

Project: Futures Forward Enhancement Project: Qualitative Research Component

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Background:

Canadian research tells us that between 41 – 43% of homeless youth have histories of foster care or other child welfare placement. A local study suggests that this statistic may be as high as 82% in Winnipeg, and that 46% of these youth experienced homelessness within the first year of leaving the child welfare system (Courtney, Maes Nino, and Peters, 2014). The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2016) suggests that early interventions that prevent and reduce youth homelessness can reduce the incidence of chronic homelessness among the adult population.

The Building Futures initiative, launched in 2013, is a community-driven collaboration that supports youth who are in or have been in the care of a Child and Family Services (CFS) agency in Manitoba. The initiative brings together a network of specialized community partners to provide wraparound services for youth at risk of homelessness, ages 16 – 25 years. The partners of this collaborative include: the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Manitoba and Winnipeg; Youth Employment Services (YES); and Community Financial Counselling Services (CFCS). As a collaborative, Building Futures draws upon the respective strengths and program offerings of its three partner agencies. Preliminary program evaluation findings of this initiative pointed to a number of ways to improve impact.

The Building Futures program aims to support program participants to: obtain educational goals, including high school and post-secondary attainment; identify and work toward employment opportunities; and learn important life skills such as household budgeting. The program offers much needed supports including counselling for issues related to the trauma and stress experienced as part of transitioning out of the child welfare system. These counselling services are delivered by Youth Service Navigators as provided by CMHA and funded by the provincial government. Within the first year of operations, it became evident that the primary focus of the counselling services provided was on finding and keeping, through eviction prevention, suitable housing options for the program participants transitioning out of the child welfare system. In essence, the model of Building Futures evolved organically from an initiative designed to support youth transitioning out of the child welfare system through life skills training and education/employment development to a program that has demonstrated three successful years in supporting, facilitating, and creating youth housing.

An initial \$25,000 micro grant from the federal government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy provided funding for research to evaluate impact of the Building Futures program and to inform further development. Research findings demonstrated that without access to safe affordable housing, youth have difficulty reaching their education and employment goals. In response to these findings, the CMHA has established the Youth Housing with Wraparound Supports pilot.

Building from the CMHAs Housing with Supports adult-stream housing model, a Youth Housing Navigation service has been designed to support the varied and complex needs of youth transitioning out of child welfare using a Housing First-inspired model.

The CMHA and its partners YES and CFCS were recently awarded a second \$25,000 micro grant to assist in the development and evaluation of the pilot. Limited resources allow only for a quantitative assessment however the partners believe a qualitative component is required to ensure a deeper understanding of how important housing security is for youth who have aged out of care.

Qualitative research proposal

Researchers will work in collaboration with community partners to design a qualitative study examining the impact of the Youth Housing with Wraparound Supports pilot. This will include a collaborative process to develop interview questions as the primary means of gathering of qualitative data through interviews with between 10 and 15 participants. Each participant will be interviewed twice. The first interview will take place during the initial intake stage. A second interview will take place at the 6-month pilot program. Interviews will be transcribed and analyzed for key themes. Ethics approval will be obtained through the University of Winnipeg Research Ethics Board.

Deliverables:

Findings will be integrated into a final report to CMHA's funders to make a case for this Housing First inspired model. A second paper will be prepared for the MRA and potential publication by CCPA. The co-investigators will submit a paper to yet to be determined academic journal for potential publication.

Timeline: May 1 – February 1

Initial interviews will take place in May 2018. Final interviews will be conducted at the end of the pilot (November 2018). Qualitative data will be analyzed in November and a final report will be submitted to the MRA by mid-January 2019. Researchers may also submit an article to an academic journal after the project is completed (Spring 2019).

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