

**Early intervention to support youth to secure and maintain housing is crucial to prevent the entrenchment of long term homelessness.**



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## Youth Homelessness in Toronto

**Over 1,000 youth under the age of 25 are homeless and/or street-involved in Toronto** at any given time.<sup>1</sup>

**Street life carries many risks to health and safety.** Street youth may panhandle, squeegee, deal drugs or be involved in sex work. They are far more likely to be assaulted, become seriously ill or unknowingly contract HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis C.<sup>2</sup>

**Street-involved youth have a 13% higher mortality rate** than other youth, often due to drug overdose or suicide, and many live with chronic physical and mental health issues, including depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>3</sup> 75% of all mental illnesses have their onset in youth, before the age of 25, with a peak in the volatile adolescent years.<sup>4</sup>

**70% of street-involved youth have experienced some form of sexual, physical or emotional abuse.** Many of them have lost touch with their families and have lost any hope of a better future. Often youth lack identification, are coping with addiction, have limited education and have little or no employment history.<sup>2</sup>

**Early intervention is critical.** The longer individuals have been homeless, the less hopeful they become that stable housing is a possibility for them and they are less likely to access housing services.<sup>1</sup>

**Dedicated programs that address their multiple needs help these youth** build on inner strengths to turn their lives around and become happy and productive citizens.<sup>3</sup>

### Recent trends among street-involved and homeless youth<sup>7</sup>

- ⇒ **increased mental health concerns** (depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, trauma disorders, bipolar disorder and paranoid personality disorder) and **more concurrent disorders** (potentially related to the increase in polysubstance use and injection drug use)
- ⇒ **more interactions with police and law** despite being less publicly visible
- ⇒ **more polysubstance use and injection drug use**
- ⇒ **physical health appears to be on the decline**— on the whole health is quite poor; most common issues are infections, injury, upper respiratory, malnutrition, dental, skin conditions and foot problems
- ⇒ Exhibiting **more symptoms associated with developmental delay** and having extended contact with the police and law

**Funding programs for street-involved youth is a good social investment.**

**Comparative costs:<sup>5</sup>**

**Youth in detention**

**\$250/day**

**Youth in shelter**

**\$75/day**

**Youth in affordable housing**

**\$25/day (with rent subsidy)**

## What should be done to address youth homelessness?

The following recommendations to address youth homelessness in Canada are drawn from Raising the Roof's report released in 2009:

1. **Existing Funding:** Secure long term and flexible funding to enable successful programs for street involved youth to continue to grow and develop
2. **Access to services:** One stop barrier free access to services for street involved youth within their home community
3. **Education:** more educational opportunities/grant programs for street involved youth and increased programs that target early school leavers
4. **Employment:** Increased job training and employment opportunities for street involved youth in particular graduates of agency programs
5. **Housing:** A national housing strategy that includes a continuum of housing specifically for street involved youth, e.g. youth shelters, transitional housing, coop housing, safe and affordable housing, as well as supportive housing for youth leaving child protection foster care and group homes
6. **Mentorship:** increased mentorship support aimed at street involved youth to build self esteem and develop skills
7. **Government leadership:** Leadership and collaboration among federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments in developing a Canada wide plan to address youth homelessness
8. **Private Sector Engagement:** Development of a supportive framework to encourage the private sector to participate in creative solutions to youth homelessness e.g. skills training employment opportunities, development of supportive work environment
9. **Government policy:** Development of distinct policies around youth homelessness to address unique needs of this population

## Get Involved!

Visit [www.youthlink.ca](http://www.youthlink.ca) for ways that you can support street-involved and homeless youth.

### Sources

1. Estimate based on Toronto Street Needs Assessment statistical survey, April 2006
2. "No Way Home" Fifth Estate Documentary, CBC Production, 2004
3. Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions, Raising the Roof/Chez Toit, 2009
4. "Kids Get Better", Globe and Mail, September 26, 2009, pg F8
5. Gordon Laird, Shelter: Homelessness in a Growth Economy, Sheldon Chumir Foundation Research Report, 2007
6. Buccieri, Kristy, Evaluating Shout Clinic's Role in Providing health Services to Street Youth in Toronto, Shout Clinic and York University, September 2008
7. Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions, Raising the Roof/Chez Toit, 2009