that it is effective for some youth, but currently only serves a six clients each year (FG). Fourcast employees mirrored the literature when they talked about the importance of youth having meaningful daily activities and a sense of belonging in their housing (IF; Dublanc, 2010; Frederick et al., 2014; Robinson, 2008; Slesnick, Feng, et al., 2016). While youth did not directly say that they needed support when they were living in the community, they talked about how when they move into their housing they lose all the supports the emergency shelter provides, and that they found food to be a big challenge to living independently (IY). When I asked youth why they return to the shelter often, they said that they do not have access to support in their housing, but they do receive it at the emergency shelter (IY). The literature provided evidence of the importance of the appropriate level of supports being connected to youth to meet their needs when they exit into their housing (Gaetz, 2014b; Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016; Karabanow & Kidd, 2014; Kidd et al., 2016; Nichols, 2008a; Robinson, 2008).

Currently, YES uses the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (OrgCode Consulting, n.d.) to better understand the needs of each individual in the shelter. Often the young people who score as having the highest vulnerability are the least connected to supports when they are living on their own in the community, as these programs and supports simply do not exist. Aubry et al. (2013) noted clients need, at the very least, case management supports when they enter their new housing. Ongoing supports should be based on the need of the individual; ideally, YES would have several options available so that youth receive the level of support they

require. This could include levels of support starting with short-term case management and life-skills training, progressing to transitional housing, and housing first for homeless youth programs (the most intensive supportive housing program). If the Peterborough community had a suite of options for supporting youth in successfully remaining housed, YES staff and Fourcast staff indicated that youth would be less likely to return to the emergency shelter.

If YES chooses to move forward in rapidly rehousing youth and addressing their complex needs, several levels of service will need to be developed for youth to engage in once they leave the emergency shelter. The absence of supports was cited as the reason why youth return to the shelter, and the reason for them remaining past their expected 42-day stay. The literature concurred with this conclusion, suggesting that youth cannot integrate into their new homes without supports (Gaetz, 2014b; van den Berk-Clark, 2016). A focus on mental health, substance use, life skills, and social inclusion needs to be a focus, and ideally these supports should be provided in an outreach capacity (Kidd et al., 2016).

Conclusion 4: Youth homelessness should be every service sector's issue. Youth homelessness is a complex social problem that touches several service sectors, and the response has an impact on the individuals and community for several decades. Youth who experience homelessness are disproportionately linked to other institutional settings such as child welfare, criminal justice, mental health, and addictions systems. Youth are discharged from these institutions into homelessness and end up interacting with these institutions as a result of their homelessness. In addition, if youth remain street entrenched and do not receive the supports they require to exit homelessness, there is a likelihood that they will require emergency shelter services as an adult in future, and be more likely to become chronically homeless. As noted in

Chapter 1, in Peterborough, 64% of individuals experiencing homelessness reported having had their first experience of homelessness before the age of 26 years old (United Way of Peterborough, 2016).

If Peterborough service sectors were able to unite around youth homelessness, it could intervene in the cycle of homelessness, preventing these individuals from experiencing homelessness into their adult years and requiring adult emergency shelter. Most people identified that family breakdown was the reason for their first experiencing of homelessness (United Way of Peterborough, 2016). Given the disproportionate involvement with several institutions, a systems approach to youth homelessness is important. If the key stakeholders within the system were able to prioritize their involvement in youth homelessness, perhaps YES would be more successful in rehousing clients while addressing their complex needs. If YES were able to accomplish this, it would impact the youth into their adult years and would positively affect the adult emergency shelters in Peterborough.

YES staff indicated that child welfare and criminal justice systems see the shelter as a positive destination for youth, and at times drop them off at YES (FG). One YES staff reported that these systems “dump youth” (FG) at the emergency shelter assuming that YES will figure it out. The research also concluded that youth who have had institutional involvement are overrepresented in the homeless youth population (Gaetz, O’Grady, et al., 2016; Nichols, 2008a; Quirouette, 2016). This is problematic, as emergency shelter stays are not supportive of youth’s needs and often leave them further entrenched in street culture, with less protective factors and additional risk factors (Cleverly, & Kidd, 2011; Mayock et al., 2011). Fourcast staff further noted that child welfare agencies assume the emergency shelter is an appropriate response to

youth's needs. Fostering an understanding of the limitations of the homeless sector's response seems an important task for YES to work on with the community. If YES is going to rapidly rehouse youth, it will need the engagement from all players involved in the young person's life, and this will include large systems like child welfare and the criminal justice system.

If the system were able to wrap around young people who experience homelessness it could impact not only the individual clients but also the entire homelessness sector in Peterborough. If youth clients had a full exit out of homelessness, it is possible that Peterborough would see a reduction in adults experiencing homelessness.

Summary of conclusions. To summarize, I drew four study conclusions based on the themes that surfaced from the interviews with Fourcast staff, interviews with YES youth clients, and a focus group session with YES staff members as well as the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. These conclusions included (a) youth need support to find housing, (b) the shelter environment could improve to support rapid rehousing, (c) recidivism will not change unless there are out of shelter supports, and (d) youth homelessness should be every sector's issue. Using these conclusions I created a series of recommendations, which I present in Chapter 5. In the next section I discuss the scope and limitations of the inquiry before Chapter 5.

Scope and Limitations of the Inquiry

The outcomes of this study provide a deeper understanding of the need for rapid rehousing of homeless youth and evidence-based source for recommendations to YES for optimizing its operations in Peterborough, Ontario (see Chapter 5). The study provides a framework for inquiry and recommendations for other youth homelessness organizations that wish to rapidly rehouse youth. The results of this study have the ability to impact the YES shelter

team and homeless youth in Peterborough, Ontario. While I limited the scope of this study to YES, some of the recommendations could extend to other agencies. The recommendations could apply to other emergency shelters that serve youth, and the inquiry design could apply to future changes both within YES and in other youth homelessness organizations. While the inquiry has been helpful to the YES shelter, and could be used by other youth homelessness organizations, there are some limitations to this study.

I undertook this study while I was employed by YES. My insider status could have been a factor in how conclusions were derived. With the help of my inquiry team, I paid attention to ensure my supervision status did not impact how YES staff participated. My inquiry team and I considered this throughout the study to ensure the conclusions and recommendations arose from the data and academic literature. I noted some advantages to my insider status, including an understanding of the internal culture, which supported data collection.

While the goal of the study was well articulated, it might have created some bias in the direction of the research. The assumption that rehousing youth as quickly as possible is the best approach may have precluded exploring other options for research as well as for application of findings. For example, before I invited stakeholders to take part in the study, I explicitly explained the goal of the study to potential participants. The focus group facilitator and I asked participants questions with the underlying assumption that YES's goal was to get youth out of the shelter, and the questions did not provide an opportunity for participants to say whether or not they disagreed with this aim. While the literature is conclusive that long stays in emergency shelters are not supportive of youth's development (Carlson, et al., 2006; Gaetz, 2014b; Kidd et al., 2016), I am unsure of whether or not participants agreed with this.

Another issue that needs reconsideration is the exclusion of the homeless families from this inquiry, since their input would have provided insight into children's early entry into homelessness and how families can exit the shelter quickly. YES provides emergency shelter to youth ages 16–24 years and families, including any adult with custody of a child. While some of the findings could likely be applied to families, the participants were asked to exclusively think about youth, so the recommendations should not be applied to the family clients of YES without additional consideration.

While it was critical to remain focussed on the YES services and the goal of rapid rehousing, one important variable that remained beyond the scope of the study was the prevention of youth homelessness. The study considered how to support youth only after they have become homeless and are accepted into the YES's emergency shelter, and then explored options for how to support them in exiting as quickly as possible. Despite the importance of prevention, the scope of the study precluded research into this topic. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that most youth who experience homelessness are hidden and do not attend emergency shelters (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016). Given that the scope of the inquiry was set at the beginning of the study, I did not explore how to support these youth, who likely require support as well.

The YES shelter serves over 200 unique youth every year (YES, 2015). This study provided the opportunity for four of them to participate in the inquiry. Although their input resonated with the other two participant groups, in future studies, a larger youth base would allow further capturing of youth voice, which can increase young people's satisfaction with public spaces and increase their engagement (Nichols, 2017). The information collected was

consistent across all three participant groups and triangulating the data increased its validity (Glesne, 2016).

Chapter Four Summary

This chapter presented the research findings after data collection with three participant groups. The findings were compared and contrasted with the literature explored in Chapter 2. After comparing the findings with literature, I derived four study conclusions. I also provided a summary of the study limitations. These conclusions will be used to inform the study recommendations presented to YES in the final chapter of this thesis.

Chapter Five: Inquiry Implications

This chapter provides nine recommendations to YES based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the findings and conclusions presented in Chapter 4. I also briefly summarize the implications to YES as well as future research opportunities. I close the chapter with a summary of the entire inquiry.

Study Recommendations

Taking the study conclusions and literature into consideration, I put forward nine recommendations for YES to consider for implementation. I developed these strategies with the aim to rapidly rehouse youth while still addressing their complex needs:

1. Create two new full-time positions at YES.
2. Equip the shelter with computers and/or wi-fi for clients.
3. Structure wake-up and mandatory out-of-shelter times for clients.
4. Continue the food cupboard and engage clients around their housing.
5. Engage a collaborative network of agencies around youth homelessness.
6. Provide life-skills training.
7. Engage community partners around youth-specific homelessness services.
8. Consider individual needs to support youth in their housing.
9. Create engagement opportunities for youth outside the emergency shelter.

I present these recommendations in order of priority. Several of these recommendations will likely be undertaken simultaneously, and some require several steps prior to completing the implementation.

Recommendation 1: Create two new full-time positions at YES. Participants in every method expressed that YES was not operating with a human resource capacity that is acceptable for the need presented by youth clients. The recommendation is that YES increase its capacity as soon as possible by at least two full-time positions, and then continue to assess capacity ongoing.

The inquiry participants suggested that YES hire one full-time rapid rehousing worker and increase the current intensive case manager role from a part-time to full-time position. YES staff suggested that these positions not have any other shelter responsibilities so that individuals in these positions can focus on providing rehousing and case management supports to clients. To accomplish this, my suggestion is that YES continue to partner with Fourcast to provide clinical supervision to a full-time case manager at YES. This position could provide case management support to youth while they are in the shelter, but also while they are out of the shelter to help youth avoid future shelter stays. Research has shown that homeless youth often experience a mental health crises (Gaetz, O’Grady et al., 2016) and a Fourcast intensive case manager will have the clinical skills to assess these circumstances and meet youth’s need.

For the rapid rehousing worker, my suggestion is for this position to be employed by the YES shelter and that the role have a similar skillset to current shelter workers. The individual in this position would be responsible for meeting with every client who enters the shelter to help with their housing needs. This worker would seek out housing opportunities with clients, support them in calling landlords, attend viewings, develop relationships with landlords, and support the client through the application process. This person could then support clients when they move in to their new home and provide some initial support while clients adjust to their housing. The worker could assess ongoing supports clients might need in their housing and make the

appropriate referrals. In order for this position to work well, YES should consider creating a budget for mileage, housing retention funds, move-in funds, incentives for youth, and funding for a dedicated cellphone for the position. My suggestion is that this position be matched with a placement student from a postsecondary institution who can support the worker and increase safety when the worker is entering people's homes. With the appropriate resources, this position would be well suited to find, attain, and move clients out of the shelter and into housing.

Initial impacts would include an increase in youth finding and attaining housing and avoiding additional victimization as a result of their homelessness. YES and Fourcast staff would experience a sense of accomplishment watching youth move forward and feel less overwhelmed by the daily demands they are currently faced with. After these positions are implemented, I suggest that YES staff consistently evaluate their capacity compared to the demands the shelter faces. Based on my inquiry results, it seems that YES has been trying to keep up with the increasing demand with no increase in staff capacity and has exhausted its current staff team. When possible, and when funding allows, a more proactive response to increased demand would have a positive impact on staff culture and youth outcomes at YES.

YES currently has a very tight budget, and creating two new full-time positions may not be immediately possible. I recommend that YES consider different funding streams using the evidence presented in the literature review and findings section. It is clear that rehousing clients as quickly as possible is the best way to support an exit out of homelessness, and demonstrating the path to accomplish this to funders could support obtaining funding. Providing enough staff to allow workers to truly help clients will further their satisfaction at the organization and improve their resilience in hearing stories of trauma often (Kosny & Eakin, 2008). In a study of nonprofit

organizations in Toronto, it was found that if workers felt like they had the capacity to deal with the needs of the clients, the clients' experiences were less likely to have a negative impact on workers (Kosny & Eakin, 2008). Staff currently feel unable to fully support clients due to the competing demands of their work, the volume of clients, and clients' complexities. These positions could begin to change this part of YES's organizational culture.

Recommendation 2: Equip the shelter with computers and/or wi-fi for clients.

Clients as well as YES staff indicated that youth need all the tools for housing searches provided in the shelter if the organization wants them to be rehoused quickly. Engagement with landlords has changed and email is now a common way to communicate, rather than phone. Sending email messages also offers clients a degree of anonymity. Currently, if a landlord needs to call a client back, clients often provide the shelter phone number, immediately telling landlords they are living in a shelter. Offering computer and/or wi-fi resources should be considered so that it does not cause further tension in the communal living environment.

In order to accommodate a computer in the shelter, YES needs to reconsider how it uses space. I suggest that YES ask staff for feedback on where and how to provide a computer for clients. A risk analysis should also be completed to ensure that YES's computer systems are secure. Clients suggested blocking most websites so that the computer is available only for housing searches and is monitored by staff members. If wi-fi is used, participants suggested a router that can turn off at curfew time each night so that clients are sleeping in the evening. If the shelter were able to implement a drop-in centre, computer access could be provided there as well to encourage clients to attend.

Recommendation 3: Structure wake-up and mandatory out-of-shelter times for clients. I recommend that YES implement a mandatory wake-up period that is reasonable and can be changed on a case-by-case basis if needed. I further advise YES set a daily period of time when clients are expected to be out of the shelter. My suggestion is that YES ask youth about a reasonable wake-up time and consider YES staff's ability to follow through on the wake-up calls and times. I then suggest that YES staff implement a practice in which youth are expected to be out of the buildings shortly after their wake-up time. In a meeting with the Project Sponsor, she suggested 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. as an appropriate range, because it lines up with schooling times. Once a time has been selected and tried, I suggest reengaging youth clients and YES staff to ask for feedback on how it is working. The out-of-shelter time must be complimented by options for youth to have a safe space to be in during the day. In the past, YES has allowed clients to be in the building if they were working on their housing with staff. I believe this practice could continue to be used. YES clients are also able to access the Carriage House school between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. on weekdays.

Once a plan is decided upon, clearly communicating the new expectations to YES clients several times and through different methods (i.e., writing, verbally) will be important. Similar to the staff positions, I recommend that this practice continue to be reevaluated as situations change.

Recommendation 4: Continue the food cupboard and engage clients around their housing. All youth interviewees talked about food insecurity and their struggle to keep themselves fed when they were not at YES. I recommend that YES continue to operate its food cupboard, providing youth with relief in situations when they are hungry. I further suggest that

the food cupboard be used as an opportunity to engage clients around their housing. This has been a longstanding goal of the food cupboard; as such, I recommend it be structured and implemented. If YES staff, students, and volunteers had three questions to ask every client who accesses the food cupboard, they would likely learn a lot about young people's housing, and potentially be able to prevent future shelter use. This could be a meaningful volunteer role, and if volunteers were also equipped with knowledge of community agencies and legal centres, they could connect youth to additional services. If YES can obtain a full-time rehousing worker, there would be capacity to act on situations when youth's housing is falling apart, before they need emergency shelter.

I further recommend that the shelter always consider food security whenever adding additional services to YES, such as a drop-in space. Food seems to be a big stressor for youth, and if YES could incorporate meals outside of the emergency shelter, including skills to teach youth how to cook, it would help youth maintain their housing.

Recommendation 5: Engage a collaborative network of agencies around youth homelessness. Youth homelessness is a complicated social issue that impacts several systems, which YES staff are well aware of. YES has recently partnered with A Way Home Canada to create a collaborative initiative that engages the system around homelessness. Given that there are several overrepresented groups in the youth homelessness population, and many of these come from other institutional settings, there is room for other systems to consider their role in youth homelessness. While YES engages other partners around this issue, telling the story of youth in the shelter will be important. There seems to be a misconception that an emergency shelter is a safe, ideal place for youth to be, and this does not encourage other service providers

to support a quick rehousing process, even though research has consistently shown that a quick exit leads to better outcomes (Gaetz, 2014b; Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016; Mayock et al., 2011; Robinson, 2008). I recommend that YES representatives share that a rapid exit from shelter is best practice when possible at community tables and meetings. I further recommend that YES continue to engage in this collaborative process and ensure the organization continues to move forward.

Recommendation 6: Provide life-skills training. Research in the literature review highlighted youth's inexperience managing housing or living on their own. They became homeless after being dependent on an adult, and often have little experience living on their own (Gaetz, 2014b). Without life-skills support, youth are often unable to maintain their housing, which is a predictor of future homelessness. I recommend that YES consider how to provide life-skills training outside of the shelter for any youth who have used YES's emergency shelter. This could initially happen by arranging for the rehousing worker to visit in the new homes of youth who have left the shelter. In addition, if a drop-in space is implemented, this would be a great venue for providing youth with skills and to support them in their learning. If a drop-in space is not immediately possible, YES staff could run life-skills training opportunities during the day, when most clients are expected to be out of the shelter. This safe, warm space might immediately engage youth to take part in life-skills training. The evidence demonstrates that engagement outside of the emergency shelter is best whenever possible. The Project Sponsor and board member suggested that the Carriage House be set up with a small kitchen to allow YES to use a current space it already has, while still allowing life-skills training to happen offsite. I believe it

is important to implement life-skills training in any way possible, even if it must initially happen inside the shelter while YES works to create other opportunities.

Recommendation 7: Engage community partners around transitional aged youth-specific homelessness services. Fourcast staff felt that youth-specific services are important when thinking about rehousing youth. They talked about how services that were designed for adults, but are later extended to youth, do not often work, and this is one of the reasons why YES is so special. YES has a youth expertise and understands the population well. Currently, Peterborough has several services set up for people experiencing homelessness, but they are geared to support the adult population, although, at times, youth clients participate. I recommend that YES engage the community in developing transitional age youth-specific services (16–24 years old) that better meet the unique needs of a young person who is experiencing homelessness. This relates to the entire community wrapping around and prioritizing youth homelessness, as suggested in Recommendation 5. Some of the supports that participants mentioned include youth-specific rent subsidies, housing first for homeless youth program, and youth-specific trustees.

Fourcast staff stated that if youth are not in safe, appropriate types of housing, they will not be successful in exiting homelessness. Often youth live in rooming houses where they are unsafe and frequently victimized. Youth do not have the income level to secure apartments or units, and many are not old enough to access the Ontario Disability Support Program (Government of Ontario, 2015). This does not support youth to exit homelessness. If youth were provided with rent subsidies, they would obtain a safe and appropriate place to live, supporting a break from the cycle of homelessness. Youth would also be better equipped to meet landlord's

needs, as landlords who received an appropriate level of rent through a housing subsidy with a trustee were more likely to rent to clients who could have behavioural problems (Aubry et al., 2015). This would be well supported by youth-specific trustees, who could manage young people's finances, helping to ensure their rent is always paid. With YES having already established relationships with clients, I suggest that YES consider providing youth-specific trustee services, as other shelters in Ontario cities have used this approach successfully (K. Kightley, personal communication, May 12, 2017).

Peterborough currently has a Housing First program (S. Galloway, personal communication, May 16, 2016), serving adults and some youth at times. While these programs are very well done and they have highly skilled staff, their staff are not experts in youth services. I recommend that YES engage the Peterborough community around a discussion on piloting a Housing First for Homeless Youth program in Peterborough to support high-acuity clients who are currently cycling in and out of homelessness as well as several institutional systems. While these recommendations will likely take time to be fully implemented, YES could begin having these discussions and seek out opportunities to fund these services. Reducing youth homelessness will positively impact adult services; as such, an investment in youth supports other nonprofit organizations in Peterborough.

Recommendation 8: Consider individual needs to support youth in their housing.

Most youth struggle after gaining housing to build a meaningful life off the streets while dealing with their physical and mental health (Kidd et al., 2016). Youth cannot be expected to acquire housing and simply thrive as a result. An assessment of all their needs would indicate that most of them need a lot of support to do well in their new housing. My suggestion is that a suite of

options be created so that the level of support that each young person needs is available. I believe this starts with Recommendation 1, increasing YES's capacity by two full-time positions, but I am aware that these positions will not provide an adequate level of support for all youth. In addition to these positions, I recommend expanding the transitional housing program, reenvisioning YES's current emergency space and engaging the community around a Housing First for Homeless Youth program. My suggestion is that the rehousing worker and case manager positions provide some support to youth in their new housing in the interim, but a lot of additional capacity will need to be created to fully address the complex needs of youth based on their acuity. With YES responding to a large number of high-acuity clients, a Housing First for Homeless Youth program is needed in Peterborough.

Recommendation 9: Create engagement opportunities for youth outside the emergency shelter. Youth spoke about becoming isolated from the YES community after they left the shelter, which has left them without the adult allies that they developed relationships with while they were in the emergency shelter. Youth talked about this being something that was both a challenge when they moved into housing and a reason why youth return to the shelter. The Fourcast staff talked about social isolation being important to consider, and YES staff spoke of youth clients routinely stopping into the shelter for no specific reason but a need to talk. YES is often the most trusted community agency for homeless youth. I recommend that the agency create opportunities for youth to engage with YES outside emergency shelter services and develop a community for youth to belong to once they have exited the emergency shelter.

There are several ways that this could be done. I think that if YES had more financial resources, a drop-in centre could be created and led by YES staff members. With YES's

financial reality in mind, I think that there are several creative ways to create this community without a large financial investment. I think that if YES were able to hire a rehousing worker, this position along with YES's youth in transition and youth outreach workers could staff a drop-in centre a few times a week. My recommendation is that these three positions each spend one day in a drop-in space, providing snacks and if possible a full meal, as well as different activities for youth to partake in. This could occur in the Carriage House school building or in partnership with another program that has available space. I anticipate that this will allow youth not only to connect with staff members they trust but also to create a natural community for themselves. Fourcast staff members talked about how university and college students use a community to live on their own and maintain their housing, individuals who have experienced homelessness want the same thing. Youth clients spoke about how the emergency shelter provided them with a community of others who understood what they were going through. I believe that a drop-in space would accomplish this as well and discourage youth from attending the emergency shelter for their social needs.

Organizational Implications

Support for this inquiry project has been ongoing by the Executive Director of YES, who was also the Project Sponsor. The Executive Director has maintained open communication and a sincere curiosity in its results throughout the entire process. Over the course of 12 months, I held weekly supervision meetings with the Project Sponsor to discuss the inquiry, which allowed me to keep her updated throughout the process. At the conclusion of the inquiry process, I passed the recommendations presented of this inquiry on to the Project Sponsor in a meeting, which is one of the major features of the ARE model (Rowe et al., 2013). This was done collaboratively and

through meaningful dialogue, which allowed the Project Sponsor and inquiry team member to offer feedback on the recommendations (Nichols, Anucha, Houwer, & Wood, 2013).

As the Executive Director, the Project Sponsor has the power and authority to make changes within YES. At the time that I was concluding this research, YES experienced a shift in leadership, with the current Executive Director leaving her position within months of the inquiry finishing and a new executive director was yet to be hired. I chose to be intentional when passing along the recommendations to accommodate for this change and ensured engagement would be passed forward (Bridges, 2009). I included a member of the Board of Directors in the meeting, attempting to ensure the information is adequately transferred to the incoming executive director. The inquiry findings are also in line with YES's most recent strategic plan, ideally further enshrining this organizational change (YES, in press).

The current lack of adequate funding presents a major barrier to the implementation of recommendations. However, YES has begun considering how to best implement and fund the recommendations. Currently, YES does not have financial reserves, and any increases in costs must first be sought out through fundraising and grant opportunities. Hopefully with concrete recommendations in place, YES will be well positioned to make an argument for these funds, as the agency intends to align with best-practice approaches. The YES Executive Director, alongside the fundraising committee of board members will be tasked with considering how to leverage funds to allow the recommendations to be put in place, particularly the recommendations that involve an increase in paid staff capacity. YES relies on municipal funding, donations from community members, and grant funds. YES could be limited by its ability to leverage additional money to implement the recommendations. However, a starting

place in the implementation process will have to be a consideration for leveraging funds. This research demonstrated the need for these positions to rapidly rehouse youth, and can ideally be used to mobilize funders and tell the story of youth homelessness. With some creativity, and research to back the recommendations, YES is well positioned to approach funders. The YES management team is also prepared to begin investing more in evidence-based practices, rather than continuing to invest in additional emergency services.

As the agency makes the recommended changes, I suggest that a continuation of the AR cycles be completed (Stringer, 2014). The AR model suggests that changes be reflected upon and actions modified several times throughout the process (Stringer, 2014). While evaluating the success of the changes, YES could consider whether recidivism rates and length of stay per client are lowering. YES could also consider the opinions of staff members to determine if their workload is attainable and reasonable. These recommendations will require buy-in from all levels of the YES agency. As the Shelter Supervisor, I will be tasked with implementing the internal shelter structure recommendations, and these changes will directly impact the shelter worker team. Continuing the AR model will support YES in implementing change that are appropriate for its context.

Implementing the inquiry recommendations has the potential to impact YES, its clients, staff members, and the broader community. If YES uses the inquiry results to implement changes in its practice, youth may spend less time in emergency shelter accommodations. This has the potential to break the cycle of homelessness, increasing youth's protective factors and decreasing their risk factors. It could support youth in remaining housed, which will positively affect several aspects of their lives. If youth are supported to move permanently out of homelessness, it could

impact the entire community. Peterborough could experience less individuals requiring emergency shelter as adults and more people living full and positive lives. The inquiry could also impact shelter workers satisfaction in their job. If successful, the shelter workers could have the human resource capacity they need to do their jobs as well as possible and to increase positive outcomes for the clients they serve.

If the recommendations from this inquiry are not implemented, youth will continue to stay at the emergency shelter past their 42-day stay limit, and they will likely return to the shelter several times before being stably housed. The greatest danger to this is that youth will continue to embody an identity of homelessness and experience the variety of traumas that come with being homeless as a young person. The shelter will also continue to be overcapacity, with workers who feel unable to do their jobs well and who are at risk of burning out.

The success of the recommendations will be influenced by the external systems in Peterborough. The recommendations that aim to support youth in their housing require buy-in from several other partners in the city. YES does not have the clinical capacity to provide these supports on its own; therefore, a clinical partner such as Fourcast would need to be engaged. This is also an expensive process that will require the municipality's support. In addition, the ability to rehouse youth is dependent on physical housing being available. The vacancy rate in Peterborough has been declining each year, and is expected to drop further in 2017 and 2018 (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2016). While the vacancy rate declines, the number of renters is expected to increase (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2016). Homeless youth will be impacted by these demands and lack supply. However, hopefully the recommendations will support YES and youth in being prepared for the rental market to

gradually become more challenging. While the recommendations will not be quick or easy to implement, the consequences of doing nothing are high.

Integrative approach to research. Traditional research generally focuses on a third-person voice, an impersonal form of research, designed to report to the academic community, also known as the third-person community (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). The inquiry differed and used an integrative approach to research, incorporating “three voices and audiences: first, second and third person” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, p. 7). AR is “a kind of social science that can generate timely action” (Torbert & Taylor, 2008, p. 2). The three audiences included the lead researcher, the community of practice at YES, and lastly the broader academic and homelessness community. The inquiry aimed to “make the actions more effective while simultaneously building up a body of scientific knowledge” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014, p. 6), integrating scholarship into practice, and “generat[ing] actionable knowledge” (p. 6).

Applying the first-person research approach required that I considered myself as the lead researcher and acted with awareness, reflection, and purpose. I was not an outside researcher in this situation, but rather an internal member of YES who sought to reflect on my own experience and biases and then integrate them into actionable research. The second-person research, and arguably the most important, was the engagement of others who are involved in the fabric of YES (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). I chose to engage youth clients, Fourcast staff and YES staff, as they shared mutual concern for the operations of YES. I engaged them in a collaborative and democratic way, valuing their thoughts as much as my own and the academic research. By choosing to ask for the expertise of those at YES, I aimed to empower the participants, encouraging collaborative action of the recommendations (Schein, 2013). Finally, in conducting

this research I aimed to involve the community beyond the second-person action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). I wrote this research to be used and hopefully valued by individuals outside of the YES community, likely engaging an academic and homelessness audience. By choosing to invite three different audiences into the research, I engaged several levels of the system in the process (Weisbord, 2012).

As YES moves forward with these recommendations, they will be tasked with evaluating the implementation process and adjusting as needed. The external system will impact YES's ability to succeed in rapidly rehousing youth while addressing their complex needs, but with the recommendations in place they will be better suited to react appropriately. The choice to use a third-person research perspective will support YES in succeeding in its goal. The inquiry engaged the system from several levels, gaining the voices and perspectives from three different stakeholder groups, and academic perspectives (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Weisbord, 2012).

Implications for Future Inquiry

Homelessness is a complicated social phenomenon with several elements. This inquiry has served as a starting place for YES to orient itself toward rehousing youth while addressing their complex needs. However, it is not the only research needed to accomplish YES's vision to "ensure all youth and families . . . lead full and positive lives in Peterborough" (YES, n.d.-c, para. 2). Future inquiries should include preventing youth and family homelessness, Housing First for Youth programming, YES's response to minority groups, rapidly rehousing homeless families, and worker burnout in shelter systems.

This thesis highlighted the struggle that a small not-for-profit has been experiencing when trying to serve some of the most marginalized youth in Peterborough. While emergency

shelters are an important piece of the system in Ontario, scholars affirmed emergency shelters are not ideal for youth (Carlson et al., 2006; Gaetz, 2014b; Kidd et al., 2016). Future inquiries should look at how the shelters could collaborate with other institutions in their community to prevent homelessness and support youth in avoiding emergency shelters. The homelessness sector is among the least resourced, but is often serving the most vulnerable members in our communities. The systems that should be engaged include, services supporting youth in care and youth who are incarcerated. This could be a wider inquiry looking at how the entire system in the province could orient itself to prevent, and better support homeless youth. A strategy to prevent youth homelessness would impact each client, but also emergency services' ability to be responsive when prevention is not successful.

While considering the entire system, a future inquiry could also look at how the City of Peterborough could implement a Housing First for Youth Program (HF4Y; Gaetz, 2014a). Housing First has been an effective intervention to break the cycle of homelessness for adults, and some adaptations to this program have been made to create a model for youth. HF4Y has not been piloted in Peterborough, but due to the level of complexity that YES sees among the youth population, this program could be very beneficial. The program could become part of many options for youth to receive the support they need when they exit emergency shelter to housing. A future inquiry could consider how to leverage the system in Peterborough to create a HF4Y program and how to fund it.

Several groups are overrepresented in the homeless youth population, including youth involved in the child protection services, youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit and ally individuals, and Indigenous youth (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al.,

2016). Future inquiries could consider how YES will support these overrepresented groups. In particular, YES should consider how it will support Indigenous youth who have experienced ongoing trauma, discrimination, and cultural genocide (Gaetz, O'Grady, et al., 2016). YES could begin by tracking and analyzing minority information to have a better sense of the population they serve.

YES also serves families in its shelter and research has found that families often spend twice as long in an emergency shelter compared to single adults and youth (Gaetz, Dej, et al., 2016). Zlotnick (2014) reported that emergency shelter environments could be damaging to the family unit. Future inquiries could consider how to support families in exiting the shelter as quickly as possible, as well as preventing family homelessness whenever possible.

The YES staff focus group revealed that workers are tired and frustrated. Future inquiries could consider worker burnout in shelter systems. In addition, a future inquiry could explore the different types of trauma that workers in an emergency-style organization experience. This inquiry would encourage YES to orient itself to become a supportive work environment for its workers and prevent burnout in this demanding field of work.

Youth homelessness is a complicated social problem that interacts with several large systems at a municipal, provincial, and national levels. I reviewed research on what creates homelessness as well as some evidenced-based approaches on how to support clients. However, further research into how to implement these approaches at program and community levels could impact how clients interact with services, and therefore their outcomes. I am hopeful that the outcomes of this inquiry will provide YES with a starting place, and that future research can

continue to support their work to support youth and families to lead full and positive lives in Peterborough, Ontario.

Thesis Summary

Through this study I sought to answer the following research question: What strategies can the YES Shelter for Youth and Families adopt to strengthen rapid rehousing practices, while still addressing the complex needs of clients? I also explored the following subquestions:

1. What brings youth clients to access YES's emergency services, and what encourages them to return for future stays, or remain in shelter past their maximum allowable one-time stay of 42 days?
2. What are the current effective rapid rehousing strategies?
3. What could an ideal rapid rehousing service look like at YES?
4. What supports and resources are required to successfully house youth?
5. What are the unique housing needs of youth?

I selected the AR methodology to complete the organizational change inquiry (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Rowe et al., 2013; Stringer, 2014). The inquiry engaged four youth clients, nine YES staff members, and three Fourcast employees in interviews and one focus group to collect data. A thorough literature review confirmed that supporting youth in exiting the shelter as quickly as possible is the best approach (Gaetz, 2014b; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Mayock et al., 2011; Robinson, 2008). Through combining data from the participants and relevant literature, I came to the following conclusions:

1. Youth need support to find housing.
2. The shelter environment could improve to support rapid rehousing.

3. Recidivism will not change unless there are out-of-shelter supports.
4. Youth homelessness should become every service sector's issue.

In the final chapter I amalgamated the research findings and relevant literature to provide nine study recommendations, a summary of agency implications and recommendations for future study. The nine recommendations are as follows:

1. Create two, new full time positions at YES.
2. Equip the shelter with computers and/or wi-fi for clients.
3. Structure wake-up and mandatory out-of-the-shelter times for clients.
4. Continue the food cupboard and engage clients around their housing.
5. Engage a collaborative network of agencies around youth homelessness
6. Provide life-skills training.
7. Engage community partners around youth-specific homelessness services.
8. Consider individual needs to support youth in their housing.
9. Create engagement opportunities for youth outside the emergency shelter.

The YES team is prepared to begin working on these recommendations, beginning with sourcing funding for the additional staffing needs. Should these recommendations be achieved, I believe that the YES shelter will be better equipped to begin the process to rehouse youth as soon as they enter the emergency shelter.

While I believe the emergency shelter will always be needed as an option, I am hopeful that YES can curb its high occupancy rates by rehousing young people as quickly as possible and preventing their entrenchment in street culture. My biggest hope for YES is for these changes to mobilize the community around youth homelessness, highlighting that if we invest in young

people we can break the cycle of homelessness. The greatest risk to YES not aligning itself to rapid rehousing is that youth will continue to embody an identity of homelessness and be unable to move forward to lead full and positive lives. I know that YES envisions all youth being supported to thrive in Peterborough, and interrupting the cycle of homelessness is the first step to accomplishing this. Youth homelessness can and should be ended so that young people in Peterborough do not have to experience the level of trauma and street involvement that they do now. YES is a progressive organization, prepared to move toward evidence-based practices. I am confident that if YES can successfully implement these recommendations, youth in Peterborough will be able to exit homelessness and move into adulthood with success.

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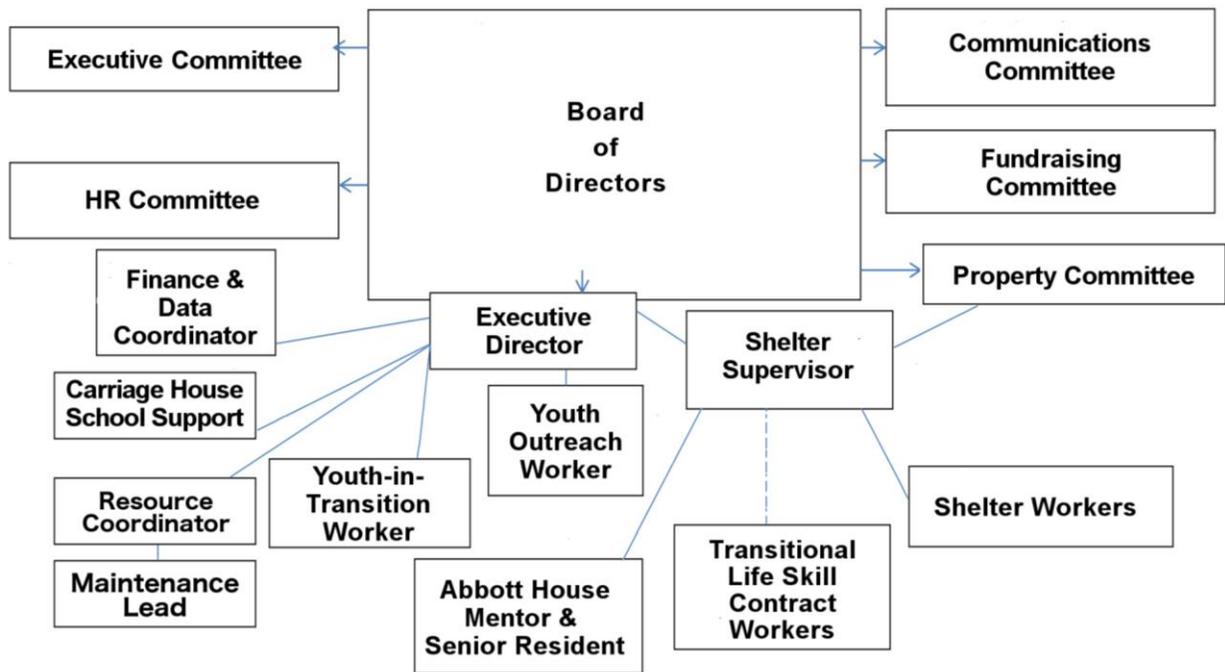
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Appendix A: Organizational Structure



Note. HR = Human Resources.

Adapted from *YES Shelter for Youth and Families Organizational Chart* (p. 1), by the YES Shelter for Youth and Families, 2016, Peterborough, Canada: Author. Copyright 2016 by the YES Shelter for Youth and Families. Reprinted with permission.

Appendix B: Questions for Youth Interviews

1. How long have you currently been housed? What kind of housing are you currently living in?
2. Thinking back to your time at the YES Shelter, what was most helpful to you in finding housing? What was most helpful to you?
3. What do you think supported you in getting housing?
4. Is there anything that could have made your transition into housing easier?
5. What have you learned since leaving YES about living on your own?
6. While you were at YES, did you attend any life-skills training, or housing meetings? If so, what was helpful? What could be improved?

Appendix C: Inquiry Team Member Letter of Agreement

Dear [Participant Name],

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership Degree at Royal Roads University, Meagan La Plante (the Student) will be conducting an inquiry research study at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families (YES) in order to consider how Rapid Rehousing Practice could be improved at YES while still addressing the complex needs of clients. The Student's credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership, at [telephone number] or email [email address].

Inquiry Team Member Role Description

As a volunteer Inquiry Team Member assisting the Student with this project, your role may include one or more of the following: providing advice on the relevance and wording of questions and letters of invitation, supporting the logistics of the data-gathering methods, including observing, assisting, or facilitating an interview or focus group, taking notes, transcribing, or reviewing analysis of data, to assist the Student and the YES Shelter for Youth and Families organizational change process. In the course of this activity, you may be privy to confidential inquiry data.

Confidentiality of Inquiry Data

In compliance with the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy, under which this inquiry project is being conducted, all personal identifiers and any other confidential information generated or accessed by the inquiry team advisor will only be used in the performance of the functions of this project, and must not be disclosed to anyone other than persons authorized to receive it, both during the inquiry period and beyond it. Recorded information in all formats is covered by this agreement. Personal identifiers include participant names, contact information, personally identifying turns of phrase or comments, and any other personally identifying information.

Bridging Student's Potential or Actual Ethical Conflict

In situations where potential participants in a work setting report directly to the Student, you, as a neutral third party with no supervisory relationship with either the Student or potential participants, may be asked to work closely with the Student to bridge this potential or actual conflict of interest in this study. Such requests may include asking the Inquiry Team Advisor to: send out the letter of invitation to potential participants, receive letters/emails of interest in participation from potential participants, independently make a selection of received participant requests based on criteria you and the Student will have worked out previously, formalize the logistics for the data-gathering method, including contacting the participants about the time and location of the interview or focus group, conduct the interviews or focus group with the selected participants (without the Student's presence or knowledge of which participants were chosen) using the protocol and questions worked out previously with the Student, and producing written

transcripts of the interviews or focus groups with all personal identifiers removed before the transcripts are brought back to the Student for the data analysis phase of the study.

This strategy means that potential participants with a direct reporting relationship will be assured they can confidentially turn down the participation request from their supervisor (the Student), as this process conceals from the Student which potential participants chose not to participate or simply were not selected by you, the third party, because they were out of the selection criteria range (they might have been a participant request coming after the number of participants sought, for example, interview request number 6 when only 5 participants are sought, or focus group request number 10 when up to 9 participants would be selected for a focus group). Inquiry Team members asked to take on such 3rd party duties in this study will be under the direction of the Student and will be fully briefed by the Student as to how this process will work, including specific expectations, and the methods to be employed in conducting the elements of the inquiry with the Student’s direct reports, and will be given every support possible by the Student, except where such support would reveal the identities of the actual participants.

Personal information will be collected, recorded, corrected, accessed, altered, used, disclosed, retained, secured and destroyed as directed by the Student, under direction of the Royal Roads Academic Supervisor.

Inquiry Team Members who are uncertain whether any information they may wish to share about the project they are working on is personal or confidential will verify this with Meagan La Plante, the Student.

Statement of Informed Consent:

I have read and understand this agreement.

Name (Please Print)	Signature	Date
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Appendix D: Questions for Fourcast Staff Interviews

1. Tell us about a time when you were involved in a positive transition of a youth from YES into housing. What went well? What could have been different?
2. What do you think youth need in order to transition from YES into housing in our community?
3. What supports and resources are required to successfully house youth in the community?
4. What are the unique housing needs of youth?
5. What could YES Shelter staff do better when supporting youth into housing?

Appendix E: Questions for YES Staff Focus Group

1. Please think about a time where a client was quickly housed after arriving at YES. What happened to make that transition successful?
2. Research has shown that getting clients out of the shelter as quickly as possible leads to be the best outcomes for them. What do you need to rehouse clients quickly?
3. What supports and resources are required to successfully house youth, and keep them housed when they are out of shelter?
4. What are the unique housing needs of youth?
5. Thinking to times you have case managed clients, were there any strategies that worked well?
6. What does the management team at YES need to know about re housing clients quickly?

Appendix F: Social Media Recruiting Post

Have you ever stayed at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families?! Have you been living on your own for at least 3 months? If you said yes to both of those questions, please keep reading!

We're doing some research on how to improve YES, and want to hear your opinion! If you are interested in learning more, please contact: [Contact Name] at: [email address] and [phone number].

Appendix G: Phone Script Youth Participants

Hello,

My name is [contact name], and I work at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families. I work with Meagan La Plante, who is a researcher with Royal Roads University. Meagan is doing research to learn how to improve the YES Shelter, so that youth clients are able to get housed faster, and get the support that they need. Meagan is looking for youth who used the YES emergency shelter, but have been living on their own for at least three months.

If you choose to participate, you will meet with Meagan, who has some questions to ask you. This is called an interview, and will take about an hour. Meagan can meet you at any coffee shop downtown, or at Fourcast, whatever you would like. If you decide to do the interview you will be asked some questions about your experience at the YES Shelter, what helped you, and what didn't help you. This is an opportunity to help improve the YES Shelter, so that anyone who uses the shelter in future will have support to move out quickly, with help from staff there.

Are you interested in this opportunity? If you are, I will send you a letter and can either mail it or email it to you. After that you will meet with Meagan, at a location and time of your choice to do the interview. Do you have any questions? Would you like me to put you in contact with Meagan La Plante, the researcher?

Thank you for your time.

Appendix H: Letter of Invitation for Youth Interviews

Study Title: Rapid Rehousing Practice at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families

My name is Meagan La Plante and this research project is part of the requirement for a Masters of Arts in Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies: [email address] or [telephone number].

Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization

The purpose of my research project is to explore how the YES Shelter for Youth and Families could better support youth who find themselves homeless in Peterborough, and enter the emergency shelter. This research is being sponsored by the YES Shelter for Youth and Families, and the information learned will be shared with the agency.

Your participation and how information will be collected

The research you are invited to participate in consists of one interview. This interview will take one hour, and you will be provided with a \$15.00 gift certificate of your choice. The interview results will be sent to a transcriptionist and then used in a final report. This final report will help the YES Shelter find new ways to support youth who are in the shelter.

Benefits and risks to participation

The benefits to participating includes the opportunity to influence housing supports in Peterborough, and possibly improve opportunities for youth in the future. This research will help the YES Shelter find new ways to help youth who are in the shelter. There are some risks to participating in this research. You will be asked to reflect on your experience while homeless, and this could trigger negative emotions. A counsellor will be made available to you, and the Four County Crisis Line will be made available to you. I will also contact you forty-eight hours after the study to see if you require any support.

Inquiry team

This research is influenced and will be reviewed by an inquiry team. I will be completing the interview with you, and your answers will be sent to a transcriptionist. Your results will not be viewed by the inquiry team until they are in the final report.

Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest

In addition to my role as a researcher, I am currently the Shelter Supervisor at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families. I will be involved in completing your interview. I disclose this information here so that you can make a fully informed decision on whether or not to participate in this study.

Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on a password protected computer on my home computer, and will never be stored on YES Shelter equipment. Information will be audio recorded, and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. This data will be completed for 12 months following the completion of the projects and will then be destroyed.

Sharing results

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership Studies, I will also be sharing my research findings with the YES Shelter for Youth and Families, the homelessness hub, and this report will be disseminated publicly via academic portals. This means that the research will be available publicly, and anyone could access the report. Should you be interested in seeing a copy, it can be made available to any participants.

Procedure for withdrawing from the study

Participants may withdraw at any point during the interview, and may choose not to answer specific questions. The transcript will be made available to the participant following the interview, and after forty-eight hours, withdrawal will no longer be possible.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By replying directly to the e-mail request for participation you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Should you have any questions, I can be contacted at: [email address] or [telephone number].

Sincerely,
Meagan La Plante

Appendix I: Informed Consent for Youth Interviews

Rapid Rehousing Practice at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 16 years old, and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project. You can choose not to participate, and there will be no consequences.

This study is being conducted to benefit the YES Shelter for Youth and Families, and will be made available publicly in the form of a Thesis Document. If you decide to participate, all information will remain completely anonymous and confidential. No one will know that you participated in the study, and your name or information about you will never be shared.

You will have an opportunity to read, or have your answers read to you after the interview, and you may change your answers at that time. 48 hours after that time, you may no longer revoke or change your answers.

There are some risks to participating in this research. You will be asked to reflect on your experience while homeless, and this could trigger negative emotions. A counsellor will be made available to you, and the Four County Crisis Line will be made available to you. The researcher will also contact you 48 hours after the study to see if you require any support.

The benefits to participating include helping the YES Shelter to improve how it works, so that youth who come to the shelter get better service.

I consent to the audio recording of the interview

Name: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix J: Letter of Invitation for Fourcast Staff Interviews

Study Title: Rapid Rehousing Practice at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families

My name is Meagan La Plante and this research project is part of the requirement for a Masters of Arts in Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies: [email address] or [telephone number].

Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization

The purpose of my research project is to explore how the YES Shelter for Youth and Families could better support youth in being re-housed, while still supporting their complex needs. This research is being sponsored by the YES Shelter for Youth and Families, and the information learned will be shared with the agency.

Your participation and how information will be collected

The research will consist of interviews, and focus groups. The method that you are invited to participate in, is an interview, which I anticipate will take 1 hour of your time. I will complete the interview with you. The data will then be sent to a transcriptionist. Your raw data will only be seen by myself, and then analyzed and shared in a report.

Benefits and risks to participation

Should you choose to participate, you will have the opportunity to support the YES Shelter in improving how it supports youth who enter the shelter. There are no foreseen risks to participating in the study.

Inquiry team

This research is supported by an inquiry team. This inquiry team will support me with my questions that I ask you during your interview. I will complete the interview with you, and then send the recordings to a transcriptionist. Only myself and the transcriptionist will review the raw data.

Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest

In addition to my role as a researcher, I am currently the Shelter Supervisor at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families. I disclose this information here so that you can make a fully informed decision on whether or not to participate in this study.

Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on a password protected computer on my home computer, and will never be stored on YES Shelter

equipment. Information will be audio recorded, and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. This data will be completed for 12 months following the completion of the projects and will then be destroyed.

Sharing results

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership Studies, I will also be sharing my research findings with the YES Shelter for Youth and Families, and this report will be disseminated publicly via academic portals. This research will be accessible by the general public. Should you be interested in seeing a copy, it can be made available to any participants.

Procedure for withdrawing from the study

Participants may withdraw at any point during the focus group, and may choose not to answer specific questions. However, anything said prior to withdrawal from the study will not be able to be withdrawn. The transcript will be made available to the participant following the interview, and after forty eight hours, withdrawal will no longer be possible.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By replying directly to the e-mail request for participation you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Should you have any questions, I can be contacted at: [email address] or [telephone number].

Sincerely,
Meagan La Plante

Appendix K: Informed Consent for Fourcast Interviews

Rapid Rehousing Practice at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 16 years old, and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project.

This study is being conducted to benefit the YES Shelter for Youth and Families, and will be made available publicly in the form of a Thesis Document. Should you consent, all information will remain completely anonymous and confidential. Your name and all identifiers will be left out of the study.

You will have an opportunity to participate in an interview, where you may choose to participate as you wish. You can choose to leave the interview at any time.

There are no foreseen risks to participating in the study. The benefits to participating include the opportunity to influence housing supports in Peterborough, and possibly improve opportunities for youth in the future.

I consent to the audio recording of the interview

Name: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix L: Email to YES Staff

Hello Everyone,

I am emailing you to invite you to participate in a Focus Group that will influence how YES rehouses youth clients!

Meagan La Plante, is conducting research in partial fulfillment of her Masters of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University. Her research asks the following questions:

How can the YES Shelter rapidly rehouse youth, while still addressing their complex needs?

The focus group that I invite you to take part in, will occur on [date] at [time]. If you participate you will be invited to talk about how YES could rehouse youth who enter the shelter more quickly, while ensuring that their complex needs are addressed.

Your participation is voluntary! I will manage the invitations, and a neutral facilitator with no connection to YES has been asked to facilitate. Meagan will be present during any of this, and will never be told who chose to participate in the group.

However, this is an opportunity to mould your work, and help the management team at YES create a plan for YES to rehouse youth. After the focus group, the recommendations that you suggest will be given to Meagan (with no names or identifiers), and she will create a report. This report will be shared with Suzanne, who will be tasked with considering how to implement the changes.

If you participate, you will also be provided with a \$25 gift card of your choosing for your time. I hope you'll participate, it's an awesome opportunity to create positive change at YES!

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

[Contact Name]

[Contact Title]

YES Shelter for Youth and Families

Appendix M: Letter of Invitation for YES Staff Focus Group

Study Title: Rapid Rehousing Practice at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families

My name is Meagan La Plante and this research project is part of the requirement for a Masters of Arts in Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Catherine Etmanski, Director, School of Leadership Studies: [email address] or [telephone number].

Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization

The purpose of my research project is to explore how the YES Shelter for Youth and Families could better support youth in being re-housed, while still supporting their complex needs. This research is being sponsored by the YES Shelter for Youth and Families, and the information learned will be shared with the agency.

Your participation and how information will be collected

The research will consist of interviews, and focus groups. The method that you are invited to participate in, is an interview, which I anticipate will take 1 hour of your time. I will complete the interview with you. The data will then be sent to a transcriptionist. Your raw data will only be seen by myself, and then analyzed and shared in a report.

Benefits and risks to participation

Should you choose to participate, you will have the opportunity to support the YES Shelter in improving how it supports youth who enter the shelter. You will also have an opportunity to influence your work, as this research will inform how YES provides case management to clients. Should you participate, you will also be provided with a \$15.00 gift card of your choice, to thank you for participating. There are no foreseen risks to participating in the study.

Inquiry team

This research is being supported by an inquiry team. The inquiry team includes the YES Shelter's Youth Outreach worker, who will manage all the invitations to participate in the focus group. The Youth Outreach worker will also send all information collected during the research to a transcriptionist. The transcriptionist will remove all information that could identify you, and will then send the information back to me, the researcher. A participant in my school program, who is not a YES employee, will complete the focus group. At no point will I know which staff participated in the focus group.

Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest

In addition to my role as a researcher, I am currently the Shelter Supervisor at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families. In order to ensure you are comfortable to participate, your identity will never be shared with me. I will, at no point, be made aware of who participated in the focus

group. I disclose this information here so that you can make a fully informed decision on whether or not to participate in this study.

Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. Your identity will not be disclosed to me at any time, and all information will be stored by the [Contact Title, Contact Name], will send all information to an independent transcriptionist who will remove all names and identifiers before returning the information to me, the researcher. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on a password-protected computer on my home computer, and will never be stored on YES Shelter equipment. Information will be audio recorded, and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. This data will be completed for 12 months following the completion of the projects and will then be destroyed.

Sharing results

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership Studies, I will also be sharing my research findings with the YES Shelter for Youth and Families, the homelessness hub, and this report will be disseminated publicly via academic portals. Should you be interested in seeing a copy, it can be made available to any participants.

Procedure for withdrawing from the study

Participants may withdraw at any point during the focus group, and may choose not to answer specific questions. However, anything said prior to withdrawal from the study will not be able to be withdrawn.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By replying directly to the e-mail request for participation you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

Should you have any questions, I can be contacted at: [email address] or [telephone number]. You can also ask questions to [Contact Name], who will ask me without disclosing the person asking, and can provide you with an answer.

Sincerely,

Meagan La Plante

Appendix N: Informed Consent for YES Staff Focus Group

Rapid Rehousing Practice at the YES Shelter for Youth and Families

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 16 years old, and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project.

This study is being conducted to benefit the YES Shelter for Youth and Families, and will be made available publicly in the form of a Thesis Document. Should you consent, all information will remain completely anonymous and confidential. Your name and all identifiers will be left out of the study, and will not be shared with the researcher at any time.

You will have an opportunity to participate in a focus group, where you may choose to participate as you wish. You can choose to leave the focus group at any time, but please be aware that anything shared prior to withdrawal cannot be withdrawn and will be included in the study.

There are no foreseen risks to participating in the study. The benefits to participating include the opportunity to influence housing supports in Peterborough, and possibly improve opportunities for youth in the future.

I consent to the audio recording of the interview

Name: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____