

# NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVE

In partnership  
to help Canada's  
homeless people



## Pilot Study: The Child Welfare System and Homelessness among Canadian Youth

***Luba Serge, Margaret Eberle, Michael Goldberg,  
Susan Sullivan and Peter Dudding***

December 2002

The views expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the National  
Secretariat on Homelessness of the Government of Canada

**Pilot Study:**  
**The Child Welfare System and Homelessness**  
**among Canadian Youth**

**December 2002**

Luba Serge

Margaret Eberle

Michael Goldberg, Research Director Social Planning and Research Council of BC

Susan Sullivan, Communications Co-ordinator Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare

and Peter Dudding, Executive Director Child Welfare League of Canada

## **Executive Summary**

### **Pilot Study: The Child Welfare System and Homelessness among Canadian Youth**

#### **Introduction**

The issue of youth homelessness is particularly disturbing for it not only touches on a population that is vulnerable with relatively little control over its situation, but it also implies the failure of key components of society – families, schools, employment, and the various safety nets that have been instituted. One of the “systems” that has been set up to protect vulnerable youth is child welfare. However, there is evidence that some youth who have had experience with the child welfare system eventually become homeless, and that the numbers may be increasing. Several profiles of the urban homeless have discovered that many homeless youth and adults have a history of involvement with child welfare, including having been ‘in care’ and are over-represented among the homeless. While this group of youth is still a relatively small proportion of youth who have been through the child welfare system, this does suggest that some, very vulnerable youth, are not getting the kind of support that they need.

This pilot study aimed to contribute to a more thorough understanding of the relationship between youth who have been in the care of child welfare and youth homelessness in a Canadian context. This research project had two broad objectives:

1. To identify the factors that lead to homelessness for some, while others, who may be in an equally vulnerable situation (i.e. in care) do not become homeless. The research looked for commonalities/differences between three groups: youth who have been homeless and never in care, youth who have been homeless and in care, youth who have been in care but never homeless. The research also aimed to identify what child protection policies or practices, if any, may have contributed to the situation, and how different practices might effectively assist in the prevention of incidences of homelessness; and
2. To assess the need for a broader study using the same or a modified research methodology. This included assessing the feasibility of the present methodology, including what areas of questioning need to be included and perhaps expanded.

#### **Research Design**

The study was undertaken in two major parts. The first was an overview of the literature and the compilation of an annotated bibliography dealing with North American and European studies on the link between youth homelessness and the child welfare system as well as outcomes of the child welfare system generally. This review helped to identify the gaps in knowledge. Key informant interviews to gather additional data confirming or denying the link and to identify some of the factors that contribute to this relationship were undertaken as part of the initial background research.

Qualitative interviews with youth in four cities, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal were the second important component of the pilot study. In each city, interviews were conducted with 10 youth from among the following three groups: youth who have been in care and have been homeless; youth who have been homeless but not in care; and youth who have been in care but have not been homeless.

It should be noted that this pilot study is qualitative and makes no claims to being representative of the population of youth who are homeless or youth who have been in care. Conclusions about this sample of youth cannot be used to draw conclusions about the population of youth who have been in care, nor about homeless youth in general. The youth who were interviewed may well be atypical – those that are easily reached, with connections to service agencies, and willing to

participate in the study. In addition, specific biases may have been introduced due to differing selection processes in each city.

### **The link between youth homelessness and the child welfare system**

Although the body of literature explicitly drawing the links between being placed in the care of child welfare and homelessness is small, some insights are offered. The most obvious explanation for the apparent connection between youth homelessness and previous out of home care is that the system fails to help children deal with the problems that were at the heart of their removal from their homes. Researchers note that these experiences may have emotional and behavioural ramifications for young people that tend to promote distrust of others and these may influence future relationships. A lack of treatment and counselling within the child welfare system to address some of the issues arising from early maltreatment may also be an issue.

Several studies found evidence of mistreatment during care, which served to exacerbate initial traumas. Other potentially influential factors include incompatible placements and changing placements. Some authors question whether the type of out of home placement, the age at which it occurs and the duration, are factors. Canadian key informants noted that youth with stable, permanent placements were much less likely to touch the homeless service system than those in temporary placements, in fact, "we never see them". Other research finds that care is often inhospitable for gay/lesbian youth, who turn to the street as an alternative.

Many researchers and advocates have focused on the process of leaving care, the age, and the shortcomings of the preparation and resources available to the youth as factors affecting outcomes. The arbitrary nature of youth leaving care at a certain pre-determined age does not necessarily reflect the age at which a youth is developmentally ready to exit, and in no way replicates the experience of leaving the family home. The inflexibility of the care system to serve the needs of youth who have aged out or voluntarily exited care either prematurely or upon reaching the age of majority is often cited as a factor in poor outcomes generally, including homelessness. If the first housing arrangement fails, there is no option to return should a young person experience difficulties. Inadequate preparation in life skills is also identified as a shortcoming of the care system and is implicated in rising youth homelessness among care leavers.

Key informants were almost unanimous in their view that a positive supportive relationship with at least one individual is key to helping a care leaver successfully exit care, something that the child welfare system is generally ill equipped to provide. This individual could be anyone - a family member, a foster parent, a social worker. Some researchers suggest that contractual service arrangements should be available for former foster children up to age 21 while others recommend that support arrangements should continue to age 24 under defined circumstances. Other suggestions range from restricting the use of temporary care, making available more flexible resources and supports (for a longer time period), more transition services and better planning for the long-term, at the outset. For First Nations, it is suggested that there is a need to "build up parenting skills" in order to deal with the family and community as a whole.

### **Overview of the youth interviewed**

A total of 40 youth were interviewed. Of these four were born before 1977, thereby over the age limit defined at the outset of the study. The youth interviewed were equally divided between males and females; however, most of the youth who had "successfully" exited care were female. There was a higher preponderance of males in the homeless/never in care group and in the homeless/in care group. Over half of all youth interviewed are under 22 years. Half of the youth stated that their ethnic origin was "Canadian" or of a European background. This is the largest group for those who have been homeless and never in care. One quarter of the youth identified themselves primarily as aboriginal or gave this as their first ethnic group. However, aboriginal youth comprise half of homeless youth who have been in care.

## **Findings**

For the 36 youth interviewed in this study the link between youth homelessness and the child welfare system appears to be borne out. The study shows, as suggested by the literature, that the youth with more positive experiences of care were less likely to become homeless. Positive experiences with care include being placed in foster homes as opposed to group homes, as well as having fewer or more stable placements. A few interviews also reveal some of challenges faced by the care system in dealing with youth with difficult behaviours – behaviours that may lead to involvement with the criminal justice system, drugs, and alcohol. The problem does not necessarily remain with the child welfare system alone, as the interviews illustrate, other organisations are drawn in, including shelters and services for homeless youth.

Contrary to the published literature and keeping in mind the limits of self-reporting, the evidence gathered from the youth who participated in this study suggests that, in their view, the actual process of preparation for leaving care had little bearing on the success of the transition. Youth in this study who successfully exited care stated that either no preparation was offered or in their view, it did not have a significant impact. This does not suggest that the preparation had no impact, simply that it was not perceived as making the transition easier. What seems to play a role is the age at which the youth left care. The younger they were, the less likely they were to avoid homelessness, in part because this move out of care often appeared to be a precursor to more family chaos. Similarly, and as highlighted in the literature, a significant personal relationship appears to be critical, be it a person from the care system or a relative. It is interesting to note that a biological parent was not identified as this “important” person in any of the interviews.

It is clear from the study that while some youth have stabilised their lives; independence at 18 or even 21 is premature. The youth interviewed for this study who left care at an earlier age were less successful in avoiding homelessness than those who left later. That does not suggest that youth, including those who are “successful”, don’t struggle. They struggle with finances, some having to delay studies because they don’t have the means or others strive to combine school and work. Affordable housing is clearly an element of this struggle. Furthermore, it would appear that youth with difficult backgrounds may need to begin to come to terms with their pasts at some point in their lives, perhaps when they are older and capable of dealing with this. However, the means to undertake this work with psychological support, long after they have become “emancipated” does not seem to be available.

On a broader level, the interviews reveal that for many homeless youth, housing alone would not be sufficient to resolve their homelessness. The “homelessness” that these youth experience often goes beyond the lack of shelter and includes the lack of employment and skills, low educational achievement and little social support. While stabilising the housing situation would be an important first step, and one that was fervently desired by many, the interviews reveal that other supports would be essential to make the move out of homelessness sustainable. Other kinds of support are needed for the youth, for example, many understood that their lack of education was an impediment to finding stable employment, many knew that they wanted something better in their lives, but often plans were vague or unrealistic, in that the process to realise these goals were not clear. The standard educational system clearly is a problem for many youth who have been on the street. Some positive tendencies emerged with youth who were in alternative school settings, including a Native Education program.

## **Further research**

The present study yields some important insights into the unique backgrounds, experiences and thoughts of a group of homeless and never homeless youth. Further quantitative research would be necessary to generalise these findings beyond this small group of individuals. The interviews suggest that some youth had behaviours that led to involvement with the criminal justice system, addictions and mental health problems. It is not clear whether some youth who wound up in group homes or residential facilities did so because the problems they had were beyond the

capacity of a foster family. Furthermore, some of these youth appeared to be the more “hardened” homeless, more involved in street culture and living on the margins of society. While the research seems to support other studies that have found that placement in foster families is preferable to residential facilities, the best response to youth who have complex problems is not apparent from this research and worthy of more study. These youth also appear to have a tendency to leave care earlier – raising questions about the kind of support that can be offered for youth who want their independence before they are fully prepared.

One of the key elements of this study is that it dealt with youth who came from chaotic backgrounds, whether child welfare intervened or not. The youth in this study illustrate to some extent how homelessness can be a profound experience – some youth stated that they had never had a sense of “home”. A study which would compare family backgrounds of youth living in homeless situations and other youth, would permit a better understanding of the factors that come into play in becoming homeless and perhaps, a better definition of the components of homelessness itself. Furthermore, this kind of comparison would allow a better understanding of the kind of support that youth need and also yield a deeper understanding of what “independence” and “adulthood” really mean, especially in a context where the definition of youth is being stretched to the age of 29 or even 35.

The definition of “successful”, based to a large extent on not having been homeless which served the initial purposes of the study is not sufficient to fully understand the dynamics of homelessness. Some youth interviewed who have been homeless appear to be moving onto “successful” and independent lives. Revisiting the results in terms of what constitutes “success” raises important questions about dealing with youth who have been homeless and the kind of support they need to stabilise their lives. The interviews conducted give intriguing hints at what these elements might be and would appear to include at least one significant relationship and for some youth finding new anchors, such as an alternative school and Native Education. More knowledge of successful outcomes in homelessness intervention with youth, including longitudinal studies, would be useful for researchers and more importantly, practitioners and policy makers.

One of the objectives of this pilot research was to determine if the study should be replicated on a larger scale. Enlarging the sample size would not necessarily strengthen the results and therefore is not recommended. However, further exploration of these issues with respect to certain sub-groups of youth, such as Aboriginal youth or young women, might be instructive. There is also a need for more quantitative research that would reveal the extent and magnitude of the link between experiences in care and homelessness.

There are a couple of potential policy implications stemming from this research that that would benefit from additional research. The comments and perceptions of the youth in this study suggest that programs and initiatives to prepare youth for the actual transition out of care are less important than other factors. It would be worthwhile to explore this further by means of an evaluation of this type of program or initiative. Since the age of leaving care appears to be a factor in explaining the link to homelessness this suggests that the age for exit from the care system should be higher in certain circumstances. Evaluation of a province or a program with a later care leaving age versus an earlier care leaving age to compare outcomes would be highly instructive in confirming if this is indeed the case. There is perhaps also need to examine the success of more gradual programs of independence for youth who have been in care – programs that allow them to “test the waters” of independence with a safety net that allows them to go back and try again.

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Objectives .....	2
1.3 Report Organisation.....	2
1.4 Acknowledgements.....	3
<b>2. Methodology .....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 Research Design.....	4
2.2 Data gathering.....	4
2.3 The sample .....	6
2.4 Analysis .....	6
2.5 The limitations of the study.....	7
<b>3. Causes of youth homelessness .....</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1 Family breakdown and family violence .....	8
3.2 Child welfare involvement .....	9
3.3 Residential instability .....	9
3.4 School.....	10
3.5 Abrupt departure from the family .....	10
3.6 Poverty.....	10
3.7 Sexual orientation.....	10
<b>4. The link between youth homelessness and the child welfare system.....</b>	<b>11</b>
4.1 Initial trauma .....	11
4.2 Experience with out of home care .....	11
4.3 Preparation and transition from care .....	12
4.4 Factors contributing to positive outcomes .....	14
<b>5. Gaps in the literature.....</b>	<b>16</b>
5.1 Proportion/extent of homeless population with a child welfare background.....	16
5.2 Causes, risk factors, and triggers for homelessness .....	17
5.3 The relationship between child welfare and homelessness.....	18
5.4 Outcomes of child welfare .....	19
5.5 Good practice .....	20
5.6 Summary of gaps.....	20
<b>6. Overview of Canadian Child Welfare Systems.....</b>	<b>21</b>
6.1 Legislation.....	21
6.2 Child Protection.....	21
6.3 Types of Care .....	22
6.4 Age of Eligibility and Extended Care .....	22
<b>7. Overview of the youth interviewed.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>8. Youth interviewed: have been homeless .....</b>	<b>28</b>
8.1 Family background .....	28
8.2 Running away and being thrown out.....	29
8.3 Becoming homeless.....	30
8.4 Current housing situation.....	31
8.5 Work and survival.....	32
8.6 Education and school.....	33

8.7	Relationships and social contacts .....	34
8.8	Summary and Discussion.....	37
<b>9.</b>	<b>Youth interviewed: have been in care .....</b>	<b>38</b>
9.1	Going into care and family background.....	38
9.2	Running away and being thrown out.....	41
9.3	Leaving Care .....	41
9.4	Current housing situation.....	42
9.5	Work and survival.....	43
9.6	Education and school.....	43
9.7	Relationships and social contacts .....	44
9.8	Summary and discussion.....	46
<b>10.</b>	<b>Factors linked to homelessness .....</b>	<b>47</b>
10.1	Family background.....	47
10.2	Running away/being thrown out.....	47
10.3	Age of independence .....	48
10.4	Education and work .....	49
10.5	Financial independence.....	50
10.6	Social relations .....	50
10.7	Other problems and behaviours.....	51
10.8	The impact of age .....	51
10.9	Resilience .....	52
<b>11.</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>12.</b>	<b>Further research .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>13.</b>	<b>Appendix A Annotated bibliography .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>14.</b>	<b>Appendix B Review Committee Members .....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>15.</b>	<b>Appendix C Key Informants.....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>16.</b>	<b>Appendix D Tables Youth Interviewed: had been homeless .....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>17.</b>	<b>Appendix E: Youth interviewed: have been in care.....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>18.</b>	<b>Appendix F Youth Interviewed: Over and Under 21 years.....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>19.</b>	<b>Appendix E: Consent forms and Interview Guides .....</b>	<b>99</b>



## Tables

### Overview of the Canadian Child Welfare Systems

Table: 1 Age of Majority and Age of Child as Defined in Child Protection Legislation and Extended Care....	22
--	----

### Overview of the youth interviewed

Table: 2 Participants' location by group.....	25
Table: 3 Participants' sex by group .....	25
Table: 4 Participants' ages by group.....	26
Table: 5 Participants' ethnic origin by group.....	27

### Factors linked to homelessness

Table: 6 Running away/being thrown out by group .....	47
Table: 7 Age first ran away/thrown out by group.....	47
Table: 8 Age first living on their own by group.....	48
Table: 9 Last year of schooling completed by group.....	49
Table: 10 Currently working by group.....	49
Table: 11 Social contacts by group .....	50

### Youth who have been homeless

Table: 12 Who raised you?.....	86
Table: 13 Have you ever run away from home or have your parent(s) ever thrown you out of home? .....	86
Table: 14 How old were you when you first ran away or were thrown out? .....	86
Table: 15 How many times have you run away and/or been thrown out? .....	87
Table: 16 Where did you stay after running away or being thrown out? .....	87
Table: 17 Where do you live right now? .....	87
Table: 18 How long have you been there? .....	88
Table: 19 Do you think you'll stay on much longer?.....	88
Table: 20 If no or don't know, where will you go (or hope to go)?.....	88
Table: 21 Are you working right now?.....	88
Table: 22 If working, how long have you been there?.....	88
Table: 23 What was the last year of school that you completed? .....	88
Table: 24 In the last six months has been in touch with:.....	89

### Youth who have been in care

Table: 25 Experience of care.....	90
Table: 26 How many social workers did you have? .....	90
Table: 27 Type of placement.....	91
Table: 28 Who raised you?.....	91
Table: 29 Have you ever run away from home or have your parent(s) ever thrown you out of home? .....	91
Table: 30 How old were you when you first ran away or were thrown out? .....	92
Table: 31 How many times have you run away and/or been thrown out? .....	92
Table: 32 Where did you stay after running away or being thrown out? .....	92
Table: 33 Where do you live right now? .....	93
Table: 34 How long have you been there? .....	93
Table: 35 Do you think you'll stay on much longer?.....	93
Table: 36 If no or don't know, where will you go (or hope to go)?.....	93
Table: 37 Are you working right now?.....	93
Table: 38 If working, how long have you been there?.....	93
Table: 39 Education and school.....	94
Table: 40 In the last six months has been in touch with:.....	94
Table: 41 Distribution by group.....	96

### Youth over and under 21 years

Table: 42 Current housing situation.....	96
Table: 43 How long have you lived there? .....	96
Table: 44 Do you plan to stay? .....	96
Table: 45 Last year of school completed.....	97
Table: 46 Are you in school now? .....	97
Table: 47 If not in school, do you plan to go back? .....	97
Table: 48 Currently working.....	97

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

The issue of youth homelessness is particularly disturbing for it not only touches on a population that is vulnerable with relatively little control over its situation, but it also implies the failure of key components of society – families, schools, employment, and the various safety nets that have been instituted. An recent environmental scan noted that youth homelessness has emerged as an issue in Canada<sup>1</sup>, that Canadian key informants believe that youth homelessness is growing, and some have observed that amount of time youth remain homeless is getting longer.

One of the “systems” that has been set up to protect vulnerable youth is child welfare.<sup>2</sup> However, there is evidence that some youth who have had experience with the child welfare system eventually become homeless, and that the numbers may be increasing.<sup>3</sup> Several profiles of the urban homeless have discovered that many homeless youth and adults have a history of involvement with child welfare, including having been ‘in care’ and are over-represented among the homeless.<sup>4</sup> Canadian key informants contacted in the context of this study confirmed this link. Noting this apparent overlap, a recent Toronto study found from the results of a survey administered to youth admitted to a youth shelter that over 40 percent of their clients had “some involvement with the child welfare system”.<sup>5</sup> While this group of youth is still a relatively small proportion of youth who have been through the child welfare system, this does suggest that some, very vulnerable youth, are not getting the kind of support that they need. Generally, information is scant about children or youth who have been in the care of provincial child welfare authorities once they have left care – either because they have attained the age of majority or they have been returned to their families. A recent overview of the child welfare system in Canada<sup>6</sup> noted that there were over 62,000 children in the care of child welfare authorities in 1999 (in care defined to mean receiving child welfare services outside the family home). Some of

---

<sup>1</sup> Kraus, Deborah, Margaret Eberle and Luba Serge (2001). *Environmental Scan on Youth Homelessness*. Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

<sup>2</sup> The term *child welfare* will be used throughout the report to denote the whole system which includes prevention and *child protection*. The latter is the specific function of investigation of complaints/allegations of abuse, neglect, etc. and may result in a child being placed in the care of the child welfare authorities. If children are removed from their families, they are considered to be ‘in care’ and they may be placed in foster homes or residential facilities according to need and availability. Furthermore, these placements can be voluntary or involuntary and temporary or permanent.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth D’Acosta, Executive Director, Covenant House, Toronto. Personal communication.

<sup>4</sup> Arboleda-Florez J. and H.L. Holley (1997) *Calgary Homelessness Study, Final Report*. Alberta Health. December; Bisson, Louise (1989) *Les Maisons d’Hébergement pour jeunes : État de la situation*. Conseil permanent de la jeunesse, Gouvernement du Québec, Québec, mars; Clark, Michelle and Merrill Cooper (2000) *Homeless Youth: Falling Between the Cracks – An Investigation of Youth Homelessness in Calgary*. For the Youth Alternative Housing Committee. August; Gaetz, Stephen, Bill O’Grady and Bryan Vaillancourt (1999) *Making Money—The Shout Clinic Report on Homeless Youth and Employment* Central Toronto Community Health Centres; McCarthy, Bill (1995) *On the Streets Youth in Vancouver* Province of British Columbia Ministry of Social Services, Research, Evaluation and Statistics Branch, July 1995; Novac, Sylvia, Luba Serge, Margaret Eberle and Joyce Brown (2002) *On Her Own: Young Women and Homelessness in Canada*. Status of Women Canada; Tonkin, Roger S. et al. (2001) *No Place To Call Home: A Profile of Street Youth in British Columbia* Vancouver: The McCreary Centre Society; Health and Welfare Canada (1993) *A Study of “Out-of-the Mainstream” Youth in Halifax, Nova Scotia*. Ottawa. Minister of Supply and Services Canada

<sup>5</sup> Leslie, Bruce and Francis Hare. (2000). *Improving The Outcomes for Youth in Transition from Care*. For the Working Group of the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto/Covenant House/Ryerson University Research Project.

<sup>6</sup> Human Resources Development Canada (2002) *Child Welfare in Canada*.

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

these children were living under various temporary and permanent placements, with only a portion actually 'ageing out' of the system or leaving at the age of majority. For example, in Toronto, approximately 600 youth age 16 or older are discharged from care each year.<sup>7</sup> Little is known about how these youth fare once they graduate and move on to independent living, although anecdotal evidence and research from the US and the UK suggest outcomes are poor. There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that some youth leave care and eventually become homeless, have lower educational levels<sup>8</sup>, that they may be over-represented among those placed in the criminal justice system, and among adults with long term dependency on income assistance.<sup>9</sup>

The National Alliance to End Homelessness in the US first drew attention to this issue. It discovered that in the 1980s, both homelessness and foster care placements increased, and heard anecdotal reports of homeless adults who had been in foster care as children. The Alliance embarked upon research to confirm and better understand and explain the link. Researchers found that while foster care did not directly cause homelessness, and in fact most youth in care do not become homeless, "foster care seems usually to be one element in a complex web of familial, social and institutional failures that can affect some children. All indications are that this web of failures occurs more often for poor children."<sup>10</sup> Similar research has not been carried out in Canada. Thus while a tenuous link has been made both anecdotally and descriptively, research to explain this relationship remains to be done.

### **1.2 Objectives**

This pilot study aims to contribute to a more thorough understanding of the relationship between youth have been in the care of child welfare and youth homelessness in a Canadian context. This research project has two broad objectives:

3. To identify the factors that lead to homelessness for some, while others, who may be in an equally vulnerable situation (i.e. in care) do not become homeless. The research will be looking for commonalities/differences between three groups: youth who have been homeless and never in care, youth who have been homeless and in care, youth who have been in care but never homeless. The research also aims to identify what child protection policies or practices, if any, may have contributed to the situation, and how different practices might effectively assist in the prevention of incidences of homelessness; and
4. To assess the need for a broader study using the same or a modified research methodology. This will include assessing the feasibility of the present methodology, including what areas of questioning need to be included and perhaps expanded.

### **1.3 Report Organisation**

The first part of this report will present a description of the methodology and some of the issues that arose in designing the study. This is followed by an overview of the causes of youth homelessness as well as the links between being in the care of the child welfare and youth homelessness. The gaps in the literature and current knowledge are presented. The second half of the report deals with the findings from the interviews with the youth. Youth who have been

---

<sup>7</sup> Leslie and Hare (2000) P. 3. op.cit.

<sup>8</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2001) "Unhappy Outcomes, Youth after foster care" *Advocasey*: Fall <http://www.aecf.org/publications/advocasey/fall2001/>

<sup>9</sup> Mann Fader, Varda and Trish White. (ND) *The Transition to Independent Living: Preliminary Findings on the Experience of Youth in Care.*

<sup>10</sup> Roman, Nan P. and Phyllis B. Wolfe. (1997) "The Relationship Between Foster Care and Homelessness." *Public Welfare*. V 55, N 1, p 4-9.

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

homeless are described, followed by youth who have been in care. Factors that seem to contribute to becoming homeless are discussed. The final section deals with conclusions and recommendations for further study.

#### **1.4 Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank the interviewers (Marc St-Louis, Shirley Chau, Christine Ogaranko, Dianna Hurford, and Judy Graves), Deborah Kraus who worked on the annotated bibliography, the agencies who put us in touch with youth for interviews, the provincial Directors of Child Welfare, members of the review committee (listed in Appendix B), and last but not least, youth and key informants who contributed their time and insights during sometimes fairly lengthy interviews.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The study has been undertaken in two major parts. The first is an overview of the literature and the compilation of an annotated bibliography (Appendix A), dealing with North American and European studies on the link between youth homelessness and placement outside the home by child welfare agencies as well as studies that examine the outcomes of the child welfare system generally. This review helped to identify, in a limited way, the gaps in knowledge and was used to prepare the structured youth questionnaire and a consent form.

The methodology and questionnaire were submitted to local service providers in Montreal and Vancouver for comment. These discussions dealt with definitions, recruitment of interviewers, recruitment and screening of interviewees, consent, the draft questionnaire and payment. Furthermore, agencies responsible for of the field research in Winnipeg and Toronto also were consulted on the draft methodology.<sup>11</sup> As a result of these discussions some important modifications to the research design were made. (See section 2.2.)

A five-person review committee, struck at the outset of the project, also played an important role at this stage. Composed of participants from across Canada it represents child welfare organisations and service providers as well as expertise in homelessness issues. In addition, a representative of the provincial Directors of Child Welfare was included to ensure liaison with that group and its work. (A list of review committee members is contained in Appendix B.)

The role of the review committee was to:

- examine the results of the literature review and assist in confirming information gaps;
- comment on the pilot study methodology including questionnaires;
- participate as key informants and identify additional key informants; and
- review the findings (e.g. does the pilot study answer the question about the link between the child welfare/ care system and homelessness) and the appropriateness of conducting a comprehensive study/survey of homeless youth.

### **2.2 Data gathering**

This research project employed three sources of data:

#### **a) Existing research**

Existing published research covering three key areas: care as a risk factor for homelessness, Canadian homeless studies showing prevalence of previous experience in care, and to a lesser extent, outcomes of care was collected and an annotated bibliography was prepared early on in the study process. It included a brief synopsis of published materials on these topics from Canada, the US, UK, Europe and Australia for the period 1980 to the present and identified additional pertinent studies that were not annotated. Since the draft annotated bibliography was completed in January 2002, some new materials have been added. The annotated bibliography is included as Appendix A.

The research plan did not include a comprehensive review of the literature, but did call for an identification of the gaps in the literature, in a Canadian context. This limited approach resulted in the identification of some gaps in the published research, which are explicated in Chapter 5.

---

<sup>11</sup> The Winnipeg Social Planning Council and the Children's Aid Society of Toronto. In Winnipeg the draft methodology and questionnaire also were presented to youth service providers.

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

### **b) Key informant interviews**

Key informant interviews were conducted to:

- gather additional data confirming/denying the link;
- identify some of the factors that contribute to this relationship; and
- find examples of initiatives/programs or services that aim to address this problem.

The twenty key informants were drawn from two groups – those working with the child welfare system and those working with homeless youth. Initial contacts were members of the Review Committee and they were asked to identify others (a “snowball methodology”). Some international key informants were also included using the researchers’ contacts in the UK and the US. An interview guide was used to focus these telephone interviews. The list of key informants is provided in Appendix C.

### **c) Youth interviews**

Qualitative interviews with youth in four cities, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal were an important component of the pilot study. In each city, interviews were conducted with 10 youth from among the following three groups:

- Youth who have been in care and have been homeless;
- Youth who have been homeless but not in care; and
- Youth who have been in care but have not been homeless.

A number of criteria emerged from the consultations.

- *Homelessness*

Homeless’ was defined to mean spending at least one night on the street or in another place not meant for human habitation. It did not include what is commonly called ‘couch surfing’.

Youth who *have been* homeless, rather than those who are *currently* homeless, were targeted for two reasons:

- With time there will be perspective and greater insight on causes and circumstances around the experience of homelessness.
- The youth will have stabilised their lives to some extent; the questions about their past, family situation and causes leading to homelessness should therefore be less disturbing.

- *Age*

Interviewed youth should be over age 18 and under 25. It was intended that this would allow for some distance and insight into their experiences as a youth. In addition, interviewing youth over 18 should help avoid issues of reporting of situations of abuse to others as well as eliminate the need to gain permission from guardians to conduct the interview.

- *Child welfare system*

Youth who have been ‘in care’ are defined to mean those who had spent at least 60 days in care.

- *Definition of a successful exit from care*

“Successful” was defined as being integrated into the society as a participating citizen i.e.:

- In a stable housing situation (e.g. own apartment, sharing, rooming house, etc.); and
- Employed (i.e. in a stable job), in a training program or in school.

- *Support during/after interviews*

Some reviewers raised concern about the need for support for the youth following the interview. They were troubled by the possibility that the youth could feel vulnerable and exposed as a result of sharing painful personal information. In part, it was hoped that by interviewing older youth and those who are leading more stable lives some of these issues would be avoided. Interviewers in each city were instructed to identify potential sources of support in the event this was required.

- *Consent form and payment for participation*

Each youth was read and asked to sign a consent form that stated that:

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

- participation was voluntary;
- the interview could be stopped at any time;
- the interview would be kept confidential; and
- their identity would not be disclosed and that a pseudonym could be used.

Each person was paid \$30 for participating in the interview or an equal combination of payment and a meal.

- *Recruitment and screening*

Recruitment of participants varied to some extent from city to city, depending on the organisations carrying out the fieldwork and on particular situations in each city. For example, in Montreal homeless youth were recruited through two shelter/transitional housing projects. Youth who had successfully exited care were identified by the two child welfare agencies. In other cities, youth were identified through homeless service agencies, youth in care networks, etc.

Efforts were made to ensure that youth selected for interviews met the criteria for selection, and included males and females and persons of Aboriginal ethnicity.

### **2.3 The sample**

While certain definitions and criteria were determined after the initial consultation process, some of these were modified with practice. For example, youth in many cases were recruited from shelters, transitional housing projects, and services to homeless youth. Thus, many of the youth could still be considered homeless rather than having been homeless in the past. Youth were living in shelters, sharing with friends and in one case, literally on the street.

Furthermore, self-reporting required modification of responses at times. For example, all youth interviewed were asked whether they had ever found themselves without a place to spend the night. However, a number of “homeless” youth, when asked “have you ever found yourself without a place to spend the night” answered “no”. Responses to other questions however, did indicate that the youth had spent time in shelters, slept in abandoned buildings or walked all night – situations that would fall under most definitions of homelessness. Efforts were therefore made to balance a respect and reflection of the youths’ own perception of events and situations while providing a uniform framework that allows comparison and analysis of the interviews.

The issue of definition of homelessness also emerged in the interviews with youth who have “successfully” exited care. Most youth were referred to by Child Welfare agencies and did meet the criteria used for “successful”. However, in some cases youth who had been homeless, also could be considered “successful” (e.g. in stable housing, and working or in school) and in one case, a youth referred by the Child Welfare agency, answered “yes” to the question about having been without a place to spend the night, and were therefore put into the “homeless” category.

### **2.4 Analysis**

The key informant interview results were employed in Section 4 along with the relevant published literature to help describe and explain the link between the child welfare system and youth homelessness in the Canadian context. Very few examples of initiatives or programs which aim to address the issue were found particularly in Canada, although some examples in the UK and US were identified. The key informant interviews helped to shape the conclusions and recommendations as well.

The youth interviews were analysed initially in two groups - youth who had been homeless (in care and not) and youth who had been in care (homeless or not). The analysis, followed the broad headings in the interview guide and focussed on the commonalities and the differences

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

between the youth in each group both in terms of past experiences and current situations to try to understand whether there were differences between youth who had been homeless depending on their experience or not of the child welfare system, and whether there were differences between the youth who had been in care, depending on whether they had been homeless or not. However, due to the small number of cases, it was not possible to analyse separately the results for various sub-groups of youth, such as Aboriginal youth or young women.

### **2.5 The limitations of the study**

This pilot study is qualitative in nature and makes no claims to being representative of the population of youth who are homeless or youth who have been in care. Conclusions about this sample of youth cannot be used to draw conclusions about the population of youth who have been in care, nor about homeless youth in general. The youth who were interviewed may well be atypical – those that are easily reached may be those who have connections with service agencies, and those who are willing to participate in the study. In addition, specific biases may have been introduced due to differing selection processes in each city. For example, in Vancouver, potential candidates with previous child welfare experience were identified by the local youth in care network, whereas in other locations, the relevant child welfare authority played that role.

In some cases, the youth interviewed were not clear about their family background, child welfare experience and residential status throughout their childhood and youth and this may have affected the conclusions drawn. Some of the youth had difficulty recalling some of the exact details of various moves and placements. Some youth had experienced many changes, including periods when they returned to their family home, or stayed with relatives. In some cases their child welfare status is unclear to them, for that reason distinction between status as a “permanent” or “temporary” ward of the state was not made in the analysis.

The study has looked at youth who have been in care for at least 60 days at some point in their lives. No attempt was made to examine specific elements of the system such as preparation for independence or foster care versus residential care or permanent versus temporary wards of the state. These are all elements that are undoubtedly worthy of greater study but beyond the scope of this research.

Each of the three topics included in the annotated bibliography (care as a risk factor for homelessness, Canadian homeless studies showing prevalence of previous care experiences, and outcomes of care) could be the basis of a more comprehensive annotated bibliography and/or literature review; however, the resources available for this study did not permit this level of detail. While the entries for Canadian studies showing incidences of child welfare among the homeless and specific literature on the connections between child welfare and homelessness are fairly complete, this is by no means the case for the child welfare outcomes literature. A comprehensive overview of Canadian child welfare outcomes literature was recently completed under the auspices of the “Client Outcomes in Child Welfare Project”<sup>12</sup> which will provide the reader with a depth unavailable in the present review. Similarly, HRDC is currently completing a literature review on the transition from care.

---

<sup>12</sup> Fallon, Barbara(1999) “Outcomes Literature Survey: A Preliminary Review for the Client Outcomes in Child Welfare Project.” *First Canadian Roundtable on Child Welfare Outcomes*.



### **3. Causes of youth homelessness**

To properly understand the relationship between child welfare and homelessness, it is important to first explore what is known about the factors that contribute to youth homelessness. The causes of homelessness generally are linked in the literature on the one hand, to broad structural or macro-level forces such as poverty, unemployment and lack of affordable housing, and on the other hand, to individual risk factors such as sexual or physical abuse, family disputes and breakdown, drug or alcohol misuse, school exclusion, and poor mental or physical health. How these factors interact has been linked to 'proximate factors' such as family and social support networks, which have the ability to ameliorate some of the structural factors.<sup>13</sup> 'Triggers' to homelessness can flow from individual factors and include leaving the parental home after arguments, marital or relationship breakdown, eviction, widowhood, discharge from the armed forces, leaving care, leaving prison, and a sharp deterioration of mental health or increase in substance misuse.<sup>14</sup> The causes of *youth* homelessness are understood to have less to do with structural factors, although research identifies high youth unemployment and a lack of affordable housing options as issues, and that conflict with parents or family has more explanatory power among this population. In a US study of childhood risk factors for homelessness, 90 percent of a probability sample of homeless adult respondents experienced one or more major problems during childhood, including foster care or institutional placement, poverty, housing problems, family trouble, or physical or sexual abuse and 64 percent experienced two or more of these factors.<sup>15</sup> Indeed some causes are both structural and individual.

Another perspective views homelessness as an extreme form of social isolation or *social exclusion*, whereby an individual lacks not only the physical or material means to prevent homelessness, but also lacks the social networks that could normally be relied upon in such circumstances. The concept of social exclusion is current in Europe: "The majority of those who become roofless and end up on the street or in an emergency shelter for homeless people are poor, have no stable work, have weak health, can no longer rely on family and friends for help, and are not well equipped to take part in or make use of the mainstream culture".<sup>16</sup> Youth are identified as being among the most excluded due to a lack of suitable employment and adequate wages, exclusion from government benefits, a lack of political voice (for those under the age of majority), and in some cases, lack of control over a family life that has become "reconstituted" through divorce or remarriage.

#### **3.1 Family breakdown and family violence**

The relationship between youth and their families is pivotal. A review of American research on youth homelessness found that "Youth consistently report family conflict as the primary reason for their homelessness. Sources of conflict vary but include conflicts with parents over a youth's relationship with a step-parent, sexual activity and sexual orientation, pregnancy, school problems and alcohol and drug use"<sup>17</sup>. Koegel, Melamid and Burnam found that almost half the respondents reported living apart from their parents during childhood, and of these, half (25 percent of the sample as a whole) experienced placement in either foster care, institutional

---

<sup>13</sup> Avramov, Dragana. (1999). *Coping with Homelessness: Issues to be tackled and best practises in Europe*. Aldershot England: Ashgate Publishing.

<sup>14</sup> Fitzpatrick et al. (2000). *Single Homelessness: An Overview of Research in Britain. Findings*. Oxon: The Policy Press. Joseph Rowntree Foundation website.

<sup>15</sup> Koegel, Paul, Elan Melamid, and M. Audrey Burnam. (1995). "Childhood Risk Factors for Homelessness Among Homeless Adults." *American Journal of Public Health*. 85(12): 1642-1649.

<sup>16</sup> Avramov (1999) op.cit.

<sup>17</sup> Robertson, Marjorie J. and Paul A. Toro (1998) "Homeless Youth: Research, Intervention, and Policy" in *Practical Lessons: the 1998 National Symposium on Homelessness Research*. Prepared for US Department of Housing and Urban Development and US. Department of Health and Human Services.

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

settings, or both.<sup>18</sup> Many homeless youth never knew their fathers, came from divorced or never married families, single parents, and had lived with relatives other than their parents.<sup>19</sup>

A study undertaken in London that became the basis of a prevention strategy for youth homelessness identified factors that are important in predicting whether a young person becomes homeless.<sup>20</sup> These include 'deviant' or 'inadequate' parents, poverty and school exclusion. Further analysis examined the inter-connections between the various factors to arrive at predictors of homelessness. Family disruption was one of the strongest predictors (e.g. the presence of a stepparent, foster family), "...where the child is living in a reconstituted or foster family, rates of exclusion are high and this exclusion is highly linked to homelessness"<sup>21</sup>. Other important family related factors included family structure and family violence; the age of the mother; and a poor relationship with the mother.

"Neglect and physical or sexual abuse in the home are also common experiences for homeless youth.... and there is evidence that neglect and abuse may actually precipitate separations of many youth from their homes."<sup>22</sup> In two recent Canadian studies on homeless youth key informants identified family breakdown as the major cause of youth homelessness across the country.<sup>23</sup> Another Canadian study found that 92 percent of surveyed homeless youth in Montreal linked their homelessness to difficulties with families.<sup>24</sup> The Mayor's Homelessness Task Force in Toronto reported that several studies have found that more than 70 percent of youth on the streets leave home because of physical or sexual abuse.<sup>25</sup> In addition, abuse may affect young women more than men, as researchers have found evidence of higher rates of physical and sexual abuse among young homeless females than males.<sup>26</sup>

### **3.2 Child welfare involvement**

Previous involvement with the child welfare system is related to the key role of family breakdown and abuse in youth homelessness. Research has shown over-representation of both youth and adults with a history of care among the homeless, in the US, Canada, and the UK. A Canadian scan found that gaps in the child welfare/protection services were a contributing factor to youth homelessness, in particular for youth over age 16 who cannot gain access to protection services as well as 16 to 18 year old youth who leave care unequipped to live independently.<sup>27</sup>

### **3.3 Residential instability**

A review of American literature found a long pattern of residential instability.<sup>28</sup> Another study found that 40 percent of homeless adults reported some form of housing problem or disruption during childhood, including 13 percent who lived in public or subsidised housing, 17 percent who lived in doubled-up situations, 5 percent who had been evicted, 3 percent who experienced homelessness with their families, and 17 percent who reported homeless/runaway experiences during childhood.<sup>29</sup> In addition, a history of public care is often characterised by numerous residential placements.

---

<sup>18</sup> Koegel, Melamid and Burnam. (1995) op.cit.

<sup>19</sup> Robertson and Toro (1998)op.cit.

<sup>20</sup> Safe in the City (1999), *Taking Risks, An analysis of the risks of homelessness for young people in London*, London

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Robertson and Toro (1998) op.cit.

<sup>23</sup> Kraus, Eberle and Serge (2001) op.cit.

<sup>24</sup> Poirier, Mario et al. (1999) *Relations et représentations interpersonnelles de jeunes adultes itinérants : au-delà de la rupture, la contrainte des liens* Montréal: GRIJA

<sup>25</sup> Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force. 1999. *Taking Responsibility for Homelessness: An Action Plan for Toronto*. Toronto: City of Toronto.

<sup>26</sup> Novac, Serge, Eberle and Brown (2002). op.cit.

<sup>27</sup> Kraus, Eberle and Serge (2001) op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> Robertson and Toro (1998) op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Koegel, Melamid, and Burnam. (1995). op. cit.

### **3.4 School**

The profile of homeless youth indicates low levels of educational attainment. Truancy or difficult school histories would appear to be part of the indicators of vulnerability to homelessness<sup>30</sup> and perhaps, one of the “systems” that fails youth.<sup>31</sup> School exclusion was one of the strongest predictors of youth homelessness in a UK study.<sup>32</sup>

### **3.5 Abrupt departure from the family**

The manner in which separation from the family occurs would appear to play a role in youth homelessness with most young homeless persons leaving home in an unplanned manner.<sup>33</sup> “Much research has focused on the effects of a parent leaving the family household, such as through divorce or death. This research has demonstrated that the manner of family separation is important in predicting the effect on the child’s psychological development.”<sup>34</sup> Abuse may precipitate the departure. According to *Operation Go Home* of Canadian youth who run away, 71 percent run from home and 29 percent run from group homes, treatment centres or residential care.<sup>35</sup>

### **3.6 Poverty**

There appear to be links between youth homelessness and family poverty<sup>36</sup> although this link may be tenuous. “Youth who had experienced literal homelessness seem to come from less impoverished backgrounds than homeless adults.”<sup>37</sup> This is consistent with abuse and neglect playing a central role in youth homelessness. American state and local studies suggest disproportionate numbers of homeless youth from lower-income or working-class families and neighbourhoods but this may be related to potential bias in sample selection. “Findings suggest that while family poverty may not be related to homelessness among youth per se...family poverty may be related to more chronic or repeated homelessness...”<sup>38</sup> Data from a Montreal study shows that family poverty is only moderately associated with youth homelessness. Only two in five homeless young women said their family had financial problems.<sup>39</sup> Poverty was one of a range of factors important in predicting homelessness among youth, but not one of the strongest predictors in a UK study.

### **3.7 Sexual orientation**

Also sexual orientation may be a factor in youth homelessness, as youth depart the family home after being rejected by their family due to their sexuality.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Fitzpatrick, Suzanne, (2000). *Young Homeless People* Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire : Macmillan Press ; New York : St. Martin's Press and Robertson and Toro (1998).

<sup>31</sup> Kraus, Eberle, Serge (2001) op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Safe in the City (1999) op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> Hutson, S. and Liddiard, M. (1994) *Youth Homelessness: The Construction of a Social Issue*, London: Macmillan.

<sup>34</sup> MacLean, Michael G., Lara E. Embry, and Ana Mari Cauce (1999) “Homeless adolescents’ paths to separation from family: comparison of family characteristics, psychological adjustment, and victimization” *Journal of Community Psychology* Vol. 27, No. 2, 179-187.

<sup>35</sup> Centre de recherche sur les services communautaires, Université Laval, *La fugue chez les jeunes en difficulté*, Recherches en Bref, No. 6, juin (1997) (available at : <http://www.ulaval.ca/crsc/montagecentredoc.html>)

<sup>36</sup> Koegel, Melamid, Burnam (1995) op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> ibid

<sup>38</sup> Robertson and Toro (1998) op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> Novac, Serge, Eberle and Brown (2002) op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> Mallon, Gerald P. (1999) *Let's get this straight: a gay- and lesbian-affirming approach to child welfare* New York: Columbia University Press.

## 4. The link between youth homelessness and the child welfare system

Although the body of literature explicitly drawing the links between being placed in the care of child welfare and homelessness is small, some insights are offered. These are highlighted below, together with the pertinent findings from the key informant interviews. Key themes are organised according to *when* the connection develops: before care, during care, and/or upon leaving care.

### 4.1 Initial trauma

The most obvious explanation for the apparent connection between youth homelessness and previous out of home care is that the “foster care system often fails to help [some] children with the problems that result from circumstances that caused them to be removed from their homes in the first place (e.g. physical or sexual abuse, parents with alcohol or substance abuse, family dissolution).”<sup>41</sup> Raychaba notes that these experiences may have emotional and behavioural ramifications for young people that tend to promote distrust of others<sup>42</sup> and, these may influence future relationships. A lack of treatment and counselling within the child welfare system to address some of the issues arising from early maltreatment may also be an issue.<sup>43</sup>

Evidence of similar outcomes for youth with histories of family maltreatment but no care experience suggests that it is the factors which necessitated placement that contribute to future outcomes, including homelessness, and that at best, the child welfare system is irrelevant in this regard.<sup>44</sup> A 1988 comparative study of maltreated children receiving home based and out of home care found that “while the children in foster care did marginally better than children left at home, both groups of children had poor outcomes when compared to non-maltreated children from similar socio-economic backgrounds.”<sup>45</sup> The question then becomes, why doesn’t the child welfare system do a better job?

### 4.2 Experience with out of home care

The nature and quality of out of home placement is found to have an impact - on outcomes generally, including future homelessness. Several studies found evidence of mistreatment during care<sup>46</sup>, which served to exacerbate initial traumas. In a Canadian study of homeless youth, Poirier et al. found that “far from being a healing experience, stays with foster families often exacerbated initial traumas (35 percent), contributed to instability (53 percent) and intensified mistrust (64 percent).”<sup>47</sup> Many youth run away from intolerable placements and in fact, in the UK, the concept of running away from home is mainly associated with young people under 16 and from local authority care.<sup>48</sup>

Other potentially influential factors include incompatible placements and changing placements.<sup>49</sup> Multiple placements, consisting of both official and unofficial (with relatives and friends), together

---

<sup>41</sup> Roman and Wolfe (1995) op. cit.

<sup>42</sup> Raychaba, Brian. 1988. *To Be On Our Own With No Direction From Home. A Report on the Special Needs of Youth Leaving the Care of the Child Welfare System.* National Youth In Care Network.

<sup>43</sup> Roman and Wolfe (1995) op. cit. Nico Trocme, personal communication, Amanda Allard, personal communication.

<sup>44</sup> Sylvia Novac, Research Associate, Centre for Urban and Community Studies. Personal communication.

<sup>45</sup> Wald, Carlsmith and Leiderman 1988 quoted in Fallon (1999) op. cit. p. 67.

<sup>46</sup> Poirier (1999) op. cit., Roman and Wolfe, (1995) op. cit.

<sup>47</sup> Poirier (1999) op. cit.

<sup>48</sup> Aldridge Robert. (1996) *Youth Homelessness.* National Report (1996). UK FEANTSA, Brussels

<sup>49</sup> Woodall Andrew summary and translation of a report by Clarie Wallot 1992 *Homeless Youth, A research report conducted under the auspices of the McGill Consortium for Human Rights Advocacy Training,* Montreal.

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

“can be very disruptive to a child’s development”.<sup>50</sup> For example, they can prevent adequate treatment, cause difficulties in school, and children may “fail to learn the nature of stable family life.” Key informants noted that youth formerly in care who become homeless are generally “more disconnected, having had multiple placements, and tended to have come into care later, between 12 and 14 years of age, and have never adjusted.” Multiple contacts (social workers) within the care system can also be disruptive.

Some research suggests that a general lack of social support networks among youth formerly in care is a factor implicated in homelessness.<sup>51</sup> Novac et al. point out that youth leaving public care lack the “invisible raft of supportive mechanisms, particularly emotional and material assistance from family networks that facilitates successful housing transitions.”<sup>52</sup> In some instances, the child welfare system interferes with formation of secure attachments.<sup>53</sup> For example, youth may have difficulty establishing relationships with foster parents and social workers because of frequent changes/moves.

Some authors question whether the type of out of home placement, the age at which it occurs and the duration, are factors. In Ireland, links to poor outcomes are evident primarily with residential care, not foster care.<sup>54</sup> One study found that less than 3 percent of those who were homeless had been in foster care, versus 40 percent who had been in residential care, this despite the fact that a much larger number are accommodated through foster care. The authors point out that this does not suggest that residential care itself is responsible, but rather, that residential care is “a place of last resort”, for example, where difficult or older youth are placed. Canadian key informants noted that youth with stable, permanent placements were much less likely to touch the homeless service system than those in temporary placements, in fact, “we never see them”.<sup>55</sup>

Other research finds that care is often inhospitable for gay/lesbian youth, who turn to the street as an alternative.<sup>56</sup> Mallon proposes that lesbian and gay youth are disproportionately over-represented in the young runaway and homeless population “because a substantial proportion of these youths have fled the child welfare system when they determined it was a hostile environment”.

### **4.3 Preparation and transition from care**

Many researchers and advocates have focused on the process of leaving care, the age, and the shortcomings of the preparation and resources available to the youth as factors affecting outcomes. According to one author, the quality of care had less relevance to explaining post-care outcomes than did the abruptness of exit from care, the level of support between ages 16 and 18, and poor planning and preparation for leaving care.<sup>57</sup>

The arbitrary nature of youth leaving care at a certain pre-determined age does not necessarily reflect the age at which a youth is *developmentally* ready to exit, and in no way replicates the

---

<sup>50</sup> Roman and Wolfe (1995) op.cit.

<sup>51</sup> Roman and Wolfe (1995) op.cit.; McDonald, Thomas P. Reva I. Allen, Alex Westerfelt and Irving Piliavin. (1996). *Assessing the Long-Term Effects of Foster Care: A Research Synthesis*. Washington DC: Child Welfare League of America Press.

<sup>52</sup> Drakeford and Williamson (1998):184 quoted in Novac et al. (2002) op.cit.

<sup>53</sup> Bassuk, Ellen L. and John C. Buckner. (1997). “Homelessness in Female-Headed Families: Childhood and Adult Risk and Protective Factors.” *American Journal of Public Health*. 87(2) 241-249.

<sup>54</sup> O’Sullivan, Eoin (1997) *Services for Homeless Children in the Republic of Ireland: Evolution and Current Issues*. National Report (1996): Republic of Ireland FEANTSA, Brussels.

<sup>55</sup> Ruth D’Acosta, Covenant House. Personal communication.

<sup>56</sup> Mallon. Gerald P. (1998). “After Care, Then Where? Outcomes of an Independent Living Program.” *Child Welfare*. 77(1) 61-(18p.)

<sup>57</sup> Hayden, Carol, Jim Goddard, Sarah Gorin and Niki Van Der Spek (1999) *State child care: looking after children?* London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

experience of leaving the family home.<sup>58</sup> The early age at which youth are permitted to leave care, generally much younger than young people tend to depart the family home, is cited by key informants as a key factor in rising youth homelessness in Canadian cities.<sup>59</sup> Younger youth are generally less well equipped to deal with life on their own. While there is no research evidence that attributes older care leaving to successful outcomes, key informant opinion supports this viewpoint. Fitzpatrick, studying youth homelessness in the UK, states that care leavers are vulnerable to homelessness because “they generally left care at a much earlier age than other young people leave home; they often did not have family support to help them make a successful transition to independent living; and they may be particularly ill equipped to deal with independent living if they had lived in an institutional setting for a prolonged period.”<sup>60</sup> It was learned that some child welfare agencies ask the court to end wardship at an early age in difficult cases, because of concerns about liability for youth who are non-compliant.<sup>61</sup>

The inflexibility of the care system to serve the needs of youth who have aged out or voluntarily exited care either prematurely or upon reaching the age of majority is often cited as a factor in poor outcomes generally, including homelessness. Aldridge notes that leaving care offers youth a single opportunity to get it right. If the first housing arrangement fails, there is no option to return should a young person experience difficulties.<sup>62</sup> This point was raised time and again by Canadian key informants who pointed to an apparent barrier to youth re-entering the care system once they have exited, even if they remain under the age of majority. Whether this is due to a reluctance to admit failure and seek assistance on the part of the youth, or actual or perceived barriers is unclear. Key informants also noted that foster parents are not supported to maintain a relationship with youth after they exit care, but some do, on a case-by-case basis. The existence of the Pape Adolescent Resource Centre (PARC), a transition program operated by the Children’s Aid Society in Toronto, is recognition that youth exiting care face many challenges and difficulties. Other options to give support to youth leaving care include possible housing and care banks (i.e. allowing the youth to go back and get support until they find another job, student loan, apartment etc.),<sup>63</sup> mentoring by youth who have been through care<sup>64</sup>, and pro-active continuing contact by care givers after the youth leaves care.<sup>65</sup> Other strategies to help youth include a Leaving Care Plan for youth up to the age of 24 in Britain and ongoing discussions with local authorities and other levels of government on financial responsibility for higher education of youth who have been in care.<sup>66</sup>

Inadequate preparation in life skills is also identified as a shortcoming of the care system and is implicated in rising youth homelessness among care leavers.<sup>67</sup> Two thirds of former Crown wards residing in a large Toronto youth shelter said they had not been adequately prepared for independent living and needed more support, “especially in the areas of finances, positive relationships, and service to better prepare them for life after care”.<sup>68</sup> While many jurisdictions offer such programs, it appears that delivery is uneven and often these skills are not all that is required. Fitzpatrick<sup>69</sup> points out that programs to help with transition focus on skills, not “strategies for coping with isolation and poverty”. One also has to question how relevant are budgeting skills if income is inadequate to meet needs?

---

<sup>58</sup> This arbitrariness is reflected in the range of ages of majority or care leaving ages across provinces.

<sup>59</sup> Linda Blackmore, President, Canadian Foster Parent Association. Personal communication.

<sup>60</sup> Fitzpatrick (2000) op.cit.

<sup>61</sup> Anonymous Family Court Judge, Ontario. Personal communication.

<sup>62</sup> Aldridge Robert. (1996) op.cit.

<sup>63</sup> Irving Piliavin, Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin. Personal communication

<sup>64</sup> Sister Paulette LoMonaco, Executive Director, Good Shepard Services, New York City., Personal communication

<sup>65</sup> Ellie Lewis, Centrepoint, London. Personal communication

<sup>66</sup> Mark Brangwyn, Association of London Governments. Personal communication

<sup>67</sup> Roman and Wolfe (1995) op.cit.

<sup>68</sup> Leslie and Hare (2000) op.cit.

<sup>69</sup> Fitzpatrick (2000) op.cit.

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

Other related issues include the challenges of providing services to adolescents, no matter what their family background or life experiences. In addition, alcohol and drug use may be an intervening factor.<sup>70</sup>

### **4.4 Factors contributing to positive outcomes**

Key informants were almost unanimous in their view that a positive supportive relationship with at least one individual is key to helping a care leaver successfully exit care, something that the child welfare system is generally ill equipped to provide. This individual could be anyone - a family member, a foster parent, a social worker. The Pape Adolescent Resources Centre in Toronto, includes a supportive relationship as one of the three factors necessary for “success”, along with adequate resources such as a job, an apartment and skills, and self esteem and control over the decisions affecting one’s life.

This is similar to the findings of an Australian study of youth leaving care, which found that positive factors for a successful transition are:<sup>71</sup>

- A stable positive experience of care
- Resilience and belief in self
- Availability of mentors or advocates
- Extended support provided by previous carers, workers, and or after care support workers
- Family contact while in care and at transition, or re-established after leaving care

Studies on resilience also suggest the kind of support needed for youth in care<sup>72</sup> and include:

- relying and building on the abilities of the youth; not focussing only on their behavioural and other problems but also putting the accent on the positive attributes, (“les objectifs des interventions basées sur la résilience sont généralement formulées en termes de consolidation et de développement de compétences, plutôt qu’en termes de diminution de problèmes d’adaptation”<sup>73</sup>);
- putting the youth at the centre of the intervention thereby permitting them to better know themselves and appreciate who they are. This approach therefore must be flexible and individualised allowing the youth to think about their self-identity, their situation and their plans;
- giving the youth opportunities to succeed and to take decisions that increase self-esteem and the sense of control over their lives. These can include artistic, academic and interpersonal activities – the important aspect is to allow them to participate in the decisions that affect them.

A Canadian study looking at the transition from care also highlighted relationships as an important element in the package of attributes, along with “structure, rules, and self-sufficiency”.<sup>74</sup> But many question the ability of the system to deliver a ‘relationship’, particularly when workers have large caseloads – there is no time to develop genuine relationships.

Roman and Wolfe urge that the child welfare system must be strengthened in order “to eliminate any contribution foster care may make to homelessness.”<sup>75</sup> Ensuring a “stable, positive experience of care” is clearly the ultimate goal. They suggest supporting and strengthening

<sup>70</sup> Roman and Wolfe (1995) op.cit.

<sup>71</sup> Maunders, David, Max Liddell, Margaret Liddell and Sue Green. (1999). *Young people leaving care and protection. Executive Summary*. A Report to the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme. Hobart: Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies.

<sup>72</sup> Drapeau, Sylvie, Suzanne Beaudoin, Richard Marcotte ((2000)) “La résilience des jeunes en contexte de placement: implications pour l’intervention” *Intervention*, no 112, automne-hiver

<sup>73</sup> “the objectives of interventions based on resilience are generally based on consolidation and development of competences rather than in terms of the reduction of problems of adaptation”

<sup>74</sup> Leslie and Hare (2000) op.cit.

<sup>75</sup> Roman and Wolfe (1995) op.cit.

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

families, moving children quickly into a permanent situation (avoiding multiple placements) and promoting skill development for independent living. Leslie and Hare suggest that contractual service arrangements should be available for former foster children up to age 21. Others recommend that support arrangements should continue to age 24 under defined circumstances, and indeed in British Columbia, this is now policy. One family court judge in Toronto has stopped releasing youth from crown wardship who are under the age of majority upon the request of a child welfare agency. Interventions structured around transitional housing for former foster youth can prevent them from becoming dependent on public assistance.<sup>76</sup> However, others point out that we know very little about the effectiveness of many interventions or programs, given that there have been few evaluations, making it difficult to promote one model or another.

Other suggestions range from restricting the use of temporary care, making available more flexible resources and supports (for a longer time period), more transition services and better planning for the long-term, at the outset. For First Nations, it is suggested that there is a need to “build up parenting skills” in order to deal with the family and community as a whole. In Australia, an effective model of support is seen as reflecting a continuum consisting of three components: preparation, transition and *after care*. New South Wales and Victoria have developed specific after care services to address this problem.

---

<sup>76</sup> Stoner, Madeleine R. (1999). “Life After Foster Care: Services and Policies for Former Foster Youth.” *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*. XXVI (4) 159-175.



## **5. Gaps in the literature**

Published research literature contained in the annotated bibliography pertinent to the link between child welfare and homelessness falls into five main categories:

1. Homeless population profiles, showing proportion/extent with a child welfare background.
2. Factors for homelessness, including child protection.
3. Relationship between child welfare and homelessness.
4. Outcomes of child protection.
5. Good practice for youth exiting the child welfare system.

With the exception of the first category, Canadian research in these areas is limited. The following discussion briefly summarises the extent and nature of the literature contained in the annotated bibliography (in Appendix A) and notes where further research is needed, particularly in a Canadian context.

The broad literature on youth homelessness touches upon many of the topics listed above. Robertson and Toro<sup>77</sup>, in a synthesis of the US literature on youth homelessness, identify some specific gaps in knowledge including the strengths and competencies of homeless youth, documentation of best practices to meet the needs, and systematic evaluation of shelters and services for homeless youth. They also note major limitations to existing research on homeless youth including the lack of large representative samples, reliable and valid measures, and comparison groups. Some areas of future research recommended by Robertson and Toro include:

- Homeless youth with multiple, overlapping problems. "... without appropriate comparison groups, it is impossible to determine the degree to which these problems are unique to homeless youth."<sup>78</sup>
- There are few studies with "carefully analysed qualitative interview data" to understand needs. "When assessing the needs of homeless youth, we believe that it is important to include the opinions of the youth themselves."<sup>79</sup>
- Longitudinal research is needed to understand both the dynamic nature of the entry into homelessness, what happens to homeless youth over time and what services and resources help them achieve positive long-term outcomes. This is important because May<sup>80</sup> finds in his study that there is not a progressive "homelessness career" – with a distinct series of stages. Instead the author finds that people move in and out of homelessness.

### **5.1 Proportion/extent of homeless population with a child welfare background**

Numerous studies in the UK and US but also in Europe, demonstrate a relationship between child welfare and homelessness - people with a child welfare background are over-represented among homeless adults and/or youth, four times more according to one study<sup>81</sup>. Some studies differentiate between different types of child protection, for example, foster care, group homes, residential care and institutional care, although it is not always clear what each means in different

---

<sup>77</sup> Robertson and Toro (1998) op.cit.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> May, Jon (2000) "Housing histories and homelessness careers: A biographical approach" *Housing Studies*, Vol 15, No. 4, 613-638

<sup>81</sup> Mangine, Steven J, David Royse, Vernon R. Wiehe, and Michael T. Nietzel. (1990) "Homelessness Among Adults Raised as Foster Children: A Survey of Drop-In Center Users" *Psychological Reports*. 67: 739-745.

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

contexts. For example, an Irish study in the annotated bibliography suggests that the problem is associated with “residential care” not foster care<sup>82</sup>. There is also some specificity about the intensity or duration of substitute care i.e. was involvement with the child welfare system as primary caregiver, at some point growing up or in the last year.

- **Gender:** Roman and Wolfe<sup>83</sup> found that 13 percent of female homeless respondents to their survey experienced foster care compared to men (7 percent)
- **Length of homelessness:** Childhood placement in foster care correlates with a substantial increase in the length of a person’s homeless experience<sup>84</sup>.
- **Age first homeless:** Homeless subjects with a history of foster care were significantly younger than those without such history<sup>85</sup>.
- **Mental and physical health, including substance abuse:** are also found to interact with homelessness and foster care. Homeless people with these disorders are more likely to report foster care history<sup>86</sup>.

There is Canadian evidence of the relationship and an over-representation of people with some experience of the child welfare system among the homeless, primarily among homeless youth, but little in terms of specific demographic relationships as above. For example, are young homeless women more likely to have been in the child welfare system, or does childhood foster care correlate with increased length of homelessness? Canadian (not necessarily published) profiles of homelessness, usually focused on a specific city, find that the proportion with a foster care/group home or institutional background to range from 23 percent among adults to 49 percent among youth.

### **5.2 Causes, risk factors, and triggers for homelessness**

The debate about the cause or causes of homelessness is wide-ranging, diverse and well documented. Recent thinking and writing on the topic recognises that different levels of causes may lead an individual to become homeless<sup>87</sup>. Homelessness is seen, at one level, to be the product of structural factors (economy, government policy, demographics). At another level, certain characteristics place an individual at risk for homelessness (family disputes/breakdown, substance abuse, sexual or physical abuse, incarceration, lack of social networks or support). Triggers are usually identifiable events that lead directly to homelessness (an argument with parents, marital breakdown, eviction and leaving care) but which wouldn’t generally lead to homelessness if the proximate or structural factors were not present. Canadian research indicates that youth homelessness in particular has strong links with family breakdown.<sup>88</sup>

Proximate risk factors and triggers for homelessness are of most interest in this context, particularly family background and the role of various social and government services and policies supporting children, including the child welfare system. For example:

- **Family background** – what role has the extended family played? In the Poirier et al.<sup>89</sup> research, often someone like a grandparent played an important role when the parents were unable to care for the child. Ultimately, these arrangements can fall apart upon the grandparent’s death or health problems.

---

<sup>82</sup> O’Sullivan )1997) op.cit.

<sup>83</sup> Roman and Wolfe (1995) op.cit.

<sup>84</sup> ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Mangine, Royse, Wiehe, and Nietzel. (1990) op. cit.

<sup>86</sup> Roman and Wolfe (1995) op.cit.

<sup>87</sup> Fallis, George and Alex Murray (eds.) 1990. *Housing the Homeless and the Poor: New Partnerships among the Private, Public and Third Sectors*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press; Crane, Phil and Jillian Brannock. 1996. *Homelessness among Young People in Australia: Early Intervention and Prevention*. Hobart: National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies; Avramov (1999) op.cit.; Fitzpatrick et al. (2000) op.cit.

<sup>88</sup> Kraus et al. (2001) op.cit. and Novac et al. (2002) op.cit.

<sup>89</sup> Poirier et al. (1999) op.cit.

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

- **How important are differences in family experiences?** There is evidence the more “hardened” homeless come from more abusive/destructive backgrounds.
- **The network of friends** – Fitzpatrick<sup>90</sup> found that staying with friends or more likely, parents of friends, is common.
- **The role of the educational system** - Fitzpatrick<sup>91</sup> seems to find that truancy is prevalent with youth and many homeless youth have experienced school suspensions and other penalties for poor behaviour. Some social agencies in fact use schools as a place to intervene to prevent at risk youth from falling into homelessness.
- **Age of leaving care** – Evidence from Canadian research suggests that youth have different experiences with the child welfare system and income support depending on their age. It seems to be particularly poor at meeting the needs of youth age 16 to 18 years<sup>92</sup>

Several studies have investigated a range of potential causes, risk factors and triggers for homelessness including poverty, high vacancy rates, the rise of single parent families, substance abuse, physical or sexual abuse, and others and concluded that there are many factors at play. Involvement with the child welfare system is just one of several risk factors for homelessness. However, there is little Canadian research in this area. In terms of social support systems, including child welfare, it is not reasonable to assume that the processes and impacts are the same given considerable differences – Fitzpatrick in Canadian social policies and programs compared to the US.

### **5.3 The relationship between child welfare and homelessness**

In depth exploration of the relationship between child welfare and homelessness is relatively rare in the literature, with the exception of Roman and Wolfe<sup>93</sup> and perhaps, McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt and Piliavin<sup>94</sup>. Roman and Wolfe conducted qualitative research (case studies) with homeless individuals to uncover information about why and how the foster care -homelessness connection works, for example:

- Is there anything about children who enter foster care (or their experiences and background) that promotes homelessness?
- Is there anything about foster care that promotes homelessness or at least fails to prevent it?

In the first instance, we cannot really understand the impact of child welfare without first understanding the situation that caused the involvement in the first place. In fact, the problems leading up to removing a child from home may be more important in the outcome for the youth than the foster/residential care situation. “Early home leaving occurs when a young person and the family of origin (parent, parents, long-term care giver) separate, for whatever reason, at a stage when there is general community consensus that the young person and family of origin should live together, and where a degree of parental guidance and dependence is appropriate”<sup>95</sup>. The child welfare system may simply fail to address deeply traumatic early childhood experiences.

Roman and Wolfe<sup>96</sup> conclude based on their research that there is evidence that:

- Children have problems upon entering foster care that aren’t adequately addressed
- Foster care can be abusive or problematic
- Multiple placements affect their ability to develop relationships
- Youth need preparation while in care for independent living

---

<sup>90</sup> Fitzpatrick (2000) op.cit.

<sup>91</sup> ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Novac et al. (2002) op.cit.

<sup>93</sup> ibid.

<sup>94</sup> McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt and Piliavin. (1996) op. cit.

<sup>95</sup> Australia Department of Family and Community Services (1998) *Putting Families in the Picture. Early Intervention into Youth Homelessness*. Report of the Prime Ministerial Youth Homeless Task Force.

<sup>96</sup> Roman and Wolfe (1995) op.cit.

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

A number of questions remain, such as:

- What specific processes contribute to some former foster kids becoming homeless?
- What role do other intervening factors, such as substance abuse and mental illness play?
- What is different about former foster children who don't become homeless, and what factors contribute to a positive outcome?

In Canada, only the Poirier et al.<sup>97</sup> study addresses the relationship between homelessness (youth) and child protection. It documents homeless youth's experiences and views of their substitute care placement, 75 percent of which were negative. 41 percent reported mistreatment. Why and how these former foster youth became homeless is not addressed. Fitzgerald<sup>98</sup> discusses but does not present any new information to bear on the subject.

### **5.4 Outcomes of child welfare**

Research evaluating outcomes of the child welfare system sometimes measures housing based outcomes, although more often, the focus is on other outcomes including education and employment. Findings of homelessness as an outcome of foster care ranged from "just over one fifth" in Leeds, England<sup>99</sup>, to 18 percent in the UK<sup>100</sup>, and 12 percent in the US<sup>101</sup>. Mallon<sup>102</sup>, in an evaluation of an independent living program, reports no homelessness upon exiting care with the assistance of that program. The Annie E. Casey Foundation in the US reports that 25 percent of foster youth had been homeless within 2.5 to 4 years after exiting foster care<sup>103</sup>. Of note is the findings of a 1988 comparative study of maltreated children receiving home based and out of home care which found that "while the children in foster care did marginally better than children left at home, both groups of children had poor outcomes when compared to non-maltreated children from similar socio-economic backgrounds"<sup>104</sup>.

Our search revealed no published Canadian evaluations of out of home placement and a limited number of Canadian outcome studies generally.<sup>105</sup> "The paucity of well-defined outcomes research has been noted at all levels of child welfare intervention: from treatment programs designed to reduce the risk of recurrence of maltreatment, to broad based primary prevention programs; from out of home care interventions designed to provide children with a stable and caring alternative living environment to family preservation programs designed to prevent out of home placement."<sup>106</sup> The author also notes that where treatment has been evaluated, effectiveness has been found to be relatively low, drawing increasing attention to prevention efforts. The 'Client Outcomes in Child Welfare Project' has developed an inventory of outcomes initiatives across Canada, and developed 10 outcome measures that have been accepted by relevant child welfare agencies. Pilot work has been completed but no data is available yet. In addition, a number of provinces and territories are implementing "Looking after Children" in co-operation with a national CanLAC project. This will improve ability to assess children and youth

---

<sup>97</sup> Poirier et al. (1999) op.cit.

<sup>98</sup> Fitzgerald, Michael D. (1995) "Homeless Youths and the Child Welfare System: Implications for Policy and Services" *Child Welfare*. 74(3) 717-731.

<sup>99</sup> Minty, Brian (1999) Annotation: *Outcomes in long-term foster family care*; *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, Elmsford; Oct 1999; Vol. 40, Iss. 7; pg. 991, 9 pgs Association for Child Psychology and Psychiatry

<sup>100</sup> Hayden, Carol, Jim Goddard, Sarah Gorin and Niki Van Der Spek (1999) *State child care: looking after children?* London ; Philadelphia : Jessica Kingsley Publishers

<sup>101</sup> Courtney, Mark, Irving Piliavin, Andrew Grogan-Kaylor and Ande Nesmith. 1998. Foster Youth Transitions to Adulthood: Outcomes 12 to 18 months After Leaving Out-of-Home Care. *Notes and Comments*. School of Social Work and Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

<sup>102</sup> Mallon (1998) op.cit.

<sup>103</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2001) op.cit.

<sup>104</sup> Wald, Carlsmith and Leiderman (1988) quoted in Fallon (1999) p. 67 op.cit.

<sup>105</sup> Raychaba (1988) op.cit.

<sup>106</sup> Fallon (1999) op.cit.

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

in care, follow their development over time, and measure outcomes on both an individual and population basis. Canada is participating with the UK and 13 other countries in this work.

### **5.5 Good practice**

Few examples of notable efforts or good practice at promoting independence among youth exiting the foster care system, particularly in the US, were found in the research literature. However, some instances were located on the web through the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Benton Foundation<sup>107</sup>. Documentation of Canadian best practises in this area would be instructive.

### **5.6 Summary of gaps**

The following are identified as gaps in the research literature.

- Descriptive information about homeless people who were formerly in foster care.
- Studies of causes, risk factors and triggers for homelessness, including child protection, in a Canadian context.
- Exploration of the specific circumstances that contribute to the individual processes that lead to homelessness for youth formerly in care.
- Specific housing/homelessness outcomes for Canadian youth who have exited care.
- Evaluation of the child welfare system outcomes and initiatives to promote independence upon exiting care, and examples of good practice in promoting independence among youth exiting care.

---

<sup>107</sup> <http://www.aecf.org/> and <http://www.benton.org/>

## **6. Overview of Canadian Child Welfare Systems**

In Canada, the provincial and territorial governments are responsible for the provision of child welfare and child protection services. The federal government is financially responsible for child welfare services for aboriginal children with status under the *Indian Act*. A growing number of First Nations communities have negotiated agreements with the federal and provincial governments and provide their own full or partial child welfare services, under the authority and governance of provincial child welfare legislation.

### **6.1 Legislation**

Every province and territory has its own child and family services legislation that defines when a child is in need of protection, how child protection investigations are to be conducted, and the government's role in protecting children from maltreatment and supporting families.

Child welfare legislation tends to vary with regard to guiding principles, interpretations and definitions. In general, however, every province and territory recognises that:

- families are the basic units of society and should be supported and preserved;
- parents have primary responsibility for the care, nurturing, supervision and protection of their children;
- children have certain basic rights, including the right to be protected from abuse and neglect and the right to be heard in matters affecting them;
- governments have the responsibility to investigate allegations of maltreatment, protect children from harm, and provide support services when practical and/or assume temporary or permanent responsibility for the child's care
- government interventions regarding children and families should be as unobtrusive as possible;
- the best interests of the child are a primary consideration in all aspects of child and family services.<sup>108</sup>

### **6.2 Child Protection**

Child protection investigations are limited to children under the age of 16, 18 or 19, depending on the province or territory. When an investigation results in a determination by a child welfare worker that the child at risk of harm due to abuse or neglect, the child is removed from the home and "taken into care."

A child can be in care under a voluntary agreement between child protection authorities and the parent(s). Voluntary agreements generally last less than three months and do not involve the court system. During this time, services and/or counselling are provided to help the family provide an environment in which the child is not at risk of abuse and/or neglect so that the child can return home.

Other times, a child protection hearing in a court determines if a child is in need of protection. The court may return the child to the parent(s) under a supervisory order, which allows child welfare workers to visit the family and monitor the child's safety and well-being. Alternatively, the court can issue a custody order and place the child in some form of care, the most common of which is foster care. Custody orders can be temporary or permanent.

---

<sup>108</sup> Human Resources Development Canada (2002)

### 6.3 Types of Care<sup>109</sup>

Children and youth are placed in different care environments, according to the level of care needed, cultural and/or religious backgrounds, the degree of involvement of the biological family and the preferences of the child.

Foster care is family-based care for children who have been temporarily or permanently removed from their birth families. Foster families can be two-parent or single-parent families and may include the birth child(ren) of the foster parent(s). “Emergency foster care” is provided on a short-term basis when a child or youth is in imminent need of protection and longer-term placement will be made at a later date. “Therapeutic foster care” generally refers to a specialised form of care provided by specially-trained foster parents for children who require intensive physical and/or mental health services. Kinship care (or restricted foster care) is foster care provided by a member of the child’s extended family or a significant person in the child’s life.

Residential care usually refers to a treatment facility, staffed by physical and/or mental health care professionals. Group homes are also run by staff rather than foster parents and may take in children/youth from the child welfare system, young offenders and/or youth placed by their parents. Group homes can vary considerably and may be publicly or privately run.

A child in permanent or long-term care can be made a “Crown ward,” which means that parental rights have been terminated by a court order. The state, through child welfare authorities, assumes the rights and responsibilities of a parent for the purpose of the child’s care, custody, and control. Crown wards may or may not be eligible for adoption.

### 6.4 Age of Eligibility and Extended Care

The age of wardship and the provision of care and services vary according to jurisdiction. The following table, adapted from Table 1-B *Child Welfare in Canada 2000* with additional descriptive information added from the report, lists the maximum age that children/youth can be eligible for child protection services and extended care provisions for children/youth who are in care of the state at the age of majority.

**Table: 1 Age of Majority and Age of Child as Defined in Child Protection Legislation and Extended Care**

Province or Territory	Age of Majority	Age for Protection	Extension Provisions	Description
Newfoundland and Labrador	19	under 16	Wardship to age 19 (subsequent to Order of Temporary Wardship, Order of Permanent Wardship services to age 21 (under an agreement or following extension of wardship to age 19)	Youth Services Agreement (YSA) provides residential and support services, including a basic living allowance. YSA can be provided to youth in care at age 16 until 18 or age 21, if the youth is in school. Assistance in preparation for independent living available any time prior to age 16.
Prince Edward Island	18	under 18	services to age 21 (subsequent to Permanent Guardianship Order)	Extended care and maintenance to age 21 when the youth is enrolled as a full-time student, is mentally or physically incapacitated or where the Director considers an extension appropriate.
Nova Scotia	19	under 16	wardship to age 21 (subsequent to Permanent Care Order)	Permanent care and custody may be extended to 21 for youth with a disability or pursuing an education.
New Brunswick	19	under 19 <sup>1</sup>	post Guardianship Service Agreements <sup>2</sup> may be signed under certain circumstances for those aged 19 to 23 (inclusive)	Services may be extended beyond 19 for children in permanent care through a voluntary Post Guardianship Agreement. Available to former wards accepted into full-time studies prior to 21 <sup>st</sup>

<sup>109</sup> It should be noted that Child welfare definitions and terminology vary, both within Canada and internationally.

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

				birthday.
Quebec	18	under 18	foster care may be extended to age 21	Foster care may be extended from 18 to 21 if the youth consents or if the Director provides valid reasons for a court order to continue foster care.
Ontario	18	under 16 <sup>3</sup>	Wardship to age 18 (subsequent to Society Wardship Order - temporary; Crown Wardship Order - permanent) Services to age 21 (former Crown wards)	All former Crown wards are eligible for Extended Care and Maintenance (ECM) any time between 18 <sup>th</sup> and 21 <sup>st</sup> birthdays. Financial support and other services are negotiated between the youth and the Children's Aid Society and must define the youth's goals and plans. ECM maximum is \$633 per month but additional dental and health expenses may be covered. ECMs are reviewed annually and can be changed when circumstances warrant. Residential services, counselling and/or independent living programs for 16- to 18-year-olds available in some areas.
Manitoba	18	under 18	services to age 21 (subsequent to Permanent Guardianship Order or Voluntary Surrender of Guardianship)	Agencies are required to provide age-of-majority planning and youth emergency services. Youth may receive assistance and support to move to independent living and the Director may extend care and maintenance to age 21.
Saskatchewan	18	under 16 <sup>3,4</sup>	Wardship to age 18 (Permanent, Long-Term Orders) Temporary Orders to age 16 Voluntary commitments to age 16 Voluntary agreements for 16-17 year-olds Services to age 21 (subsequent to Permanent Committal Order, Long-Term Order to age 18)	Youth under a Temporary Committal Order at age 16 or 17 may enter into an Agreement for Services for residential services and financial assistance until age 18 and are combined with social assistance. Youth under permanent or long-term care may agree to receive continued support, shelter, care and counselling until age 21 or completion of education, whichever comes first.
Alberta	18	under 18	Care and Maintenance Agreement <sup>2</sup> services to age 20 (subsequent to Temporary or Permanent Guardianship Order, Support or Custody Agreements entered into with the child)	Care and Maintenance Agreement may be extended to youth between 18 and 20 who was subject to a Permanent Guardianship Order, Temporary Guardianship Order or an agreement with the Director.
British Columbia	19	under 19	Post Majority Services Program <sup>2</sup> Support and/or maintenance to age 21 for current and former permanent wards (Permanent Order)	Support and services can be extended for a maximum of 24 months, after age 19 and at any time until age 24, for youth attending an education, vocational or rehabilitative program or in need of continued support due to a chronic or terminal medical condition. Reviewed twice a year according to the youth's proposed plan. The Independent Living Program provides financial and emotional support to youth 17 and over in temporary or continuing care. An agreement specifies the responsibilities of the youth and the social worker and is reviewed twice a year. Youth Agreements provide services under legal agreement to high-risk youth aged 16 to 19. Parents may be required to contribute financially.
Yukon	19	under 18	Wardship to age 19 (Order for temporary Care and Custody, Order for Permanent Care and Custody)	A case review conference occurs prior to a child's 17 <sup>th</sup> birthday in order to have a plan in place by 18 for extended care to 19. Care and custody may be extended to 19 for youth with a mental or physical disability or pursuing an educational program.
Northwest Territories & Nunavut	19	under 18	Wardship to age 19 (subsequent to Permanent Guardianship Order)	A Permanent Custody Order can be extended at age 16 to age 19 if it is in the child's best interest.
<p><sup>1</sup> Regulations stipulate mandatory provision of child protection services applies only to a child under age 16 (under 19 for a disabled person). Mandatory reporting of a child in need of protection applies only to children under 16; reporting of cases involving children aged 16 to 19 must be done with the child's consent</p> <p><sup>2</sup> Formal agreement signed by the youth and the department</p> <p><sup>3</sup> Youth 16 and 17 years of age can either enter into an agreement for services until age 18.</p> <p><sup>4</sup> In Saskatchewan, a 16 or 17-year-old may be apprehended in extraordinary circumstances</p>				

Source: **Child Welfare in Canada 2000: The Role of Provincial and Territorial Authorities in the Provision of Child Protection Services**. March 2002, CFS Information Child and Family Services, Secretariat to the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Child and Family Services Information.



***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

**Primary source of information:**

***Child Welfare in Canada 2000: The Role of Provincial and Territorial Authorities in the Provision of Child Protection Services. March 2002, CFS Information Child and Family Services, Secretariat to the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Child and Family Services Information.***

*Additional source (for definitions):*

*The Real Deal: Rights, Resources and Opportunities for Youth in and from Care in Ontario, by the National Youth In Care Network (<http://www.hri.ca/realdeal/care.htm>)*

## **7. Overview of the youth interviewed**

The research project set out first to identify whether there was a link between experience in the child welfare system and homelessness in Canada as reported by existing literature. As discussed in Section 4, data from other studies and anecdotal information seem to confirm this link. The objectives of the primary research component of the project were to identify what factors may be contributing to this possible link by examining two principal groups of youth – youth who had been homeless – further divided into two subgroups: those with experience in care and those with no experience in care, and youth who have been in care: again in two subgroups: those who have “successfully” exited care and those who have been homeless. This phase of the research consisted of semi-directed interviews with forty youth to reveal commonalities and differences to better understand the factors that lead to homelessness and why others, in equally vulnerable situations do not become homeless. It is important to remember that this research does not try to confirm or deny the link between the child welfare system and youth homelessness but rather to identify what elements may come into play. As a qualitative study, the primary goals are to gather greater depth of understanding of these factors, rather than attempt to draw any conclusions on the overall population of homeless youth or youth in care.

A total of 40 youth were interviewed. Of these four were born before 1977, thereby over the age limit defined at the outset of the study. The largest group is youth who have been homeless and in care.

**Table: 2 Participants’ location by group**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Homeless/ Never in care</b>	<b>Homeless/ In care</b>	<b>‘Successful’ Exit from care</b>	<b>Total</b>
Vancouver	2	4	1	7
Winnipeg	3	5	2	10
Toronto	3	3	4	10
Montreal	2	4	3	9
Total	10	16	10	36

Information about the profile of the youth is presented below, however, because the number of youth interviewed was small and because of biases in the methodology (see Section 2), the interviews were not analysed by gender or ethnic origin. Some analysis was undertaken by age but (see the discussion in Section 10.8) this was not conclusive. However, as discussed in Section 12, further research into sub groups of homeless youth, such as by Aboriginal ethnicity, or by gender, is recommended.

### **Sex**

The youth interviewed are equally divided between males and females, however, most of the youth who have “successfully” exited care are female. There is a higher preponderance of males in the homeless/never in care group (11 out of 16) and in the homeless/in care group (6 out of 10).

**Table: 3 Participants’ sex by group**

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

Sex	Has been homeless / never in care	Has been homeless / has been in care	Never homeless / has been in care	Total
Male	6	11	1	18
Female	4	5	9	18
Total	10	16	10	36

**Participants' ages**

Three youth under 18 (all who were about to turn 18) are included in the data. Over half of all youth interviewed are under 22 years. However, in the “successful” exit from care group, six of the ten are over 22.

**Table: 4 Participants' ages by group**

Age	Has been homeless / never in care	Has been homeless / has been in care	Never homeless / has been in care	Total
Under 18	1	2	0	3
18-19	4	5	3	12
20-21	3	4	1	8
22-25	2	5	6	13
Total	10	16	10	36

**Ethnic Origin**

Half of the youth stated that their ethnic origin was “Canadian” or of a European background (e.g. Irish, Scottish, German). This is the largest group for those who have been homeless and never in care. One quarter of the youth identified themselves primarily as aboriginal or gave this as their first ethnic group<sup>110</sup> (e.g. followed by Irish, Scottish, etc.). However, aboriginal youth comprise half of homeless youth who have been in care. A few other youth stated that they had some aboriginal background, but this was not the first ethnic group that they mentioned (e.g. Metis grandparents, one parent who is half aboriginal). Two youth identified themselves as “African-Canadian” or Canadian-Jamaican” while a final group of youth had a variety of backgrounds (e.g. Asian, Central American, etc.)

Four of the youth stated that a parent had been in a residential school (two in the homeless/in care group and one each in the other two groups) and one youth had a grandparent who had been in a residential school (also in the homeless/in care group).

<sup>110</sup> The issue of ethnic background is a complex one. Youth were asked “what is your ethnic/cultural background?” and offered Canadian and Aboriginal as examples. A further question about parents’ birthplaces was asked, but the analysis these did not reveal much about ethnic background, but did confirm immediate immigrant backgrounds of some of the youth. A number of Aboriginal youth listed multiple ethnic backgrounds – if the first one listed was Aboriginal (‘e.g. Aboriginal, Scottish, etc.’) they are considered Aboriginal, since the response would indicate that as the first ethnic group that comes to mind when the youth are asked. Others, who may have included Aboriginal as one of a series, but with Aboriginal coming towards the end, are considered as “some Aboriginal”.

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

**Table: 5 Participants' ethnic origin by group**

<b>Ethnic Origin</b>	<b>Has been homeless / never in care</b>	<b>Has been homeless / has been in care</b>	<b>Never homeless / has been in care</b>	<b>Total</b>
Canadian/European	7	7	4	18
Aboriginal	1	8	-	9
Some Aboriginal	-	-	3	3
Canadian/Caribbean/African	-	-	2	2
Other	2	1	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>36</b>

## **8. Youth interviewed: have been homeless**

### **8.1 Have been homeless: Family background**

A total of 26 youth interviewed had been homeless – 10 had never been in care and 16 had been in residential care at some point in their lives. The overwhelming impression of the family background of these youth is that of chaos and instability with the added feature, for youth who have been in care, of further movement in and out of placements with foster families and/or residential facilities.

Of the 10 youth who had been homeless but never in care, only one grew up with both parents. Two youth had parents who died; in one case the mother, who had been the primary care giver, died when the youth was 14. This death was followed by a stay with a relative who threw out the youth not long after his arrival because he “had other children and could not deal with the added stress”. When asked how long he was away from home after being thrown out he responded “I have no sense of home. I went from one relative’s home to another after my mother died.” In the other case, the father died when the youth was 13, but “when alive, dad wasn’t around at all.” The father had remarried and had other children, with whom the youth has no contact. Nonetheless, when asked about the worst thing about growing up in his family, he responded, “not having a dad”.

For three other youth who had been homeless but never in care, a reconstituted family played a negative role in their lives and difficulties with stepparents precipitated departures. One youth was thrown out by her stepfather at 12. “I couldn’t go there because of my step-father – mom chose him over me.” Furthermore the relationship with the other parent was unstable: her father also had thrown her out. Another youth spoke of being beaten by his a stepfather and finally leaving home at 17 because of this violence. Other youth who grew up with single parents experienced problems with new boyfriends (in the case of those growing up with single mothers). For example, a mother who found a new boyfriend when one youth was 16, started spending most of her time with him. Her two sons were left alone for days on end, during which time they would hold parties. The disturbance to neighbours led to their eviction and the mother, angry with her sons, decided to move in with her boyfriend, leaving the sons to fend for themselves. Another youth, when asked why he ran away said “over stupid stuff, little things like my mom bringing home boyfriends”.

The family life of the youth who have been in care appears equally chaotic, with the added element of moves in and out of care. A number of youth were taken into care at a young age, returned to a parent only to find themselves in care a few years later. Others found themselves going from one foster home to another, to various group homes, sometimes interspersed with stays in closed facilities or correctional institutions. For example, a youth who became involved in the child welfare system at 11 spent time in a group home, followed by periods in youth centres, group homes and back to parents. According to the youth, it was during this period that he met gang members and was frequently arrested. For him the best thing about his period in care was “when I returned to my parent’s home”. He ran away from his placements and would “try to visit with my parents...they would sometimes refuse to see me”. Another was placed into care at five for two years, returned home to his father and then lived with various relatives. He stated that his various guardians “did not want me around and I did not want to be with them.” Another placed into care because of physical abuse from his grandparents, with whom he lived, found himself also moving around from the ages of 12 -16 from group homes and youth centres, to various relatives and shelters. He recalls the hardest part at that time as “being on the streets, dealing with the rules”. One youth states that she had over 35 placements. While her family seemed to have problems of alcoholism and a relative sexually abused her, she states that the hardest part of being in care was “being away from my parents... not knowing what home was”.

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

Many of the youth dealt with an extended family when the relationship with parents broke down or was severed. Five of the youth who had never been in care were either raised by relatives and parents or went to relatives when the parental relationship became difficult or ended. One youth “could not remember all the places I’ve stayed...I have lived with every different family member...”

When asked who had raised them, youth who had not been in care appear to have a stronger presence of relatives as they grew up (this includes aunts, uncles, grandparents); four out of ten stated that relatives, with or without parents, raised them. On the other hand, youth who had been in care did not attribute such a role to extended family members; only two out of sixteen referred to relatives in their response. (Tables presenting this information can be found in Appendix D. See Section 8.7 below for further discussion about relationships.)

Youth in both groups would at times express a desire to be with parents. One youth who had been placed in care stated that he “longed to be with my parents and I feel that I should never have been taken away from them in the first place.” Some youth who had never been in care would reach out for parents they may not have known. For example, a youth, whose parents separated when he was very young, grew up with his mother, who remarried. At 12 he ran away and then was thrown out by his mother and stepfather at 14-15. Thrown out a second time, the youth went to stay with his biological father – an arrangement lasted only a week and he no longer has any contact with him.

The longing for the past, as imperfect as it may have been, comes through in the responses to “what was the best part about growing up in your family”. “Having a mother” comes from one youth never in care who’s mother died when he was 14, even though in the response to “what were the worst things” he speaks of excessive drinking and violence on the part of the mother and relatives.

### **8.2 Homeless youth: Running away and being thrown out**

For many of the youth the movement in and out of parental and relatives’ homes as well as various care situations, was further exacerbated by running away or being thrown out. Eight of the ten youth who had never been in care had either run away from home, been thrown out by a parent or guardian or both. Youth who had been in care had less tendency to run away or be thrown out of their parental homes; seven of the 16 had never done so. However, of these seven, all but one had either run away or been thrown out of a placement. Two youth who had been put into care considered this action on the part of their parents to be “throwing them out”. One youth placed at 16 because he was “partying too much” while answering “no” to being thrown out but did add, “I was thrown out into foster care”. Another youth, put into care at 15, thinks that his mother could no longer handle her two children, perhaps because of her illness, and had them placed in care, a gesture he considers being “thrown out”<sup>111</sup>.

Violence can play a role in pushing youth out of their homes. Three youth who had never been in care moved out of home because of their father’s violence. One youth went to a shelter where she could not stay and went back to her father, while in the other case the mother left but eventually returned to her husband; the son decided not to go back and moved into an apartment. For a third, the father’s violence towards his daughter pushed her into a shelter – the mother had already separated from the father.

---

<sup>111</sup> As mentioned in section 2, the responses that youth give to the questions are usually entered as such, given that they reflect the youth’s perception of events. In the case of responses to being thrown out, the first youth quoted in the paragraph is not counted as being thrown out. Another youth, who also answered “yes” to being thrown out by parents, was referring to an occurrence when he was five years old and his father threw his mother out of the home, along with the child. Because the gesture concerned the mother primarily, this was entered as a “no” in the tables.

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

Only two youth who had not been in care had never run away or been thrown out. One youth did not return to his violent father with his mother but rather went to live with a relative. He wound up living in transition housing he moved to find work in another city. Another youth stated that he'd come to a mutual decision with his parents that he should leave. However, while not detailed, the participant did state that he had been in prison a number of times (without giving a reason), leaving the impression that the relationship with the parents was perhaps more complex and troubled than revealed.

Seven of the youth who had been homeless and in care ran away from foster parents or group homes reflecting a desire for fewer rules and/or a longing to go back to parents. One youth ran away to his parents at 11 because "I did not like the rules of the receiving home and I would try to visit with my parents while in care..." . Finally he was thrown out of care at 15 because he was "intoxicated". Another also ran away when he was about 12 years old because he "did not like the rules.... I wanted freedom", and then was thrown out by foster parents at 14/15. Another youth, placed in care at 12-13 years, ran away the first time "because I wanted to go home" and continued to run away (stating that this happened 60-70 times), "I was AWOL all the time. I wanted to go out to be with friends, to drink and whatever. I didn't want to listen to anybody. One ran away because he was "being treated poorly by foster parents" and finally left care at 16/17 because "my foster parents did not feed me sufficiently. I went to my mother's to get proper food". Another youth ran away many times from care and home and when asked why, he answered "Alcoholism. I ran away from foster care and my grandmother's...."

Almost two-thirds of the youth who had never been in care had run away or been thrown out before they were 13 years old, whereas this proportion was slightly lower with the youth who had been in care. One youth who had been in care ran away before she was ten because "mom was strict, her husband and she fought, I didn't want to stay, I wanted to be with friends" and another, who ran away at 6 to 9 years did so because of "the situation that was going on at home. I didn't like things that were going on. The emotional, physical, and mental abuse started at age 7—after the first year of marriage to my step-dad."

### **8.3 Homeless youth: Becoming homeless**

The process of becoming homeless for most youth is rarely a single moment or incident but often tied into the process of running away or being thrown out. Seven of the eight youth who had never been in care and had run away or been thrown out wound up on the street or in a shelter at some point . Other strategies included staying with friends (7 out of 8) or with a family member, including a parent (6 out of 8).<sup>112</sup> Youth who had been in care had less tendency to state that they had found themselves on the street or in a shelter or had stayed with family, including a parent while friends played an important role in providing shelter.

For some the move onto living on the street was rapid. One youth, never in care, left home at 18 but within the first year estimates that he lived in eleven different places, including with his drug dealer. When he lived in apartments or rooms, parties or conflict with managers would lead to evictions and he sometimes found himself on the street. Two youths, also never in care, found themselves on their own and on the street at a young age. One left home with her mother because of violence at 13, but this was followed by periods of time with her father, friends, couch surfing and jail. She moved from city to city and her strategy when homeless was "go find somewhere, meet people who would let them (her and her friend) stay there." She has stayed under bridges, which "sounds bad, but it was actually nice". The other respondent stated that she was homeless by 13. Fights with her father would lead to squatting with friends who were also on the street, followed by a return home; a pattern that repeated itself several times. However

---

<sup>112</sup> It should be noted that three youth, when asked whether they had ever found themselves without a place to stay, said "no" and stated that they stayed in shelters or with friends.

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

“eventually I was not allowed back” and by 16 she had her own apartment. The lack of skills and education made it hard to get a job and keep the apartment.

When asked what would have prevented the youth from finding themselves without a place to stay, the responses were similar in both groups of youth. Some said nothing would have prevented the situation, one stating “It couldn’t have been prevented. I had no options or choices.” Others spoke of the lack of choices or services available to them or the lack of knowledge about those that existed. “More resources such as [a youth shelter]; there were no alternatives available.” Some youth thought that a job or money would have helped. A few spoke of the need for relationships and support, “someone who cared about me”, “more support, people, housing, financial support. I was addicted to drugs, I needed support...the shelters were too strict.... They knew I was doing drugs so I kept getting discharged”, and “people I could talk to that would give me encouragement...I was not connecting with anybody”. One youth, never in care, who feels her mother chose her new husband instead of her, stated “I wouldn’t have been homeless if I still lived with my mom”, while another, who had been in care stated “I was happier without a place to stay than being in placement... but having a place to live where I would have been comfortable would have helped.”

### **8.4 Homeless youth: Current housing situation**

Few youth who had been homeless, whether they had been in care or not, seemed to be in stable housing situations at the time of the interviews; the majority had been in their current situation less than six months. Many were living in shelters or transitional housing<sup>113</sup> and few of the ones who shared apartments seemed to be settled, one youth stating “this is too negative an environment... There are too many arguments with my girlfriend and roommates”. A few did seem happy in their living situations. One woman who had been in care, had been living in a basement suite for the last four months and was happy there. “I appreciate living alone, having my own space to come home to and relax. I can control the cleanliness of my space, at least if it’s a bit messy, it’s my mess and not anyone else’s”. Two other youths who also had been in care, were living alone in apartments, but for a short time. Both were planning to stay and noted how difficult it was to find decent and affordable housing.

Over half of youth who had not been in care planned to move but many did not know where they would go next. The reasons for wanting to move varied, ranging from eviction to bad housing. Many spoke of the difficulty of finding affordable housing, and in some cities, in safe neighbourhoods. Some were not sure how long they would remain; one youth who did not plan to move stating, “I need to stay here because I have no place to go”, while another hoping to move in a few weeks, was having difficulty finding an apartment. “This is stressful for young people to go through, they shouldn’t have to worry about money, paying for rent “. This youth continued by stating “everything will be OK once I have my apartment ... a whole new life”. A youth spoke of a continual round of temporary housing of squeegee kids: renting an apartment, getting evicted and finding another. Some youth were in more hopeful situations; one youth was moving on to a long-term project that would allow him to stay while he was in school or working and another was hoping to stay in a transitional housing project long enough to get a supervised apartment or find a roommate.

Only one person who had not been in care was living on the street. She was “moving around a lot...not sure where next.” She had arrived in the city a month before and was not sure where she would go. When asked whether it was hard to find a place to live, her response reflected this movement, “Yes, sometimes. Especially when you don’t know your way around and you want to find your way back there.”

The reasons for wanting to move on the part of the youth who had been in care (7 out of 16 stated that they planned to move and 3 said they did not know) were not very different from the

---

<sup>113</sup> This is not surprising, given that the methodology involved interviewing youth through such services.



## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

other youth. Three youth were sharing with friends but one wanted to “be by myself”, while two had been recently evicted and thought they might go “possibly under the bridge” or on the streets. Other youth were habitués of shelters and did not seem to desire anything else or had undefined plans such as, “I just have to find a place and everything is set” or a desire to move to be “closer to my son”. Another youth, who had been renting a room for the past year, thought he would be leaving, although he was not sure where he would go, wanting “to pursue further education.”

Two youth who had been in care were moving soon into more stable housing while another, who had been at a shelter for three weeks, had been accepted for long-term support. This was his second stay there but said that his life had changed 180°. He also said that he had not regretted his time on the street, was even proud of it and felt he had matured through this experience in a way that he would not have otherwise.

### **8.5 Homeless youth: Work and survival**

Only two of the youth who had never been in care were working, compared to over half of those who had been in care. Four youth who were not working were in school (two in each category) and two youth (both had been in care) were both working and attending school.

Youth who had been in care appear to have steadier employment. Two youth stated that they hoped to continue in the same employment where they had each been for seven months and over a year and a third was working in the field in which he’d begun studies. Another youth had worked in the same position twice in the last two years; once for a year and once for five months while two other youth had been working in the same position for over a year but the work did not appear to be continuous or full-time.

The employment of the two youth who had not been in care and working was recent and it is unclear how stable the situations would be. One youth had been working in a store for three weeks and hoped to keep the job but recognised that earning a minimum wage was going to make finances difficult. The other youth had just got a job that day as a sales agent. However, it was not clear how long this would last; when asked how she survived she stated “Not thinking about it. I drink a lot. I used to do drugs.”

A few youth who had been in care worked as casual labour, but only one seemed to find this satisfactory, although he did state later in the interview that the best thing in his life right now was “smoking joints”. Another didn’t plan to keep on working in casual labour but had not found permanent work because he looked different. “I don’t want to change my appearance for a job interview.” The income he earned was not sufficient so other sources of income were squeegeeing and “hustling”.

Some youth who did not work received a Personal Needs Allowance (\$26.25/week), others provincial assistance (two had just applied). One on assistance had found work but quit because it was “unsuitable”. Other sources of income included squeegeeing, pan handling, friends and shelters. When asked how he survived one youth, never in care, stated “life is free”. He was not interested in looking for work and had done job-training programs, but just for the money. He is sure that if he looked, it would be easy to find employment. Another, also never in care, survived by squeegeeing. He had sold drugs and had held jobs, one from which he stole, another he’d quit because of long hours and a third where he’d been laid off. A third survived by panhandling, which was “ok sometimes.” This youth had worked but did not really want a job now and felt that it would not be difficult to find something.

Other youth survived on little. One who had been in care was going on welfare and had difficulty finding work. “They don’t want to hire me because I’m a teenager, I live in a shelter, I’m going on welfare and can’t work.” Another who had also been in care, said, “I just barely survive now because my girlfriend is pregnant. I put her before me. When she needs things I get them for her,

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

her needs come before mine ... I'm fairly qualified to do a large number of things, I guess I just have bad luck because they're not hiring. ..."

Both groups of youth thought that a lack of experience, a lack of education, and for three youths, a criminal record, were handicaps to finding work. One youth who had never been in care thought that living in a shelter caused prejudice: a potential employer had called her but seemed to renege on the interview when he called the shelter. Another, on assistance, had found that early on her youth had been a disadvantage while it was now a lack of education that made finding work difficult.

### **8.6 Homeless youth: Education and school**

Only two of the ten youth who had never been in care had completed high school (one with some post-secondary education) and both planned to go on with their education. A higher proportion of youth who had been in care, almost a third, had completed secondary school. One was in college and another planned to go but needed certain courses in order to get in. He stated that he'd had no trouble in school, but did not take school seriously, didn't know why he should bother working hard – but "this is generally my attitude to life". A woman who had completed high school had no desire to continue on but thought that she would probably need a degree to continue to do the work she currently enjoyed. Two youth in this group who had completed high school still seemed to be in school. One had recently dropped out because she needed to work while a second youth was in a Native Education program. Two other youth who had not completed high school were currently in school and seemed to be doing well. The first was in a school that allowed her to "work at my own pace" while the second was completing an apprenticeship and academic program.

Only two youth who had not been in care were in school. Both found it difficult. One youth had first been homeless at 13 and had spent time living on the streets. A "normal" lifestyle and focussing for a long period of time were hard. On the street there was no schedule to follow, and the priority was obtaining basic needs and survival, "school is a very different way of thinking". This youth also thought that she had a learning disability and needed one-to-one tutoring, but no such program was available. Nonetheless she did hope to go to college. The other youth in school had similar difficulties with adjusting to school. "I'm trying my hardest but I've been in jail so much, I've missed a lot. I'm doing all right but I won't be passing with flying colours."

Other youth seemed to have plans to go back to school: a youth (who had not been in care) had plans to register for adult education in the fall. He stated that he'd had no learning difficulties when in school but drank excessively and had dropped out. Others spoke of plans to undertake non-academic programs. Two youth who had been in care had precise programs that they hoped to follow: one was planning to do so in the fall while the other hoped to return to the course that had been interrupted when he'd been thrown out of home by his father.

Many youth in both categories seemed to recognise that education was important and said that they planned to go back to school but the responses were mixed and the plans did not seem very solid. (They are considered as not planning to go back to school.) One youth, never in care, said that she was thinking of going back to school in the fall but did not know what she wanted to study. Her problems in school had been drugs and "not wanting to go... I thought it was retarded.... I didn't like the stuff they were teaching us... it didn't make sense. [It was] all stupid." She also said that she had found school "too stressful" finding it difficult to sit all day in school and "would like to learn something fun". Another, also never in care, had no plans to go back to school but said, "I would like to receive training for mechanical repairs or electrician skills". Another youth, also never in care, stated that he already had grade 12 English and probably would go back for math and socials and "other useless shit like that". However he did not see the purpose of learning things that "you will never use after you've finished school" and thought it was "pointless". Another first stated that he planned to go back to school but then admitted that he

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

was too used to his current lifestyle on the street and that he wanted to not be visible since there were three warrants out for his arrest.

Some youth who had been in care were no different and spoke of vague and unspecific plans. "I'll be going back to school in August 2002" or to pursue fairly unrealistic dreams. A few others thought they would go back, "eventually when I have time and am not working so much.... My long-term goal is to be an animal biologist" or "Maybe in the future. I want a job in a nice place to live right now."

Two youth who had not been in care had no plans to go back to school. While one admitted that she would like to have her GED, she really wanted to get an education and have her own business. She attributed her problems at school to the lack of friends. "I don't get along with people. I want to be alone.... Maybe some good friends would have helped. Even if I had one friend, I might have stayed at school." Another youth had a similar understanding of his difficulties at school. "When you're poor you can't be part of the gang. You don't have the good clothing...." This led to him losing his motivation to continue on with school. When asked what would have helped, he also stated "having friends".

While some of the youth seemed to have no difficulty in school, a number of youth who had been in care mentioned that problems and conflict at home made it difficult to concentrate. Others stated that they had difficulty concentrating or "acted out". "I did not like school. I didn't like being told what to do. Nothing would have helped." For another, while school was "really good" and "my teachers were always there when I needed them, he found himself dropping out because his girlfriend was pregnant and he had to get a job. Some youth wished they had one-to-one tutoring, "I have ADHD. I learn fast when I have one-to-one".

Two aboriginal youth who had been in care spoke of "white people" as the biggest problem at school. For the first it was "White people – racism, looks, comments" while for a second it was "being around a majority of white people, learning what they've known without going further back...there was no First Nations perspective..."

### **8.7 Homeless youth: Relationships and social contacts**

Interviewers asked participants about contacts in the last six months with five different categories of people: parents, siblings, other relatives, friends that they grew up with and any one else. They were asked how often they saw them, did they get along and if the person helped and how. If there was no contact, participants were asked how they felt about this. A question about current friends, how they met and how they helped was also asked.

While most youth stated that they had been in touch with their parents and a majority with siblings and other relatives, the relationships were often tenuous and infrequent whether the youth had been in care or not. Some of the youth who had been in care would call a parent "occasionally" and this was "OK because of the distance" or it was clearly not a healthy relationship "when we see each other we drink and argue". Another who said that she saw her mother once a month then went on to say that she did not associate with her because "As soon as mom sees me, she offers me a joint" and the respondent had been trying to reduce her consumption. Another had seen her mother a few months back, but generally they only saw each other every few years. Another saw his parents every month; his mother lent him money while his father "is someone to party with". Some youth had virtually no relationship with their parents but a few of these had important links with other relatives, aunts and uncles, siblings, including a brother who helped by "selling his belongings and giving me money".

Youth who had not been in care seemed to have equally tenuous relationships with persons from their past. A 20-year-old youth was still in touch with his mother and stepfather, who helped by

### ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

paying the participant to do chores, buying him clothing, giving him food and helping him find work. He sometimes babysat for a sister, but his current friends were street and squeegee friends who had taught him how to be “street smart”. The other significant relationships were staff from youth shelters and a drop-in centre. Another youth also stated that he was in touch with his parents, although his mother could not help him because “my father doesn’t want to because I chose to leave the house.” His friends now were others he had met at the shelter where he had been living for a six weeks and the only other significant relationship was with his probation officer who he saw twice a week. “She keeps me on track to stay out of trouble and to keep up the good work.”

Another youth who had not been in care also had few ties to his past. His mother had died when he was a teenager and he did not get along with his sister. Other relatives with whom he had lived after his mother’s death were “a negative influence and they drink excessively. I try to avoid them.” Although he did acknowledge that some did give some emotional support. Childhood friends were seldom seen because “they have interests different from my own”. His current friends were people from an aboriginal agency, an Aboriginal church, and friends from AA. He sees them every day and they give practical support – food, money – and emotional support.

Some youth from both groups seemed to continue to reach out to their parents. One youth who had not been in care stated that he had no contact with his mother but during the interview revealed that he called her weekly. He still did not understand why she had chosen to move in with her boyfriend and abandon the youth and his brother. However, he had support from an uncle and aunt, especially the uncle who “is like a father to me”. A youth who had been in care had tried to contact his father who had refused to speak to him, and while he spoke to his mother twice a month he found that they got along “not well, but I would like to get along better”. He had also reached out to his brother; something his mother did not sanction, making this relationship difficult.

One youth who still resented having been put into care had support from his parents who “make sure I eat, give me emotional and financial support” but little contact with siblings. Relatives were far away, and no longer saw childhood friends “I was taken away from them too.” New friends included squeegee friends, and a girlfriend. Another youth had infrequent contacts with parents, siblings and other relatives although she was occasionally in touch with her previous foster mother. However the relationship was strained because she had “accused her husband of molesting me.... It doesn’t help”. Emotional support came primarily from her therapist and boyfriend.

A few youth seemed to have relatively little contact with family and people from the past and had created new relationships with street friends. A 19-year-old woman who had not been in care stated that she hardly spoke to her father who had been abusive. She saw her mother, along with her younger siblings every 1-2 months and although she got along well with her mother “there is still some tension”. She rarely saw childhood friends and her emotional support came from her best friend, who she had met on the street, her boyfriend, who she’d met at a punk show, and his sister.

A 23-year-old youth, never in care, who had left home at 18, stated that he still had support from his mother, with whom he got along well. “She’s my mom... As long as I don’t live with her things are good... she buys me shoes and feeds me.” Siblings were “just not a part of my life”, and although he said he was in touch with other relatives he stated that he did not want to associate with them. “After I moved out, I could see my family’s dysfunction.” He had no childhood friends “we moved every couple of years when I was a kid, so I sort of got it in my head, don’t make friends because you’re just going away.” Current friends were people he had met on the street. “All are my friends now.... We mostly get along really well...they’re like a little family to me.... Nobody really helps each other.... The only way to help is to give money and none of my friends have money, sometimes they’ll just smoke me up with weed, that’s it.”

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

Similar patterns of forging new relationships and social networks emerged with youth who had been in care. One youth, with few contacts with his family, had friends from the street, whereas another, who now had a better relationship with some family members, felt he had lots of friends. "I've met them in group home, when on my own, at parties, just hanging out downtown.... They support me because they see me going through stuff emotionally...." Three youth had developed a new entourage based on new activities in their lives. One who lived in shelters had made friends with classmates at her alternative school. Another youth had developed recent friendships through a growing identification with his First Nations heritage. He was in a Native Education program, had made friends through school as well as "cultural events, sweat lodges, Native friendship centres, family night, Recovery Club, dances, bars... everywhere", and had ongoing support from care workers.

Other youth seemed very alone. One of the most isolated was an 18 year old, never in care, who had been thrown out of home by her mother and stepfather at 12, followed by a year and a half on and off with her father. She had not seen her mother for a year, stating that "I'm used to it. Doesn't affect me...all she cares about is how everything looks. She's fake. I hate it.... She doesn't like what I do" She speaks to her father every three months but "we don't talk.... He just asks how I'm doing." She had little material support from her parents and had lost touch with her siblings, who still lived with the mother. "It hurts a lot, especially my brother because he's blood. I don't even know what my brother or sister look like." Other relatives were not part of her life nor did she have any childhood friends. "It doesn't really bother me. I don't think about it or I'll go crazy." When asked about current friends, she answered, "Nobody. I'm always by myself"

Two other young women who had not been in care were isolated in the city in which they lived but spoke of support from people elsewhere. One had moved to a new city hoping to find work and was no longer in touch with her violent father. Her mother and grandmother, who had raised her, were both living in other countries. Her sisters, also living elsewhere were considered a source of support and current friends. She had no friends in her new city. "I don't share my life with anybody"

Another youth, also never in care, stayed in touch with a variety of people, but people seemed to drift in and out of her life. She was in touch with her parents and had spoken to her father "a while ago..." and stated that she spoke to her mother every few weeks, "when I have time or remember or when I miss her." A brother committed suicide and she has no contact with other relatives. When asked about childhood friends she stated that "It is hard because I don't stay in the same place lots..." She has a boyfriend in another city "I left there and told him I'd come back.... I call him sometimes." Current friends included people she met recently and travelling companions.

Similar solitary patterns emerge with youth who had been in care. One had seen his mother 4-5 times in the last three years, had no contact with his father, had no friends, and no significant relationships other than those with shelter and homeless organisations. Another youth had a few contacts but these included a 10-12 year old cousin with whom he played, a social worker that he saw every week because "I have to go to ...office to pick up my cheque", but no friends. "I don't have anyone's number. I don't feel anything ...I don't think about my friends... I have me, myself. I don't trust anybody ... You trust somebody, they'll rip you off". Another stated that he was in touch with both parents "all the time" but saw them rarely because, they, as well as other relatives, lived far away. When asked about friends he said, 'I don't have many now, I just eventually started hating everyone.... I got fired from my job, my friends kicked me out, welfare was not helping me. So I said 'fuck the world'." When asked about the best thing in his life right now, he spoke of his twenty-month old son, "My son, ever since he was born, we have been close."

A 22-year-old with few contacts with family seemed to have run into a series of difficulties that had further isolated her. An accident, the loss of a baby, and the death of a friend who had also been "through the system" seemed to add to her difficulties. "I feel that I've made some bad

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

decisions in the last while... I had a nice apartment and stability before the accident, then it happened.... I was in and out of transition houses after that and in bad relationships.” When asked about current friends, she stated that she had very few. “ I don’t meet people the normal way, I’ve called phone lines to meet other people. I met some other people through people I met on phone line. ...I only have a few good friends. I question new people...”

## **8.8 Homeless youth: Summary and Discussion**

The foregoing seems to suggest that youth who have been homeless, regardless of whether they have had experience in care, share a chaotic family background; many featuring reconstituted families and violence. For the youth interviewed for this study it appears that in some instances, care just added to the chaos. There is also some indication that for youth, perhaps more often for those not taken into care, relatives stepped in to fill the gap left by unstable or ineffective parents. The childhood and adolescent chaos is further exacerbated by running away or being thrown out – from the family home, placements or both. Youth who had never been in care were more likely to run away or be thrown out at an earlier age although the reason for this is not clear – unless the intervention of child welfare assuages some of the difficulties.

The pattern of running away or being thrown out underlines the findings of other studies – homelessness is not simply a state of being but a process. The homelessness experienced by the youth interviewed is clearly the result of a series of events and often appears to be a state that becomes resolved by the intervention of family and friends, only to reoccur again.

While all but one youth were currently housed, the stability of this housing is questionable, The vast majority in their current situation less than six months and over half planning to move or unsure of whether they would be staying on. However, some of the comments of the youth emphasised the importance of housing as the basis for stability, if not the rebuilding of lives. While it is unlikely that stable housing alone would be sufficient for many of the youth, clearly, it is a very important factor for them and there are high expectations about what it can do in their lives.

The youth who had been in care appear to have had a steadier employment history compared to those homeless youth who had not been in care suggesting that care had helped to stabilise their lives to the degree necessary to allow them to focus on work. Perhaps related to this is the similar pattern that emerges with respect to education: proportionally more youth who had been in care had completed high school although these two observations may be related to the age of the youth – those who had been in care are on the average older.

There appears to be no great difference in terms of social contacts. While youth for the most part were in touch with various family members, especially parents, the interviews reveal difficult relationships, with some youth reaching out for closer relationships. Some of the youth were isolated and appeared to be cut off, while others had established new circles of support, some based on other street kids. However the importance of relationships was underlined at various moments during the interviews. When asked what would have prevented their homelessness some youth answered, a relationship with someone who cared. This was echoed in some responses to quitting school when youth spoke of how friends may have prevented their quitting. This need for relationships confirms that the homelessness of these youth is not just a lack of shelter, but is a more profound state – one with its genesis quite early in their lives and much closer to the sense of “social exclusion” .

## **9. Youth interviewed: have been in care**

While the previous section examined the differences and similarities of youth who had experienced homelessness, whether they had been in care or not, this section will deal with the similarities and differences of youth who have been in care. Ten youth interviewed had successfully exited care, that is had never been homeless and were living in stable housing situations and were working or in school. The sixteen youth, discussed in the previous section, who had been both homeless and in care are discussed in this section as well.

### **9.1 Youth in care: Going into care and family background**

There appears to be no great difference in the ages at which youth from both groups had their first contact with the care system; 6 out of 10 of those who exited successfully were under ten years and 11 out of 16 in the group who had been homeless. Only one youth in each group had their first contact with the care system after the age of 15. An equal proportion, about a third were not placed in care right away but were followed by social workers or others from the care system for periods of a few months to years. (Tables with the data for this section can be found in Appendix E.)

Both groups are similar in the number of social workers they had – over half had one to five while 2 out of 10 in the successful group and 3 out of 16 of those who had been homeless had more than ten social workers.

The differences in the experience of care are on other levels. First, youth who had been homeless had more placements: over half (9 out of 16) had been in more than six placements, some in “as many as 12” or “over 32”. On the other hand, only one youth who had successfully exited care had more than six placements (11 places in all). Youth who had not been homeless also were more likely to be placed in foster families rather than in group homes or other kinds of residential facilities (6 out of 10). On the other hand, youth who had been homeless were equally divided between foster homes (5 out of 16), group homes (6 out of 16) and a combination of the two (5 out of 16).

Furthermore, youth who had been homeless had a greater tendency to leave care before their eighteenth birthdays; 7 of the 16 had done so, compared to two out of ten in the “never homeless” group. However, the two who left care before their eighteenth birthdays among the “successful” group did so at the age of 17 and 17.5. Both asked to be released and both continued to receive support. In the first case, although the youth left care, her ties to the care system were not severed; her social worker helped her find an apartment, paid for the first month of rent and continued to give support (although it is not clear whether this was “official” support). In the second case, the youth got a student loan and went to university. Youth who had been homeless, on the other hand, often left care at a much younger age (three were under 15 and two 16 years old) and most went back to live with parents – arrangements that often broke down. One youth left care at 17, but his experience up to that time had been chaotic with periods of time in care, with his father, relatives and on the street. The other youth was almost 18 when he left. “I got kicked out of my house, I didn’t have a job and I didn’t want to go to school. My worker told me I was turning 18 anyway so they cut me off.” This youth had also spent time with relatives, friends, on the street, as well as in jail.

While not unanimous, there was a greater tendency for youth who had successfully exited care to see the experience of care in positive terms – often in comparison with the situation they were leaving. For example, a 25-year-old woman, who was sexually abused by her stepfather, ran away at 9 and called a social worker to be removed from her home. Her foster family, with whom she stayed for five years, made her feel at home. “People actually cared about my well-being, I was protected and resources were offered to me – I had the resources I needed to survive. I wasn’t beat up on or sexually-abused like I was in my family. My in-care family encouraged me to go to school...I was able to sleep at night without crying.” Another youth made similar comments

### ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

about being put into care. According to her, the best thing about growing up in her family was that her foster parents “accepted me into the family, they loved me. I didn’t have to worry about the family problems...” At twelve she was placed in a foster family with whom she stayed until she was 18, when she went away to school, and continues to visit them “all the time”. For her as well, the best part of this time in her life was that “I felt safe knowing no more bad stuff was going to happen.” The hardest, according to her was “not being with my biological family, I guess.” A 22-year-old woman continues to live with her foster family, with whom she has been for fourteen years. At 8 she was made a permanent ward and went to the foster home. The best part of her life at this point was “ I was allowed to be a child again.... I had unconditional love from my foster parents.... I knew that they would not leave me.”

One person from the age of 12 to 14 “had to fight to get into care”. She continued to insist on being placed in care “because I realised that my family tried to kill each other...I used to wear the same clothes every day... I was 10 years old and suicidal...” Two women who went into foster homes when they were over 16<sup>114</sup> were not very happy in the homes but both appreciated the attention from social workers that they had; one feels she should have been put into care much earlier.

On the other hand, the experience in care of youth who had been homeless was less likely to be positive. Five of the ten saw this period of their lives as negative; one questions why family services got involved in his family in the first place and states that he met gang members and was arrested during the time he spent in youth centres and group homes. His good memories of growing up in his family included “not having to worry about violence and sexual abuse” although he admits that they were hit at home but doesn’t feel it was “ excessive” and feels that “ I should never have been taken away from them in the first place.”

Some youth who had been homeless spoke of abuse as causal factor in their placement into care and then found themselves in abusive situations again. Two youth were placed into care because of physical abuse and alcoholism and then abused in care. Another youth, now 19 years old, also spoke of sexual abuse by a foster parent. Placed into care at six or seven, over the next eleven years he was in over eight foster homes and group homes and spoke being punished, poorly treated, used as “slave labour” in these homes and sexually abused in one.

Some youth did not understand why they were being put into care or moved around. One youth found himself in care at seven and over the next five years placed in a number of homes, some violent, with little information about what was to happen to him. “ Once I was sent to a new foster home ... without talking to me about what was happening. ...Eventually I moved back in with mom and dad.... I didn’t know what happened, I just knew I was going to be with my mom and that all of my stuff would be there... I was taken out of my home because it was violent and then was put into more violence without any explanation.” However, this lack of understanding is not exclusive to youth who had been homeless. A youth, who exited successfully, echoes the confusion about care, when asked what he found was the hardest part of the nine years he was in care, answered, “not knowing why I was in care.” Another who was knifed by her mother at 13 spent the next four years in a variety of group homes and centres. Now 19 years, she still does not understand why she is put into restrictive group homes when her mother was the aggressor, why she was moved around so much and finally, why the police had to come to take her away while she was at school. She attributes her rebellious behaviour during this period on these factors.

Nevertheless, a few youth who had been homeless did speak of being in care in positive terms. The most positive experience was that of a youth from an abusive and negligent background who considers her last foster mother to be her “real mom”. She lived with her mother, grand parents, and other relatives before being placed in a group home at 14. (Child welfare had been involved in her life from the age of nine.) Her foster mother at her the last group home, “gave me amazing

---

<sup>114</sup> NB, the contact with the child welfare agency may have begun much earlier, but the removal from the parental home only occurred after a certain period of time.



### ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

guidance and taught me that life was about the choices I made. If I was unhappy, then the only person that could change that was me...my foster mom was also a supportive figure for me as a lesbian, and taught me about the gay community... My foster mom helped with anger management and mental health issues..."

Another youth who did not seem to have a very good experience of care still seemed to think that having the child welfare system involved earlier in his life would have helped. At 14 his mother called child welfare because of conflict with the youth and for a year social workers visited. Nonetheless his mother threw him out at fifteen and he then stayed relatives, friends and in a foster home. Unhappy with the rigidity in the foster home, he left and this was followed by more instability with time on the street, his father and in group homes. When asked what would have helped at the time, he included "...being placed earlier in a milieu that was not too rigid and with youth who were not delinquents."

A third youth, while speaking of being in foster homes in a positive manner, responded to some questions in a manner that seemed to contradict this assessment. He went into foster care at the age of 5 was moved twice (without explanation) saw his father almost every weekend and, at 13, his father asked him to come back. He found it hard to refuse, but stated that this return had been a big mistake. His father often left him on his own and the youth said he felt no attachment to him, finally leaving home at 19. However, during the interview, he also stated that he had started to drink at 10 or 11, was taking drugs at 16 and tried everything including heroin (and was still consuming at the time of the interview). When asked what was the hardest about the time in care he spoke of having to change foster homes and losing the desire to create ties because these were always broken and had to be rebuilt. "In care, you accumulate nothing, nothing belongs to you. When you leave, you leave with nothing."

Other youth, who had been homeless, neither regretted leaving their families, nor found anything positive in the experience of care. A youth who was put into care at 7 or 8 years and was moved from foster homes to group homes, back to his father and spent time in jail. When asked about what was best about growing up in his family, he answered "nothing ..." while the best thing about the time in care was "having more freedom – getting to go outside playing games...money to spend." Another youth, put into care at 12-13, lived in a foster home, a group home and an independent living program at 16. A period of instability that included shelters, the street and jail followed losing his apartment at 16, because he lacked money. Still he fondly remembers "being 16, 17, 18 and on my own and no one telling me what to do" but felt that there had been no conflict with foster parents or guardians, just the "normal teenage conflicts with staff at group home, arguments about coming home late, drinking, etc."

Some youth in both groups felt "excluded and discriminated against" in foster homes. One youth who had been homeless felt that the foster mother "took sides and had favourites. She didn't offer help like she should have", while another, upon being placed into care "felt rejected by my ... family and fed up with 'the system'." However, youth who had not been homeless also spoke of being "stigmatised". A 23-year-old woman was placed in care at nine and had four different foster homes, some to which she returned, interspersed with time at her father's house, with her boyfriend, and aunts. She felt excluded in the foster family "I always felt different or on the outside of things...It wasn't my family and my home, that was obvious to me...I felt stigmatised." Another woman, in care from the age of 4 and a half because of sexual and mental abuse by family members also felt different. The hardest part for her was "Being treated differently by my foster family.... My foster parents made their own rules. I wasn't adopted, I wasn't accepted. The money would stop if I was adopted." She stated that she suffered both emotional and physical abuse while in foster care. However she decided that "I could not run away because it would jeopardise my plans to go to university and it would mean being separated from my sister ...I had strong personal goals from the time I was ten. I knew I wanted to leave my foster parents and do well for myself. I worked hard at school and made the honour roll."

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

The more positive experience of care by youth who exited successfully is further underlined when they were asked who raised them. Youth who had never been homeless had a greater tendency to acknowledge the role of someone from the care system (foster parent, social worker, etc.); 6 out of 10 compared to 6 out of 16 of those who had been homeless.

### **9.2 Youth in care: Running away and being thrown out**

Both groups of youth had run away or been thrown out. However, the proportions were higher for the youth who had been homeless (15 of the 16 had run away or been thrown out, compared to 6 of 10 for the group that had not been homeless<sup>115</sup>). Only one youth who had never been homeless had been thrown out, compared to seven in the group who had been homeless. This one youth, who had never been homeless, had a “tumultuous” relationship with her mother who abused her verbally and physically. Reasons for running away for the two groups were similar and included conflict with parents or stepparents. One youth who had never been homeless ran away from home a number of times before she was put into care (she also had asked to be removed from her parents) and stated, “I think many kids whose parents are rich are on the streets because home was unbearable.” Another who ran away from home because she was “put down a lot” and had a conflicted relationship with her father’s new wife (her mother died when she was six) stated, “one of the reasons we went into care, he got married”. She found herself running away from care as well, because “I wasn’t happy...I felt that the foster home didn’t want me”. Other reasons for running away from placements cited by both groups of youth included “frustration”, “I didn’t like the controls” or “I didn’t like the foster home”.

Almost all the youth who had never been homeless ran away before they were 13 (5 out of 6), compared to 7 out of 15 in the group that had been homeless. Similar proportions in both groups stated that they had run away more than ten times, or “many” times: 4 out of 10 for those who had not been homeless and 7 out of 16 for those who had.

Both groups of youth reacted in similar ways when running away or being thrown out: going to friends, family members or a parent. One youth who had never been homeless did state that she “wandered the streets” but does not appear to have spent the night on the streets. One, who was heavily involved with drugs, stayed with drug dealers and another, also never homeless, stayed with “drug friends” when she ran away from her parents. She had started to run away at the age of seven, was raped at 12 but told no one until she was 16. Her behaviour progressively worsened – aggressive behaviour, drugs, and longer periods of running away – until her parents called child welfare when she was 16.

### **9.3 Youth in care: Leaving Care**

The experience of leaving care did not seem to be very different between youth who had been homeless and those who had exited “successfully” except for the age of leaving care. As noted in Section 9.1, almost half of the youth who were in care and homeless had left care before they were 18 whereas only two of the ten youth who exited “successfully” left care before the age of majority.

Some youth who had been homeless left to go back to their parents when they were still quite young. One who left care at 10, having stayed in many “not good places”, still attributes his last foster home with helping him learn to cook and helping him go back to school. Others, unhappy in the foster homes, left when they were around 16 years old. One of these, who wanted to leave her foster home, still wishes that she had received “more support, people, housing, financial support. I was addicted to drugs, I needed support.” A youth, who had been homeless who was in an independent living program resented having to leave even though he did not comply with

<sup>115</sup> One youth who had never been homeless, also stated that she ran away, although this was for only a few hours after an argument with her foster parents at the age of 8 and is not counted as running away. This youth is living with her foster family, who continue to support her, even though she is over the age of majority

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

conditions. When asked what prepared him for independent living, he said “Not a damn thing. Nothing. The Group home people taught little about budgeting.” Another seems to have been thrown out of two group homes at 17 for running away and breaching jail conditions.

Others who had been homeless also seemed to indicate or felt that they had been forced to leave. One youth said that he had been told at 17 that he could not stay in his group home beyond 17, while another said that she was “forced” out of care at 19 with out any more assistance although, it appears that she did receive help in finding an apartment and with the rent. She also acknowledges that the group home helped in teaching her how to do chores, keep a clean house, cook, and money and anger management. Others were given similar preparations in semi-independent group homes. A youth, felt that he had been prepared for independent living by “watching people”, but also spoke of a life skills program and training that he had received both in the home and at school, as well as rent that was paid for one year. However, he felt that was lacking was, “More interaction, honesty with child services... more home visits, more connection with youth”

Chaos in the lives of the youth sometimes made the transition difficult. One youth, who had been helped with housing, furniture and rent when he was 18, went to jail and lost everything. While another, who felt that he had been well supported, found that “I did not always listen”.

The two youth who had successfully exited and left care before 18 asked to be emancipated. One had gone through a number of unstable placements, including going back to an abusive mother, did receive support with the first month of rent, in finding an apartment and had ongoing contact with her social worker. The other youth wanted to leave at 17 and a half, having been unhappy in her foster home. She did get help in getting a student loan and a place to live at the university. When asked what had prepared her for living independently the response was “courage, a sense of independence, and a determination to show foster parents that I can do well.”

However, most of the youth who had successfully exited care did not seem to find that their departure from care was planned. “I just exited at 21 – no help, you know that you don’t call your worker anymore.” Another said that she wanted to go to school and be independent at 18; she decided to move in with a friend on the spur of the moment and found a place right away. However she had been taught, cooking, budgeting, and other “every day stuff “ by her foster parent. Others said they had no help in finding work or an apartment. There was only one example of flexibility – a youth who at 22 was still living with foster parents and had her status as a ward extended so she could finish school.

A few had very precise suggestions for improving the transition out of care, including having someone help make plans “ concrete plans about goals, steps to obtaining goals and support.” A slower exit was also mentioned and someone to call for “resources, groups, life skills, the world, setting up banking account, things you have to do as an adult”. A few mentioned the desire for therapy to understand their pasts although they did not have the financial means to undertake this.

### **9.4 Youth in care: Current housing situation**

It is important to note that by definition, the youth who have “successfully” exited care will be in more stable situations in terms of housing, work and education. The next three sections illustrate these differences when compared to youth who have been homeless.

Over half of the youth who had never been homeless were living independently (in a room or apartment) and had been in the same place for more than a year. This is much more stable than youth who had been homeless, where almost two-thirds (10 out of 16) had been living in the same place for less than six months, many for just a few weeks.

Future plans for moving were almost identical for the two groups; similar proportions planned to stay, move and were “not sure”. Three of the four youth who had not been homeless did not plan to move because they had nowhere else to go and affordable apartments were hard to find but all

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

three had been in their present situations from 2 ½ to 4 years. This reasoning, based on keeping affordable housing, echoed that of youth who had been homeless who also did not plan to move.

Reasons for moving did vary between the two groups however. For the youth who had not been homeless, the moves were often based on decisions over which they had control and were fairly precise plans. For example, two of the women who were planning to move were moving in with boyfriends. Two other youth were moving in with roommates, one had been in an apartment for a year and a half and another had been living with her foster grandmother for a week. On the other hand, youth who had been homeless were more likely to speak of moving because of evictions often accompanied by vague plans about moving elsewhere.

For two of the three youth who had not been homeless and were unsure about moving, the possible reasons for moving also were fairly clear; one was considering moving in with her boyfriend while another had a job offer in another city. The third youth was less clear about his move, he was thinking of going to another province to be closer to his father.

### **9.5 Youth in care: Work and survival**

All but one youth interviewed who had not been homeless, were working and the majority had been in the same job for more than six months. Only one person was on welfare but stated that “I just recently seriously started looking for work. I was going through personal stuff...I’m fearful, lack confidence and social skills. I can be extremely shy and quiet. I don’t know how to approach people, network, do interviews. I’ve had interviews but I didn’t get the job because I assume I didn’t interview well.” On the other hand, just over half (9 of the 16) of the youth who had been homeless were working. Three had been in the same place for more than a year.

Many youth who had not been homeless were both working and going to school. Two youth were receiving financial support from parents while in school; one from her biological parents, the other from foster parents. Two women who had children were working part time and receiving money for child support or family benefits. A youth was working part-time, after a six-month period of full time work, but also receiving disability for mental health problems. Two women each had two jobs, one of whom had recently dropped out of school for financial reasons. A number of youth who had never been homeless mentioned work in relationship to schooling. For example, one youth who had been in an office job for a year, (“I’m a receptionist and do things that others here don’t like to do, for example, faxing”) when asked whether she would like to keep on doing the work stated, “No. Another reason to go to school.” Another, who had been working as a facilitator in a youth program for a few years, when asked the same question, responded “Yes, that’s why I want to go back to school.” A third, who had dropped out of school for financial reasons, stated that she did not want to continue this work, “I want a steady job in the field of social work.”

### **9.6 Youth in care: Education and school**

As mentioned above, work and school was closely linked for the youth interviewed who had never been homeless: a number had part-time work while they went to school. Half of the youth in this group were in school and the other half had plans to return. This group also had the lowest proportion of persons who had not complete high school (7 out of 10 had completed high school compared to 5 out of 16 of those who had been homeless) and the highest proportion of those in post-secondary education.

Some of the youth who had never been homeless left school for financial reasons. “I’d like to go back because I think I need a degree; the more education you have, the more choices...also I want to be an example to my children...but my biggest problem is money...the [Student Aid Program] is not enough... I already have a [student loan] debt” . A woman who had been an honour role student and had wanted to go to university since she was ten years old stated that she would likely “take a breather and save money...I have a large student loan to pay off”.

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

Some of the youth spoke of difficulties, both personal and systemic, in getting their education. A woman, who had always done well in school, reproached the youth centre where she had been placed for not offering the final year of high school – she somehow managed to complete high school and is now in college. Another, who also had not had problems in school, did speak of difficulties with being a foster child, “I don’t think I had any problems at school... I had good grades, friends, I was popular... maybe just trying to explain being a foster child and being stereotyped to fail because I’m a foster child. This made me want to work harder, do better because they , the teachers, expected me to do badly.”

Two women who were not in school were still struggling with personal problems that made it difficult to continue. One who had dropped out explained that “I felt that I wasn’t going to make it – I didn’t believe in myself. I dropped out of [college] after two months... Nothing would have helped. I had to drop out, I felt like a failure... I need to work out my issues.” Another who had not completed high school but wanted to go to college spoke of “going through a lot of depression” and also felt that nothing would have helped at the time. A woman who had not completed high school because “I had no motivation...I didn’t like school...I was doing too many drugs” had recently completed technical training and was working part time in her field. A man who was still in school part-time (although he did not indicate at what level) stated that in the long-term he wanted to study a trade “because you go for a short time and then you can work”.

Thus, while for most of the youth who had not been homeless going to school was not necessarily easy, most seemed to value what an education could bring them and somehow found a way to continue their education or training. Youth who had been in care but homeless were less likely to see education as a critical pathway to stability, although some were trying to overcome learning difficulties or struggling with adaptation to school after spending time on the streets or in jail.

An interesting theme that emerges from the youth who had not been homeless is the choice of eventual career. Six of the women in this group, who were in school or had wanted to return, planned to work with youth. They mentioned child and youth care worker, social work, and psychotherapy. ). A woman who had felt stigmatised in school because she was a foster child saw this experience at the core of her career choice “This is why I want to be a Child and Youth worker – to help foster children to make a difference and to make the success rate higher. Success is finding peace in yourself and being happy doing what you’re doing. Not settling for what other people think you should be doing.” Another, not planning a career in the social services did express a desire to change “things” and to help other youth in similar situations.

### **9.7 Youth in care: Relationships and social contacts**

Youth who had not been homeless were less likely to have contact with their biological parents (3 out of 10 compared to 2 out of 16 for those who had been homeless). When asked how they felt about this lack of contact, one youth who had never been homeless said “Good. I have no wish to be in contact with them” while a second person spoke of her biological mother’s death four years before and the lack of contact with her father by stating “I’m fine with it, I’ve dealt with it.” Another, also never homeless, stated “Nobody asked me that before. I’d say I don’t care, I don’t care anymore. I had tried to contact my mom but she won’t change. I need to keep my sanity – I do feel sad sometimes because I get lonely.”

As with the youth who had been homeless, for some, who were in touch with parents, relationships were difficult. Two women, never homeless, spoke of uneven relations – sometimes both parents in one case or the mother in the other, were warm, sometimes cold or even disparaging. A woman, who still lived with her foster parents, had cut contact with her mother five years before and never saw her, although they did communicate by phone. “My mother is not able to have healthy relationships”. Another woman, who also occasionally was in touch with her mother stated, “We don’t have a relationship, I think. She doesn’t call me, I don’t call her. We

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

don't have a relationship, I don't know if that means we don't get along. We don't talk." Two others spoke of arguments with parents, one had a mother who drank, "we argue...I don't expect any support from her", while another person he and his mother have "a few scraps, but it's alright". A woman spoke of a better relationship with her father; "He doesn't have that guardian role over me. He can't hit me now...I talk to him more..."

One difference that seems to emerge between the two groups of youth who had been in care is that none who "exited successfully" spoke with any longing for a relationship with their biological parents, unlike youth who had been homeless, some who resented being put into care and continued to reach out to parents.

Part of the ability to have fewer expectations of the relationship with parents may be related to age (6 out of 10 of youth who had not been homeless were over 21 compared to 5 out of 16 of those who had been homeless), but also because the relationships established in care continued to play important roles in the lives of many youth (9 out of 10 youth who had not been homeless, compared to 9 out of 16, of those who had been homeless). One woman, who had not been homeless, considered her social worker as her "role model". Others would see their workers every few months on an informal, but meaningful basis. "We have lunch and we are close...it's a more personal contact... I mean if there's stuff I need, she'll help me with that. Financially, she'll help with applications for funds. She is also trying to help me with getting a job right now." Another woman, never homeless, spoke of youth workers in one centre, as "not judgmental... they know what it's like to be in care, going to college and dropping out. It's like a family, a home..."

Furthermore, a few who had not been homeless were still in touch with foster families, including one who still lived with them, while others kept in touch with foster parents they'd lived with for a long period or with foster siblings. Only one person was no longer in touch with anyone from the care system, a youth who'd had four different foster homes over 8 years and had often run away and lived with family and friends.

Similar relationships with persons from the child welfare system were evident for some youth who had been homeless. . One woman continued to have a relationship with a social worker. "It's pretty cool ...we go for lunch, she gives me presents and stuff...she talks to me, calls me at shelter to see how I am." Another is in touch with foster mothers, one she e-mails and the other she considers her 'real' mom and "the main influential person in my life". A third youth who had developed a growing identification with his First Nations heritage spoke of the support from social workers. "My two social workers, who are non-native, were really good...They showed lots of love and care and are always happy and excited to hear from kids under their care.... They were supportive for me to be educated and to connect with First Nations culture." A few other youth continued to be in touch with persons from the child welfare system; some were still getting help from social workers, including "emotional support and taking me to food banks".

As with youth who had been homeless, difficulties with parents had carried over to relationships with siblings for youth who had never been homeless. "They live with my mother and I see them when I see her...which isn't often enough to know whether we get along or not." Another woman stated, "I don't talk to them anymore. They are young, confused...they don't want to believe their mother was abusive. I said something 'bad' about mom to my sister and we got into a conflict about it. She doesn't believe it... I haven't seen them for a year and a half." Others spoke of a "weird relationship...we disagree on lots of things" although they saw each other on a regular basis, whereas others spoke of a better relationship now that the siblings were older and could "better understand what happened." A few mentioned a relationship with a sibling as being important, for emotional or other support, but for a few, siblings moving to other cities or provinces meant the loss of regular contacts.

For other youth who had not been homeless, family members played a significant role. For example, one woman with a difficult relationship with her parents, considered her maternal

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

grandmother to be a significant person in her life. For another it was a maternal uncle who had also been in foster care. A woman who had been cut off from her family against her wishes had found a cousin on the Internet. She found it “Helpful to know I have family that don’t hate me the way my mom told me”

Most of the youth who had not been homeless had a circle of friends. For one, these friends were those “who stuck by me through everything”. Some had met their friends at school, college and university, while a few still had childhood friends. A woman who had been put into care at 16 after a difficult few years, found that she had to eliminate many from her social circle and had found new friends in high school and through her boyfriend.

As with a few youth who had been homeless, one person from the never homeless group seemed somewhat isolated. She had no childhood friends. “I feel different than kids not in care. I think because I was never in one place long enough and because of things that happened to me. I feel there is a wall; I don’t attempt to make friends because they’ll be judgmental.” However, she had been in regular contact with an ex-boyfriend who had been very supportive but, “I haven’t seen him for two months though because I’m starting therapy and a lot of anger is coming out ...I take it out on him. I get very bitter that he has parents. We fight, disagree ... somehow, some way my past comes up.”

### **9.8 Youth in care: Summary and discussion**

The interviews with youth suggest that there are distinct differences in terms of experience with the care system among youth who successfully exited care and those who had been homeless. The differences do not appear to be related to the age at which they had their first contact with the care system but with the number and type of placements. Youth who had been homeless had more placements, over half had more than six, and some many more. These youth were more likely to have been placed in a group home than with a foster family and although the reason for this is not clear, in some cases, it may be because of more difficult behaviours. Perhaps related to these factors is the greater likelihood of an earlier departure from care of youth who had been homeless. Overall, youth who had been homeless generally had a less positive experience with care compared to those youth who successfully exited care, although this was not universal.

Other than age, the experience of leaving care for both groups of youth would appear to be similar. For the most part the youth with successful exits who were interviewed as part of this study were as likely to find that their exit was unplanned as youth who had been homeless. While during interviews many of the youth spoke of some preparation such as learning to budget, this would not seem to constitute the preparation that they deemed necessary, and thus, may explain why many stated that the departure had not been planned.

There is some indication in the interviews that social networks and relationships are different for the two groups and that they may be pivotal in the success of the youth. Youth who had not been homeless seemed to be more able to separate from their parents, perhaps a factor that stems from the ability or opportunity to develop a strong relationship with someone from the child welfare system or an extended family member, while many youth who had been homeless seemed to reach out to parents..

Some of the differences between the three groups of youth interviewed that emerge are discussed in the next section.

## 10. Factors linked to homelessness

The preceding sections looked at the two categories of youth, those who had been homeless (in care and not) and those who had been in care (homeless and not). A number of commonalities and differences do emerge from the two groups. However, some of the most obvious differences are due to methodological/definitional biases – notably the current housing situation, where youth who have been homeless may be living in shelters, transitional housing and even on the street, whereas this is not the case for youth who have never been homeless. It is not clear whether other differences, particularly work and educational levels (where over half of the youth who have been homeless have not completed high school whereas this is the minority among those who have not been homeless) are due to the definition given at the outset of the project or are a manifestation of the relative stability of youth who have not been homeless.

This section will attempt to identify the factors that may play a role in the homelessness of some youth.

### 10.1 Family background

Youth who have been homeless share a background of unstable childhoods, moving from various households and family situations. For many, being in the child welfare system only increased this instability. In the interviews some of the backgrounds are revealed to include violence and abuse. The involvement of the child welfare system, according to the interviews, is not necessarily indicative of more damaging situations; some of the youth who had not been in care wondered why no one had intervened in their families.

While youth who had not been homeless came from equally chaotic situations, the intervention of the child welfare system was more likely to herald a more stable life. They had fewer placements and were more likely to have been placed in a foster home, rather than a group home. Furthermore, youth who had been homeless, whether in care or not were more likely to speak lacking a sense of “home” as they were growing up.

### 10.2 Running away/being thrown out

Youth who have not been homeless are less likely to have run away or been thrown out. This is not surprising since these are commonly viewed as ‘triggers’ to homelessness. However, youth who have never been homeless are more likely to have been younger when this occurred.

**Table: 6 Running away/being thrown out by group**

	<i>ran away</i>	<i>thrown out</i>	<i>both</i>	<i>neither</i>	<i>total</i>
<b>Has been homeless / Never in care</b>	1	3	4	2	10
<b>Has been homeless &amp; in care</b>	6	3	6	1	16
<b>Never homeless &amp; in care</b>	4	1	1	4	10

**Table: 7 Age first ran away/thrown out by group**

<b>Age first ran away/thrown out</b>	<b>Has been homeless / Never in care</b>	<b>Has been homeless &amp; in care</b>	<b>Never homeless &amp; in care</b>
10 years or under	1	3	2
11 to 13 years	4	4	3
14 to 16 years	1	6	



**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

over 17 years	2	1	
NA		1	1
Total	8	15	6

Running away and being thrown out are not necessarily the result of the youth’s behaviour but may well be a healthy response to an intolerable situation on the part of the youth or the inability to cope on the part of the parent (sometimes tied to alcoholism, drugs, and mental health problems). However for many youth this experience lead to spending time on the street; all the youth who had never been in care and almost half of the youth who had been in care had spent time on the street.

The behaviour of the youth upon running away or being thrown out illustrates the murky definition of homelessness that plagues all research into the topic. Some youth may have literally found themselves on the street, sleeping in parks or abandoned buildings. Some youth in response to the question about finding themselves without a place to sleep would answer “no” and follow this by stating that they had walked the streets all night. Youth also spoke of staying with drug dealers or staying with friends – behaviour that may not have put them into the literally or absolute homeless category, but very much in the grey zone of what it means to be homeless. Thus while some of the youth were never homeless according to the definition adopted at the outset of the pilot project, many youth, from all three sub-groups found themselves in very vulnerable situations at some point in their lives.

### 10.3 Age of independence

As presented in section 9.1, youth who had been in care and homeless were more likely to have left care before 18. In examining the interviews of all the youth, the age of “independence” or finding themselves on their own, perhaps with intermittent support from relatives or a parent, would appear to be a factor – whether the youth were in care or not. (It should be noted that some of the interviews with the youth reflected some of the confusion in their own lives; a lack of precision of where they lived, for how long, and the sequence of events.)

**Table: 8 Age first living on their own by group**

	Has been homeless / Never in care	Has been homeless & in care	Never homeless & in care
Under 16	2	3	
16 to 17	5	8	2
18 to 20	3	5	5
21 and over			3
Total	10	16	10

The information presented here is slightly different from the information in Section 9.1 which deals with when the youth left care, rather than when they started living on their own. In a number of cases, the youth may still have been “in care” but were in an independent living situation with ongoing support from their social worker. In most cases this would appear to be official support.

As the table illustrates, youth who had been homeless have a greater likelihood of finding themselves living on their own before the age of 18; 7 out of ten who had not been in care and almost the same proportion, 11 out of 16, who had been in care. The proportions are reversed for youth who have not been homeless; 8 out of 10 were over 18 when they started to live on their own, including three who were 21 or over. Two of the three youth who were over 21 when they began to live on their own, moved into stable housing situations while the third, still in school, lives with her foster parents.

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

As discussed in previous sections, the trajectories of homeless youth are complex and include living with friends, family and on the street. For some of the youth, whether they have been in care or not, the process of becoming homeless can take years and includes being thrown out, returning home, living with family and friends, and, at some point finding themselves on the street. It becomes clear the interviews that at some point the youth is no longer living in a permanent situation with an adult who is responsible for them. The youth may be living with a parent – but this may become a short-term arrangement, sometimes only lasting a few days and can be followed by a move to another parent's house that can again last just a few days. Thus, while there may be some parental or family presence, it is sporadic and not continuous. For a number of the youth interviewed, being on the street is accompanied by other behaviours; drugs that can lead to addictions, survival by selling drugs and squeegeeing, and involvement in the criminal justice system. (None of the youth spoke of involvement in the sex trade. The only reference to this that was made during the interviews was a young woman who spoke of being proud of surviving the streets and not turning to prostitution or stripping, which, according to her, many had done.)

**10.4 Education and work**

Youth who had not been homeless not only had higher educational levels and were more likely to be working, but they appeared to make an easier connection between education and work. Comments such as a youth who disliked her job that she'd had and saw school as a way out of this situation “ I think I need a degree, and the more education you have, the more choices you have.” Some of the youth who had been homeless stated that they were not interested in looking for work and that they felt they would have no trouble finding employment. However, money was often the response to “what is the worst/most challenging part of your life right now?” with responses such as, “being poor, broke, not having any money” and “trying to get money, especially when I'm really hungry, it feels bad asking for money.”

Some youth who had been homeless did see the lack of education as an impediment to working and spoke vaguely of plans to go back to school, while others appeared to be taking measures to rectify the situation.

**Table: 9 Last year of schooling completed by group**

	Did not complete High School	Completed High School	Some/ completed college or university	Technical training (HS not completed)	NA	Total
Has been homeless / Never in care	8	1	1			10
Has been homeless & in care	11	4	1			16
Never homeless & in care	1	2	5	1	1	10

**Table: 10 Currently working by group**

Are you working right now?	Yes	No	Total
Has been homeless / Never in care	2	8	10
Has been homeless & in care	9	6	16
Never homeless & in care	9	1	10

## 10.5 Financial independence

While some of the youth were coping with being on their own, for almost all money was of critical concern. Half of the youth who were “successful” spoke of money as the most challenging aspect of their lives. For example, one youth, who had wanted to go to university since she was ten, had been forced to drop her studies because she needed to work and save enough to go back to university. Others, also never homeless, who were in post-secondary education spoke of their large student loans and the burden that this represented in their lives. One youth spoke of both working and going to school as the most challenging/worst part of her life.

Youth who had been homeless also spoke of money. Those still in a fragile situation would speak of hunger or finding themselves homeless. “I’m 21 and staying at a shelter...it’s difficult to think I’m 21 and don’t have anything.” Another stated, “I’m living in a shelter, I’m homeless”. Some youth who had been homeless spoke of needing money to go back to school.

Related to the issue of money, is the question of affordable housing raised by all categories of youth. Youth not only would speak of this when asked about their current housing situation, but a number, when asked at the end of the interview what would help them at this moment stated that it was housing. “Housing, I desperately need housing”, “I need a place to live”, “a supervised apartment near my job”, “being in my own home and not wondering where I’m going to be”, “a decent income, a decent place to live”.

Finally, a few “successful” youth also spoke of the desire for therapy and to come to terms with their pasts. A 19 year old stated, “I feel my past still affects my life right now, I’d like to look at this in greater depth” and while a 25 year old said “I don’t have any money. I’m dealing with issues from my past, sexual abuse... what would help right now is if I was healed from my past wounds...and hurt.” In both cases, the women did not have the means to pay for this kind of support.

## 10.6 Social relations

**Table: 11 Social contacts by group**

In the last six months has been in touch with:	Parent(s)	Siblings (where applicable)	Other relatives	Childhood friends	Foster parent / social worker/etc	Others	Total
Has been homeless /Never in care	9	6	5	6	NA	6	10
Has been homeless & in care	14	11	12	8	9	9	16
Never homeless & in care	7	9	8	9	9	5	10

As noted above in Sections 8.7 and 9.7, while youth would indicate that they had been in touch with various persons in the last six months, the quality of the relations were very variable. Youth might be in touch with family members, but these were often superficial. Further examination of the relationships and the language used to describe them reveals that for some youth, the relationship with various persons was not just “Ok” or “good” or “fairly good” but rather the youth would speak of persons – usually relatives or in a few cases, persons from the care system as “very important” or the relationship as “excellent”. Youth who had never been homeless were more inclined to speak of such relationships but this was not exclusive to this group. Two youth, who had been in care and homeless each spoke of an aunt and a cousin who were very important to them, another spoke of a grandmother and a sibling. However, only one youth who had been homeless but never in care spoke of a relationship in such a way, saying that his uncle was “like a father” to him. The help that flowed from these “important” relationships was not necessarily material, rather the connection represented someone who the youth could speak to

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

and receive emotional support.” I see my half-sister very often, we get along really well, she’s the most important person to me, she listens to me...” Care workers were sometimes spoken of as being very important. The youth quoted above also spoke of her social worker as someone she saw occasionally, supported her with advice, and considers him to be “my role model”. Another youth spoke of her foster mother as “my real mom”. One youth spoke of three close friends, who were very important, two of which had been “through the system.”

Other patterns emerge, however. Some youth, primarily those who had been homeless, had very few contacts that appeared meaningful. One youth with few contacts spoke of survival by drinking and “not thinking about it”, the latter a strategy employed by a number of the youth interviewed.

Another pattern was that of youth who developed a social life based on friends met on the street. One youth spoke of feeling “really close to street kids”, others spoke of meeting friends by “just hanging out downtown”, or “all over the city”, “on the street”, “through the gang I used to belong to”.

A final pattern was that of youth who had been homeless who had found a new and perhaps healthier milieu. Part of this new milieu can stem from assertion of the youth’s identity. For example, one youth, with few contacts with family or childhood friends had developed a new social network from AA, an aboriginal church and an aboriginal agency. “They are people who are positive and they respect me.” When asked about what would help him the most right now he responded “Maintaining my faith in God and maintaining the friendships that provide support and strength.”

In another instance, the youth who had been in care and homeless seemed to be rebuilding her life by integrating her identity as a lesbian. Her “core” group of current friends was met at a gay event and “they reinforce my maturity with good conversation ...they don’t just talk about gossip but talk about what is happening in the world. I’m ready to live life and not just talk about everybody else.”

### **10.7 Other problems and behaviours**

A number of problems or issues emerged during some of the interviews and dealt with involvement in the criminal justice system, drug or alcohol use and mental health problems. No questions in the interview dealt directly with these issues, so the information is partial and based on self-reporting. In one case of mental health problems, the interviewer, not the respondent, noted the problems; the youth was “obsessed with numbers, was paranoid” and “believed that he had predicted the September 11, 2001 incident”. This was the only such observation, in the other cases the youth might mention a diagnosis of depression or schizophrenia. The use of drugs or mental health problems occurs in all three categories of youth, although mention of drugs is slightly higher among youth who had been homeless. Mention of involvement in the criminal justice system, however, only took place in interviews with youth who had been homeless.

### **10.8 The impact of age**

The preliminary overview of the youth in the three categories seemed to indicate a preponderance of youth over 21 in the “successful” group. Analysis by age, those over and under 21, was undertaken for youth who had been homeless to see whether age could be a factor in stabilisation. Youth who had never been homeless were excluded from this exercise since they would bias the results. The tables are presented in Appendix F and for the most part do not seem to indicate that age is a factor in stabilisation. (It should be noted that the sample size is very small and differences cannot be considered significant.) For example, the housing situation of youth over and 21 and under does not seem to be different and in fact a slightly lower proportion of youth 21 and under are in shelters and transitional housing. Plans to move also did not seem to differ between the two groups. While the educational attainment of youth over 21 appears to be

## ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

higher than that of youth 21 and under, the latter group has a greater tendency to be in school now, while the plan to go back to school seems fairly similar in both groups. Finally, youth who were over 21 are slightly more likely to be working.

### **10.9 Resilience**

An element that filtered through some of the interviews with the youth was that of resilience. There are youth who were in difficult situations including situations of abuse, instability, addictions and lack of support who somehow were able to overcome these difficulties and stabilise their lives. One example is a woman who was placed into care at four and a half with a family background of abuse including sexual abuse by an uncle. She was placed in a foster family with her sister where, "I suffered emotional and physical abuse." However, she stated that she had strong personal goals from the time she was ten, "My biggest goal was to successfully make it on my own, without the help of my foster parents. They would tell me that I'd never do well and I was determined to prove them wrong." This youth left care when she was seventeen and a half, received a student loan, a part-time job, and began university. While she has had to stop school to save money because she has a large student loan, she plans to go back to school and wants to become a social worker. The best thing about her life right now is, "I've remained independent. I could do it without them. I proved them wrong."

Equally impressive is a youth who was placed in care at 14 after running away from a violent stepfather. She was then placed in group homes, lived with friends, with her grandmother and spent more time in various residential settings. At 15 she was regularly consuming alcohol, marijuana, PCP and acid. A year later she dropped out of school and was now regularly taking heroin and cocaine. She asked to leave care and found herself living in squats, sharing apartments and on the street. Without going into great detail during the interview about her drug habit, she spoke of being almost 17 and deciding that she had hit rock bottom; at that point, on her own, she stopped all drugs. With some support from social workers and a student loan she has returned to school. She is in a stable housing situation, has friends are from AA, and is close to her grandmother and a brother. The best thing in her life right now is "to be free of drugs and to be out of [child welfare agency]."

Recent studies have identified three levels of characteristics of resilient youth; individual (e.g. ability to establish close ties, intelligence, a sense of control, self-esteem, empathy); family characteristics (e.g. the presence of an attentive parent, emotional ties that are supported by the family, parental mental health, ties with the extended family, positive expectations), and environmental characteristics (e.g. ties with significant adults, attendance at an institution that supports abilities and helps in giving meaning to ones life).<sup>116</sup> Not all elements are necessary however, and in the context of placement in to care, these components, especially the family ones, are not all likely to be present. Three studies dealing with resilience of youth in care were reviewed and the characteristics of these youth include intelligence, flexibility, positive self-esteem, feeling more effective and having control over their lives, a realistic perception of the future and a relationship with a significant person outside of the family.<sup>117</sup>

For the most part, the youth who had not been homeless, and some of the youth who had but appeared to be stabilising their lives, shared many of these characteristics. For example, while two youth who had never been homeless left care before the age of 18, both asked to leave, thereby exercising control over their situation. Other youth, when asked about the best things in their lives right now, spoke of "being responsible for myself", or "the fact that I'm healthy, still young and have people around me that are encouraging and that I'm a strong person". One youth who had been homeless and in care, was working in a stable job and had been sharing an apartment when asked what was the best part in her life right now answered, "me - I'm happy and proud of myself".

---

<sup>116</sup> Drapeau, Beaudoin, Marcotte (2000) op.cit.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid*

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

This appears different from the youth who may have found themselves thrown out by their parents or fleeing difficult family or care situations, without any control over these events and for some, still yearning to establish close ties with their parents or looking to understand why the events occurred. For example, a youth who became involved with the care system when he was about 13 found himself living in group homes, on his own, sharing and on the street for the last few years. When asked about what was the hardest part in his life right now he stated, “being on the streets and finding a job... I wish could be back with my family... to live with my mom.” Another youth, now almost eighteen and abandoned by his mother at 16 when she moved in with her boyfriend, when asked about the most challenging aspect of his life right now said, “being thrown out by my mother”.

Having been homeless is not necessarily an insurmountable obstacle to eventual “success” or stabilisation. Some youth were in relatively stable housing situations, in school or in stable employment or, in some cases, going into transitional housing programs that offered support. Other than the youth quoted at the beginning of this section, who overcame a drug habit, there are other youth who may not have completely stabilised but appear to have elements that are positive and promising. For example, one youth had recently been on the street, had a drug habit, panhandled and robbed was about to move into a youth co-op from a shelter at the time of the interview. She was back at school, an alternative school where she was happy, and while still in touch with her mother and younger sisters, her friends include those she had met at school and an important relationship was with the social worker she had while still in care. When asked what the best thing in her life was, she said “I’m moving out to a good place and being on my own, that’s the best thing.”

This would suggest that while “resilience” is perhaps innate for some persons, there may be supports that can be given that allow resilience to be developed. While beyond the mandate of the present study, it is clear that the definition of “successful”, based to a large extent on having been homeless, served the initial purposes of the study but may not be sufficient to fully understand the dynamics of homelessness. The results raise important questions about dealing with youth who have been homeless and the kind of support they need to stabilise their lives. The interviews conducted give intriguing hints at what these elements might be.

In many if not most instances of youth who have been “successful” or appear to be in the process of stabilising their lives, there is an important tie to someone – often a person from the care system or a relative. For example, youth who in the discussion of social ties used words such as “very important”, “excellent” or spoke of “close” ties with family members or care workers, would often also be in school and stable in work (i.e. more than six months).

## **11. Conclusion**

The scant literature addressing the linkage between youth homelessness and out of home care by the child welfare system suggests that several factors may play a role, from initial traumas in the family home, to experiences while in care, and the process of transition out of care. Related literature suggests that ‘resilience’ can explain why some individuals can eventually surmount seemingly impossible obstacles, such as severe neglect or maltreatment experienced as a child.

For the 36 youth interviewed in this study some of these linkages appear to be borne out. The study shows, as suggested by the literature, that the youth with more positive experiences of care were less likely to become homeless. Positive experiences with care include being placed in foster homes as opposed to group homes, as well as having fewer or more stable placements. A few interviews also reveal some of the challenges faced by the care system in dealing with youth with difficult behaviours – behaviours that may lead to involvement with the criminal justice system, drugs, and alcohol. The problem does not necessarily remain with the child welfare system alone, as the interviews illustrate, other organisations are drawn in, including shelters and services for homeless youth.

Contrary to the published literature and keeping in mind the limits of self-reporting, the evidence gathered from the youth who participated in this study suggests that, in their view, the actual process of preparation for leaving care had little bearing on the success of the transition. Youth in this study who successfully exited care stated that either no preparation was offered or in their view, it did not have a significant impact. This does not suggest that the preparation had no impact, simply that it was not perceived as making the transition easier. What seems to play a role is the age at which the youth left care. The younger they were, the less likely they were to avoid homelessness, in part because this move out of care often appeared to be a precursor to more family chaos. Similarly, and as highlighted in the literature, a significant personal relationship appears to be critical, be it a person from the care system or a relative. It is interesting to note that a biological parent was not identified as this “important” person in any of the interviews.

It is clear from the study that while some youth have stabilised their lives; independence at 18 or even 21 is premature. The youth interviewed for this study who left care at an earlier age were less successful in avoiding homelessness than those who left later. That does not suggest that youth, including those who are “successful”, don’t struggle. They struggle with finances, some having to delay studies because they don’t have the means or others strive to combine school and work. Affordable housing is clearly an element of this struggle. Furthermore, it would appear that youth with difficult backgrounds may need to begin to come to terms with their pasts at some point in their lives, perhaps when they are older and capable of dealing with this. However, the means to undertake this work with psychological support, long after they have become “emancipated” does not seem to be available.

On a broader level, the interviews reveal that for many homeless youth, housing alone would not be sufficient to resolve their homelessness. The “homelessness” that these youth experience often goes beyond the lack of shelter and includes the lack of employment and skills, low educational achievement and little social support, approximating the experience of social exclusion. While stabilising the housing situation would be an important first step, and one that was fervently desired by many, the interviews reveal that other supports would be essential to make the move out of homelessness sustainable. Other kinds of support are needed for the youth, for example, many understood that their lack of education was an impediment to finding stable employment, many knew that they wanted something better in their lives, but often plans were vague or unrealistic, in that the process to realise these goals were not clear. The standard educational system clearly is a problem for many youth who have been on the street. Some positive tendencies emerged with youth who were in alternative school settings, including a Native Education program.

## **12. Further research**

Qualitative research is used to gather contextual knowledge and may be used in an exploratory fashion to shed light on a specific topic or issue. It focuses on a participant's perceptions and generally involves collecting detailed information from a small group of individuals. The results of qualitative research cannot be used to draw conclusions about the entire population of homeless youth with child welfare histories. Thus, the present study yields some important insights into the unique backgrounds, experiences and thoughts of a group of homeless and never homeless youth, but further quantitative research would be necessary to generalise these findings beyond this small group of individuals. Furthermore, the complex relationship between the child welfare system and homelessness would be well served by more rigorous and longitudinal studies of child welfare outcomes generally in Canada.

The interviews suggest that some youth had behaviours that led to involvement with the criminal justice system, addictions and mental health problems. It is not clear whether some youth who wound up in group homes or residential facilities did so because the problems they had were beyond the capacity of a foster family. Furthermore, some of these youth appeared to be the more "hardened" homeless, more involved in street culture and living on the margins of society (e.g. squeegeeing). While the research seems to support other studies that have found that placement in foster families is preferable to residential facilities, the best response to youth who have complex problems is not apparent from this research and worthy of more study. These youth also appear to have a tendency to leave care earlier – raising questions about the kind of support that can be offered for youth who want their independence before they are fully prepared.

One of the key elements of this study is that it dealt with youth who came from chaotic backgrounds, whether child welfare intervened or not. The youth in this study illustrate to some extent how homelessness can be a profound experience – some youth stated that they had never had a sense of "home". What is not clear however, is how different from other youth of the same age are their current situations. For example, the instability of the housing situation of some youth, such as short periods of time in an apartment and constantly moving around, may be indicative of larger problems but may also be the norm for youth of that age (e.g. students). A study such as that undertaken in London by Centrepoin<sup>118</sup>, which compared family backgrounds of youth living in homeless situations and other youth, would permit a better understanding of the factors that come into play in becoming homeless and perhaps, a better definition of the components of homelessness itself. Furthermore, this kind of comparison would allow a better understanding of the kind of support that youth need. Perhaps this approach would also yield a deeper understanding of what "independence" and "adulthood" really mean, especially in a context where not only the definition of youth is being stretched to the age of 29 or even 35 but that parents often continue support long after a youth moves out of the parental home the first time<sup>119</sup>.

While beyond the mandate of the present study, it is clear that the definition of "successful", based to a large extent on not having been homeless, served the initial purposes of the study but may not be sufficient to fully understand the dynamics of homelessness. Some youth interviewed who have been homeless appear to be moving onto "successful" and independent lives. An Australian report by Maunders et al.<sup>120</sup> defines independence as "having some sense of direction in life; having a good personal support network of family and/or friends; and having stable, continuing accommodation". Revisiting the results in terms of what constitutes "success" raises important questions about dealing with youth who have been homeless and the kind of support they need to stabilise their lives. Studies on resilience also suggest the kind of support for youth

---

<sup>118</sup> Safe in the City (1999) op.cit.

<sup>119</sup> According to the 2001 Census, 41% of youth between 20 and 29 still lived with their parents. Statistics Canada The Daily, October 22, (2002)

<sup>120</sup> Maunders et al. (1999) *Young people leaving care and protection*, National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, Australia



### ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

in care. The interviews conducted give intriguing hints at what these elements might be and would appear to include at least one significant relationship. More knowledge of successful outcomes in homelessness intervention with youth, including longitudinal studies, would be useful for researchers and more importantly, practitioners and policy makers.

The study also presents clues to what may help in the prevention of homelessness – elements such as close ties to a family member or someone from care. As well, a few youth who had been homeless appeared to find new anchors, for example an alternative school that seemed to be flexible and accommodating to a youth who had spent time on the street and Native Education that allowed another youth to assert his aboriginal background and grow from that identity. Better understanding of what works and does not work would be invaluable for policy makers and practitioners.

One of the objectives of this pilot research was to determine if the study should be replicated on a larger scale. By definition a qualitative study refers to in depth interviews and analysis of a small number of individuals. Enlarging the sample size would not necessarily strengthen the results and therefore is not recommended. Although youth from a variety of different ethnicities, genders and ages were included in this research, it was not possible to say anything about the experiences or outcomes of specific sub-groups. Additional research comparing the experiences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, or males and females would be instructive. Aboriginal youth or young women, might be instructive.

However, there is a need for more quantitative research that would reveal the extent and magnitude of the link between experiences in care and homelessness. This refers to a definitive, probability study of how many homeless youth or adults (for example, using shelters on a specific night) either A) had contact with the child welfare system or B) were in care for a time. This might be further elaborated by duration in care or by permanent versus temporary wardship status. Stakeholders who took part in the regional consultations for this project identified the need for this type of research.

There are a couple of potential policy implications stemming from this research that would benefit from some additional research. First, the comments and perceptions of the youth in this study suggest that programs and initiatives to prepare youth for the actual transition out of care are less important than other factors such as relationships, sources of income, access to resources and affordable housing. On the other hand, while the youth may not value the preparation they receive for leaving care, it may nevertheless be an important factor for a successful transition. As such, it would be worthwhile to explore this further by means of an evaluation of this type of program or initiative.

Since the age of leaving care appears to be a factor in explaining the link to homelessness, according to both the interviews with youth and key informants, this suggests that the age for exit from the care system should be higher in certain circumstances. The published literature reviewed for this project does not address this issue specifically. Outcomes for two groups of youth, age 16-18, and age 18 and over, who left care would be highly instructive in confirming if this is indeed the case. The role of transition programs could also be explored in the context of age – i.e. is preparation for independence more successful with the younger or older age group? There is perhaps also need to examine the success of more gradual programs of independence for youth who have been in care – programs that allow them to “test the waters” of independence with a safety net that allows them to go back and try again rather than expecting that a youth of 18 or 21 will succeed right away.

## **13. Appendix A Annotated bibliography**

### **Annotated bibliography on the relationship between child welfare/foster care and homelessness**

**January 6, 2002**

**Luba Serge, Margaret Eberle and Deborah Kraus**

## **Table of contents**

1. Care as a risk factor for homelessness.....	59
2. Canadian homeless studies showing prevalence of previous care .....	70
3. Outcomes of Care .....	73
4. Other related studies.....	80
5. Pertinent studies not obtained.....	82

## **1. Care as a risk factor for homelessness**

### **CANADA**

**Raychaba, Brian. 1989. Canadian Youth in Care: Leaving Care to be on Our Own With No Direction From Home. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 11:61-79.**

This article builds on information from the author's previous study and compares the characteristics of youth in care with those of people who are homeless. The similarities between the two groups highlight the vulnerability of young people as they leave the care of the child welfare system. The author concludes that the scenario for young people leaving care sets the stage for them to become homeless. "At core is an issue of vulnerability and susceptibility". The author states that the special needs of youth from care must be recognized and addressed to lessen the probability of their becoming homeless.

**Poirier, Mario et al. 1999 *Relations et représentations interpersonnelles de jeunes adultes itinérants : au-delà de la rupture, la contrainte des liens* Montréal: GRIJA**

A study based on in-depth interviews of 60 homeless youths found that 28 percent had been placed in care (because of a death, youth protection or placements initiated by parents). For 75 percent of these youths the experience was negative or even catastrophic; 41 percent report mistreatment including severe punishment, physical abuse, intimidation and rape. Over half underlined the instability of these stays and multiple placements, while 40 percent runaway from intolerable situations further adding to their instability. Even when the substitute care was potentially positive, youths often had difficulty taking advantage of the situation because they could not accept the idea of replacing their parents or the youth had not sufficiently "digested" what was seen as the initial rejection upon placement in care. Some of the youth recognised their own aggression and inability to integrate into a foster home. The authors conclude that "far from being a healing experience, stays with foster families often exacerbated initial traumas (35 percent), contributed to instability (53 percent) and intensified mistrust (64 percent).

**Centre de recherche sur les services communautaires, Université Laval, *La fugue chez les jeunes en difficulté*, Recherches en Bref, No. 6, juin 1997 (available at : <http://www.ulaval.ca/crsc/montagecentre.doc.html>)**

Review of studies and data on runaways in Canada. According to 1996 data from the Solicitor General, about 50,000 children are reported as runaways in Canada each year. 90 percent come home within 60 days. According to *Operation Go Home* 71 percent run away from home and 29 percent from group homes, treatment centres or residential care. Of these youths, 15 percent have runaway more than twice and 29 percent runaway repeatedly. According to *Operation Go Home* suicidal thoughts or attempts are prevalent among 69 percent of runaways. Other studies indicate drug consumption to be two to three times higher with runaways and drug usage increases with frequency of running away. *Operation Go Home* estimates that 69 percent of runaways use drugs and 20 percent exchange sexual favours for shelter. According to 1996 data 93 percent have run away from home after an argument, 66 percent flee a situation of abuse, 33 percent were emotionally abused by parents, 14 percent were physically abused by the father and 12 percent were physically abused by the mother or other family members. Other studies have found that runaways have persistent problems at home and school as well as an inability to communicate effectively. Learning and behavioural problems at school are prevalent with a scholastic history marked by being held back and special education classes. "Marginal at school as at home, youth who run away have developed a sense that they belong nowhere."<sup>121</sup>

<sup>121</sup> "Marginaux à l'école comme à la maison, les adolescents qui fuguent ont acquis le sentiment qu'ils n'ont de place nulle part..."

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

**Woodall, Andrew summary and translation of a report by Clarie Wallot 1992 Homeless Youth, A research report conducted under the auspices of the McGill Consortium for Human Rights Advocacy Training, Montreal**

This study is based on interviews with representatives of community organisations working with homeless youth, youth, representatives of the health and social services sector and researchers. The section on institutional causes of homelessness amongst youth finds that the system of youth protection is bureaucratic and difficulties include “incompatible placement”, constantly changing placements, and the system often ends up further destroying the fragile bonds between the parent and the child. Furthermore the system is not found to teach self-respect or build up self-esteem and life skills training is lacking. Schooling in reception centres also is criticised – often the certificates received are not accepted “on the outside”.

## **U.S.**

**Bassuk, Ellen L. and John C. Buckner. 1997. Homelessness in Female-Headed Families: Childhood and Adult Risk and Protective Factors. *American Journal of Public Health*. 87(2) 241-249.**

This study identifies individual-level risk factors that increase the likelihood of a female-headed family becoming homeless. Foster care placement and drug use by the respondent’s primary female caretaker are the most salient childhood predictors of subsequent family homelessness in adulthood. The study suggests that foster care may interfere with the formation of secure attachments and may not provide some children with the skills and supports necessary to establish themselves as self-sufficient adults. Independent risk factors in adulthood included being part of racial minority, recent move to the area, recent eviction, interpersonal conflict, frequent alcohol or heroin use, and recent hospitalisation for a mental health problem.

Method: Conducted interviews with 220 homeless mothers enrolled in family shelters in Worcester, Massachusetts, and a comparison group of 216 low-income housed mothers receiving welfare. The women completed an interview covering socio-economic, social support, victimization, mental health, substance use, and health issues.

**Koegel, Paul, Elan Melamid, and M. Audrey Burnam. 1995. Childhood Risk Factors for Homelessness Among Homeless Adults. *American Journal of Public Health*. 85(12): 1642-1649.**

The purpose of this study was to identify negative childhood and family background experiences that may increase the risk for adult homelessness. Almost half the respondents reported living apart from their parents during childhood, and of these, half (25 percent of the sample as a whole) experienced placement in either foster care, institutional settings, or both. When compared with data from the general population, it was found that homeless people in general, disproportionately experienced out-of-home placement as children. Respondents reported out-of-home placements at rates 4.8 to 7.2 times that of the general population.

The study also found that the majority of respondents reported growing up in poverty. Over 50 percent reported a female as their primary source of financial support and almost 60 percent reported receiving welfare, lacking food or utilities, or having an unemployed caretaker. Forty percent reported some form of housing problem or disruption during childhood, including 13 percent who lived in public or subsidized housing, 17 percent who lived in doubled-up situations, 5 percent who had been evicted, 3 percent who experienced homelessness with their families, and 17 percent who reported homeless/runaway experiences during childhood. Younger respondents were much more likely to have experienced housing problems as children than older respondents. Almost one third of respondents reported an adult substance abuser in their childhood home, while 9 percent reported incarceration of an adult caretaker and 5 percent

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

reported sexual assault taking place in the household. Sexual or physical assault during childhood was also prevalent. Ninety percent of respondents experienced one or more major problem during childhood, including foster care or institutional placement, poverty, housing problems, family trouble, or physical or sexual abuse. Sixty-four percent of respondents reported problems in two or more of these areas, and more than 40 percent reported problems in three or more areas. The authors conclude that vulnerability to homelessness is the product of potential risk factors of many kinds, including demographic, economic, familial, personal and situational.

Method: Frequencies of negative childhood experiences were examined among a probability sample of 1,563 homeless adults in Los Angeles County. Differences in risk for such experiences were calculated by sex, age, and race/ethnicity. Where possible, rates of negative childhood experiences among the homeless were compared with the general population.

**Mallon, Gerald P. 1999 *Let's get this straight : a gay- and lesbian-affirming approach to child welfare* New York : Columbia University Press**

The author proposes that while most child welfare systems have struggled to understand and adapt to racial, ethnic, religious, physical and cultural diversity, "most have been loath to add sexual orientation to that list". Lesbian and gay youth are found to be disproportionately over represented in the young runaway and homeless population "because a substantial proportion of these youths have fled the child welfare system when they determined that it was a hostile environment that constituted a poor fit". The Streetwork Project in New York's Time Square area found that 42 percent of youth surveyed reported that they were lesbian, gay or bisexual and 57 percent reported that they had been in a foster home or group home. Homelessness is a gradual process for many youth. "Those who flee to the streets or who begin to flirt with life on the streets are those who have decided not to "take it" anymore. Lesbian and gay youths are highly represented in this population." For many the street is seen as being safer than home or care settings, and in many cases when the youth was fleeing neglect or abuse, this was a healthy response. A study undertaken by Mallon in 1998 in which 54 youth were interviewed found that half had lived on the streets at one time or other "as an alternative to living in a hostile child welfare environment". Risk factors related to life on the street include survival sex, substance abuse, health and mental health issues and lack of educational and life skills.

**Mangine, Steven J, David Royse, Vernon R. Wiehe, and Michael T. Nietzel. 1990. *Homelessness Among Adults Raised as Foster Children: A Survey of Drop-In Center Users. Psychological Reports. 67: 739-745.***

A study of 74 homeless adults in Lexington, Kentucky during the winter and spring of 1988 found that 16 percent of the sample had been in foster care at some time before age 18. Among the subjects who had been in foster care, the average age when entering foster care was 9.6 years, and these subjects spent an average of 4.3 years in foster care. The homeless individuals with a history of foster care were compared with those without such a history on a number of issues. Subjects with a history of foster care were significantly younger than those without such a history. The mean age of subjects who had been in foster care was 31 years, compared to a mean of 37 years for subjects who had not been in foster care. There were no differences in race, marital status or years of education.

The study also found that former children of foster care were represented four times more frequently among the homeless population than in the general population. The authors concluded that children in foster care are at risk of serious dysfunction as adults.

Method: Interviews were conducted with 74 homeless adults in Lexington Kentucky. The individuals were asked about foster care as part of a survey of the demographic, social and mental health characteristics of the homeless population in Lexington.

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

**McDonald, Thomas P. Reva I. Allen, Alex Westerfelt and Irving Piliavin. 1996. *Assessing the Long-Term Effects of Foster Care: A Research Synthesis*. Washington DC: Child Welfare League of America Press.**

In addition to providing a review of the impact of out-of-home care on the children served the authors summarize several studies of homeless persons that found that a disproportionate number of them spent some time in out-of-home care during their childhoods.

- Intake assessments for 8,051 men and women who were applying for emergency shelter in New York City in 1982 and 1983 found that 7 percent of the women and 3 percent of the men primarily grew up in out-of-home care or institutions. Many more reported that they had been in a family foster home or institution for some part of their childhood. (Crystal 1984).
- A 1985 study of 223 male, first time users of New York City shelters and a representative sample of 695 men already residing in those shelters found that 23 percent of the first time shelter users had been placed in family foster care, group homes, and/or other special residences before the age of 17. In the broader sample of shelter residents the authors found that 17 percent had been placed in similar out-of-home care settings before the age of 17 (Susser et al, 1987).
- A two-wave longitudinal study of homeless adults in Minneapolis beginning in November 1985 and ending in May 1986 that involved interviews with 338 homeless adults in a cross-sectional sample and 113 homeless adults who were designated as recent arrivals to homelessness found that 39 percent of the cross-section had been placed in a family foster home, group home, or institution at some point before they turned 18. Thirty-five percent of the recent-arrivals sample had experienced at least one of those types of placements (Soisin et al., 1990).
- A comparative study of 181 homeless persons and 355 poor domiciled persons in Chicago who participated in free-meal programs in 1986 found that 15 percent of adults in their sample who were ever homeless and 7 percent of adults who had never been homeless had experienced out-of-home care prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (Soisin et al., 1988).
- Data from 74 homeless persons in Lexington, Kentucky in 1988 found that 16 percent had been in foster care (a ward of the state) as a child <sup>122</sup>et al..
- A study of 512 homeless psychiatric patients and 271 never homeless psychiatric patients in New York, in 1991 found the rate of childhood placement to be substantially higher for the homeless group (15 percent of the homeless group had experienced family foster care and 10 percent had experienced group home placement. Among the never-homeless sample, 2 percent had experienced family foster care and 1 percent had experienced group home placement. This study also found that 79 percent of patients in the state psychiatric hospital who had been in family foster care experienced homelessness as an adult compared to 25 percent of those who had not been in foster care (Susser et al., 1991).

All of the studies of homeless persons cited in the book reveal significantly high rates of childhood out-of-home placement for homeless adults ranging up to 39 percent. Several reasons are offered to explain the process by which childhood placement and adult homelessness are linked:

- Young people in foster homes and institutions have severe emotional or behavioural problems, which, if not abated by these experiences, make them vulnerable to various adult problems and crises, including long-term homelessness.
- Out-of-home care may itself be debilitating, leaving its recipients relatively less able to manage independently and conventionally as adults
- Young people who receive out-of-home care may have weak family ties, generated in part by the conditions necessitating care and augmented perhaps by the experience of foster care. As adults these individuals would be likely to lack family support networks that could provide them major resources at times of economic crises. In these circumstances, these individuals would be vulnerable to homelessness.

---

<sup>122</sup> Mangine, Royse, Wiehe, and Nietzel (1990) op.cit.

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

The level of education attainment of persons who had been in care was found to be below the average of other citizens of comparable age in their state or country. Between 15 percent and 56 percent of the subjects formerly in care had not completed high school. While the majority of the studies indicated that most former foster children became self-supporting adults, one of the more recent and larger studies, found that slightly less than half of older foster youths were employed at the time of a follow-up interview. It also seems that for many, employment is steady but precarious. Unemployment rate estimates ranged from 25 - 41 percent for males and around 20 percent for females. One study estimated that 28 percent of those formerly in care never held a job.

Method: The authors reviewed out-of-home care research conducted or published since 1960 to 1992 including descriptive studies, trends studies, and evaluative studies. Only a limited number of studies have looked at the long-term functioning of children formerly in out-of-home care. One reason may be that out-of-home care was once viewed as an outcome in itself because it was seen as an intervention that served to rescue a child from an abusive or neglectful home and assure his or her continuing safety. Out-of-home care was seen as a solution, not a problem. The idea that out-of-home care is a process or step toward permanent placement or the final outcome - a well-functioning adult, is a relatively new one. The authors found 29 studies that form the core material for the book, of which 18 were done in the United States, 5 in England, 3 in Scotland, and one each in Australia, France, and Canada. An additional six studies were reviewed regarding the relationship between homelessness and out-of-home care.

**Roman, Nan P. and Phyllis B. Wolfe. 1997. The Relationship Between Foster care and Homelessness. *Public Welfare*. 55(1) 4-9. and**

**Roman, Nan P. and Phyllis B. Wolfe. 1995. The Web of Failure: *The Relationship Between Foster Care and Homelessness*. National Alliance to End Homelessness. Available at: <http://www.endhomelessness.org/pub/fostercare/webrept.htm>**

This research project was initiated in 1994 to examine the connection between foster care and homelessness and to determine if there was an over-representation of people with a foster care history in the homeless population. Some of the principle findings include:

- There is an over-representation of people with a foster care history in the homeless population. Several studies are quoted, including one that found that of 331 homeless adults in Minnesota, 38.6 percent reported childhood placement in foster care compared to 2 percent of the general population (Piliavin et al., 1990), another that found that of 223 men entering the New York City shelter system for the first time, 23 percent reported being placed in foster care, group homes or other special residences (Susser et al., 1987), and another study of 1,228 New York City families, 10 percent of heads of households had been placed in foster care homes as children (Knickman and Weitzman, 1989). Information from 21 organizations concerning 1,134 people participating in their programs during two, one-week periods during 1994 found that of those homeless individuals for whom data was obtained, 36.2 percent had a foster care history.
- Homeless people with a foster care history are more likely than other people to have their own children in foster care.
- Very frequently, people who are homeless had multiple placements as children: some were in foster care, but others were "unofficial" placements in the homes of family or friends.
- People with a foster care history tend to become homeless at an earlier age than those who do not have a foster care history.
- Childhood placement in foster care can correlate with a substantial increase in the length of a person's homeless experience.

Some of the reasons given for the homelessness/foster care connection are that:



### ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

- The foster care system often fails to help children with the problems that result from circumstances that caused them to be removed from their homes (e.g. physical or sexual abuse, parents with alcohol or substance abuse, family dissolution). Foster care may also fail to help children deal with problems that arise from foster care placements in abusive homes or facilities.
- Alcohol and other substance abuse illnesses and mental illness can play a significant role in the relationship between foster care and homelessness.
- Youth who come out of foster care often lack the independent living skills that would allow them to establish a household.
- People who have experienced foster care may become better accustomed to institutional living than to living on their own.
- Youth who come out of foster care and become homeless tend to lack the support networks that other people can rely on in times of crisis.
- Children who are moved from home to home over an extended period of time (foster care and/or unofficial placements) learn to deal with problems by leaving them behind.

The authors conclude that foster care has an impact on personal risk factors that may eventually result in homelessness. "Foster care seems usually to be one element in a complex web of familial, social and institutional failures that can affect some children". All indications are that this web of failures occurs more often for poor children. The result is that by the time children become adults, they are unable to establish independent households or to maintain residential stability, and have fewer economic and social supports to fall back on."

The report recommends supporting and strengthening families to keep children out of the foster care system. If children do enter the foster care system, children should be moved into permanent living situations as soon as possible. It is also recommended that the foster care system direct more effort to help children gain the skills and other resources necessary to move to successful independence, particularly if the children have experienced multiple placements; address services and housing needs of homeless parents with a foster care history to promote their stability so that their own children are not placed in foster care; and take extraordinary steps to avoid placing children in foster care solely because of their parents' homelessness.

Method: The authors used a four-part methodology. It consisted of reviewing existing studies and reports that addressed the relationship between homeless and foster care. They collected data on 1,134 individuals from 21 organizations that serve homeless people in every region of the country. Each organization provided client data for one week in winter and one week in summer on the total number of homeless people served, the number who had a foster care history, and the number of individuals who had children in foster care. The authors also worked with 40 homeless service and housing providers to distribute survey questionnaires to their clients and tenants to find out about the individual's foster care history, their children's foster care history, and demographic information. The authors received 1,209 completed questionnaires. Finally, 10 case studies were conducted to learn more about the process by which someone becomes homeless, the length of time between leaving foster care and homelessness, any relationship between mental illness, alcohol and other substance abuse issues and foster care placement and homelessness, and other issues.

## **EUROPE**

### **FEANTSA National Reports**

An overview of the link between the child welfare system and homelessness is presented by the series of country studies undertaken by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA). These reports present an analysis of various themes and often make available the results of research that would otherwise be inaccessible because of language barriers. The 1996 reports dealt with youth homelessness.

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

**Tosi, Antonio 1997 *Marginalisation Processes and Youth Homelessness in Italy*, National Report 1996: Italy FEANTSA, Brussels**

Italy: No mention of the child welfare system although research into the causes of the state of “no abode” include experiences of institutionalisation. Research into the life histories of homeless persons include family related problems as causal factors (e.g. the “lack of sufficient communication within the family” (30.9 percent of cases), “traumatic breakdown of the household” (20.5 percent of cases); “expulsion from the family for deviant behaviour” (21.7 percent); “abandoned by family as children” (9.6 percent))

**Børner, Tobias. 1997 *Youth Homelessness in Denmark*, National Report 1996: Denmark, FEANTSA, Brussels**

Denmark Categories of homeless youth presented at a conference by those working with this group include those “who have one or more failed forced accommodations in their past. They have run away or been thrown out from institutions into which they did not fit – institutions that did not cover their needs.” In a study of 36 youths, 30 had an “institutional background”. It should be noted that the numbers of homeless youth appears to be relatively low (e.g. about 300-350 “socially excluded” youth in Copenhagen)

**De Feijter, Henk and Hans Blok 1997 *Youth Homelessness in the Netherlands: Nature, Policy, Good Practices*, National Report 1996: Netherlands FEANTSA, Brussels**

Netherlands Research into the number of homeless youth results in variations – from 4,300 to 7,000 persons, while 30,000 run away from their homes or institutions annually. Of the youth treated in institutions for “psycho-social” problems, about 25 percent run away one or more times; compared to 2 percent of youth who run away from parental homes, “therefore we can establish that, relatively seen, the problem of running away is more associated with institutions than with families.”

Research indicates that over 50 percent of homeless youth have had “some kind of contact” with the Child Welfare Office, which can include children living at home but under supervision of the Office. Furthermore, studies also indicate that 50 percent of homeless youth had been in institutions, of these 69 percent had been in touch with the Child Welfare Office. “All in all, the situation of homeless youth who experienced both a history of institutions and came into contact with the Child Welfare office, seems to be the most problematic.” The institutions encompass a wide range of sectors including education, special education, youth assistance, mental health, and judicial youth protection.

Vulnerable youth include those who “were sent from one institution to the other, and left care institutions prematurely without solving their problems.” The multiplicity of institutions, each with their own policies, funding sources, working methods etc. leads to a lack of co-ordination and their specialisation leads to difficulty in dealing with “multi-problem-youth”, although a more integrated approach is being developed.

**Busch-Geertsema, Volker 1997 *Youth Homelessness in Germany* National Report 1996: Germany FEANTSA, Brussels**

Germany The number of homeless children (i.e. under 14 according to law) and juveniles (14 to 18) is estimated to be between 5,000-7,000. The link with institutional care revolves primarily around housing shortages and the difficulty in finding flats. “The shortage of housing and the economic and social access barriers to the housing market are the main reasons why juveniles and young adults can not leave the homes or hostels, even though they fulfil the necessary requirements.” Failure in support is also identified as a problem, particularly in the case of

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

“difficult” children and juveniles to be referred from one institution (e.g.. youth welfare services and psychiatric clinics) to the next.

**Hannikainen, Katri and Sirkka-Liisa Kärkkäinen. 1997 *Young people and the risks of exclusion and homelessness* National Report 1996: Finland FEANTSA, Brussels**

Finland There are relatively few street children – a few dozen in Helsinki. Youth in the child welfare system are recognised as being vulnerable. Follow-up care for child welfare clients is obligatory until the age of 21 after which the municipal social welfare board is to provide housing. Help in the transition to independence is typically provided by a support person or family. Flats are next door to each other or at least on the same stairway. Some municipalities have units that are annexed to each other, but with separate entrances as well as interior access. The support includes help in shopping for food, banking, paying the rent and cleaning as well as career counselling, support in studying or employment. Supported housing can be available for youth of 16 to 21 and the support is given for 18 months to 2 years but has lasted 4-5 years. Support families are not professionals but receive support from social workers and are paid a monthly fee. This kind of support is not offered to those using drugs or involved in crime. “Unless the young person is him/herself motivated to try, or to accept the rules of supported housing, he/she is not usually placed in a support home.” Each support families serve for about 2-5 years.

**Aldridge, Robert. 1996 *Youth Homelessness* National Report 1996: UK FEANTSA, Brussels**

UK The concept of running away from home is mainly associated in the UK with young people under 16 and from local authority social work care. One study found that of 532 young persons who had runaway, 34 percent had run away from care – given that only 1 percent of young people live in care, “the numbers running away from care point to a serious problem.” Having spent part of one’s childhood in the care of a local authority seems to put young people at high risk of homelessness. For example a 1994 survey of Scottish emergency hostels for young homeless persons found that 40 percent had a history of local authority care. Other studies point to 20 - 50 percent of homeless young persons having a history of care.

For many, arrangements are made to leave care when they reach school leaving age (16 years) and attempts are made to have them stay with friends or relatives – arrangements that often break down. Two thirds have left care by their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, and “leaving ‘home’ for a care leaver often only offers a single opportunity to get it right, with no option to return should a young person experience difficulties.” One report found that 84 percent of youth had moved at least once since leaving care, 10 percent had moved three times, 16 percent four times and some had moved up to ten times with many experiencing homelessness at some stage. Thus, a study found that the process of leaving an institution may not lead directly to homelessness, often the initial arrangement breaks down and little support is available at this stage.

Youth in care are found to be less likely to have qualifications, one report found that 75 percent had none, while another found this to be 44 percent, compared to 18 percent of the population. The educational disadvantage makes finding training or employment more difficult, making them reliant on state benefits and consequently limiting their access to the housing market. An institutional background can also mean that decisions have been taken on behalf of the person, making it difficult to control ones life and to organise it once they are independent.

However, the author does underline the importance of differentiating between a “risk factor” and a “predictor”. “In other words, the over representation among the youth homeless population of people who have been in care does not mean that one can predict that a certain young person in care is likely to become homeless. It is also extremely important to stress that the risk factor is not of itself the cause of the young person’s homelessness. The lack of a house, or money, or the continuity of appropriate support, or exclusion from allocation policies are the causes.”

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

**O'Sullivan, Eoin 1997 *Services for Homeless Children in the Republic of Ireland: Evolution and Current Issues* National Report 1996: Republic of Ireland FEANTSA, Brussels**

Ireland The system of childcare in Ireland began to change in response to problems of child abuse. The system had primarily been based on voluntary agencies, often tied to the church, that were partially funded by the State. In the 1990s, revelations of inaction in cases of child abuse and of abuse in residential homes shifted the delivery of services to the regional health boards.

A key finding of research into youth homelessness has been the significant number of young homeless persons who had been in "substitute" care. A study of the Eastern Health Board found that 22.2 percent of homeless youth they had been in touch with had been in residential care, and a subsequent study found that 38 percent had been in long-term care. Part of the reason for this problem is the lack of follow-up care - over 16 percent of residential homes surveyed in the Republic had no formal aftercare system and there was confusion about who should be responsible for this care.

The problem would appear to be primarily linked to residential care and not to foster care, in spite of the fact that nearly two-thirds of children in care are in foster care. The Eastern Board study found that less than 3 percent of those who were homeless had been in foster care (vs. 40 percent in residential care). This difference is explained by residential care "becoming a place of last resort, rather than an equal partner in the continuum of care...Thus, it could be plausibly argued that it is the nature of the process by which children are selected for residential care, and the increasingly residual nature of residential care, rather than residential care *per se* that is contributing to the substantial numbers of residential care leavers who become homeless." Nonetheless it is acknowledged that the lack of after-care programs is a factor.

**De Decker, Pascal with Ludo Serrien 1996 *Trends in Housing, (Housing) Policy and (Youth) Homelessness* National Report 1996: Belgium FEANTSA, Brussels**

Belgium Changes in responsibility for "special youth care" have shifted from the federal Ministry of Justice to Dutch and French speaking communities and from a repressive to emancipation approach. In 1995, it is estimated that 4-5,000 children were in institutions and 4-5,000 in foster homes. Research into 100 families that have intergenerational poverty (including homeless or in unhealthy housing) found that 55 percent of the parents had been in an institution or with foster-parents when young. Furthermore, if both parents had been in institutions, 85 percent of the children were likely to be taken away. This would appear to increase the likelihood that the youth will become homeless, although no research into the process or reasons has been undertaken.

**De Gouy, Anne 1996 *Les jeunes sans-abri en France* National Report 1996: France FEANTSA, Brussels**

France Children who have been in the child welfare system are found to be over represented in the homeless youth population and having been in residential care or foster care is seen as a risk factor.

**UNITED KINGDOM**

**Wade, Jim and Nina Biehal with Jasmine Clayden and Mike Stein 1998 *Going missing : young people absent from care* New York : John Wiley**

The issue of runaways is related in part to the disproportionate number of those in care who run away, which is seen to be symptomatic of fundamental problems. One study found that while less than 1 percent of children and young people are in care, 30 percent of young runaways were missing from substitute care - 96 percent of these from residential care and only 4 percent from foster homes. A 1994 study of 102 young people using "streetwork" projects found that 70 percent had lived in substitute care and that a quarter of those under 16 had run away from

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

residential care. Other studies have found equally high numbers of young homeless persons coming from care and runaways from residential care.

Studies of runaway youth from residential care and from home or foster care have found that those running away from residential care are more likely to run away repeatedly, repeat runaways from residential care were found on average to stay away longer than those from home or foster care and they were more likely to travel further afield, run away with someone else and be picked up by the police. Finally, they were more likely to have started running away at a younger age.

The study was based on two surveys of patterns of absence from substitute care in four English local authorities for a one-year period (July 1995 to July 1996). Qualitative research was carried out in two local authorities and included 14 focus groups with young persons, social workers and residential and foster carers to identify key issues, followed by individual interviews with 36 young people who had recently gone missing overnight or reported missing to the police, their social workers and carers.

Findings from the study include:

- Across the four authorities 43 percent of the total population went missing at least once during the year, although there was considerable variation between local authorities
- Three fifths for one day or less and more than 1 in 10 were missing for a week or more – those under 13 were more likely to be missing for less than one day, with an increase in the time missing with increased age.
- Three quarters had stayed with friends or relatives, 15 percent had slept rough. Those who had slept rough were younger – to thirds were between 11 and 13.
- Going missing more or less often is not associated with a progressive pattern. “The number of times young people go missing from substitute care is not significantly associated with each successive episode becoming deeper, riskier or more protracted.”
- Risks involved with running away include offending, sexual exploitation, including prostitution and health and safety, including substance abuse.
- A large proportion of young people in the survey and interview sample had established a pattern of going missing from home before placement into care. Initial reasons for running away included a background of neglect, abuse and “the lack of parental boundaries”.
- Placement-centred reasons for absences included escape from bullying and “other pressures of institutional life”, feeling unsettled, peer pressure and the feeling in certain centres that there would be few consequences.
- Exclusion from school was found to be intertwined with running away. “Once patterns of non-attendance and going missing had been established they were mutually reinforcing.”

**Fitzpatrick, Suzanne 2000 *Young homeless people* Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire : Macmillan Press ; New York : St. Martin's Press**

Reports in the 1990s have linked local authority care and youth homelessness. For example, a survey of young homeless persons in Scotland found that almost 40 percent had experienced residential care. One study found that care-leavers were found to be especially vulnerable to homelessness “because they generally left care at a much younger age than other young people leave home; they often did not have family support to help them make a successful transition to independent living; and they may be particularly ill-equipped to deal with independent living if they had lived in an institutional setting for a prolonged period.” While most local authorities had established programs to prepare care-leavers, these focussed on “practical matters such as cooking and cleaning, but strategies for coping with isolation and poverty were less well developed.” Very few were released into homelessness; rather homelessness occurred when the initial accommodation arrangements broke down.

**FRANCE**

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

**Lagandré, François 1995 *Les phénomènes d'errance chez les jeunes de 15 à 25 ans : observations et propositions* Paris : Conseil technique des clubs et équipes de prévention spécialisée**

Risk factors that can lead to homelessness (or “wandering”) include for the youngest, emotional deficiencies that stem from family problems including placing a child in an institution while for older children, risk factors are strongly linked to having spent time in institutions. Children who have been in child welfare placements<sup>123</sup> are over represented among young homeless persons. The problem is found to be related to the exit from care. One study found that four fifths of long-term homeless persons (clochards ‘cristallisés’) had spent at least two years in childcare institutions.

**Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité, Direction Générale de l'Action Sociale, Olivier Chazy *Synthèse des travaux de diagnostic sur la grande précarité et l'errance des jeunes* <http://www.social.gouv.fr/hm/pointsur/errance/index.htm>**

This document presents a synthesis of work being undertaken on youth homelessness by various regional governmental departments following a national conference on prevention and risk in 1997. The heterogeneity of pathways to homelessness among youth is underlined, however general tendencies were noted, including youth representing 30 - 40 percent services for homeless persons, widespread early separation from the family placing youth in highly precarious material and emotional situations, and the pull of certain cities and regions. Finally, a uniquely European phenomenon is identified – the emergence of a marginal counter culture that includes great geographical mobility, very precarious situations and heavy drug use, with a lifestyle that follows various festivals throughout Europe.

**Fridion, Jean-Marie, *Étude sur jeunes sans domicile dans les pays occidentaux, état des lieux* <http://www.social.gouv.fr/hm/pointsur/errance/index.htm>**

A review of research on youth homelessness in western countries. Family difficulties are generally found to be critical. In France, youth are released from care before they are ready. Specific measures have been undertaken to help youth who have reached the age of majority (18) to help in this transition until they are 21. A 1998 study found that 10 percent of homeless male adults and 7 percent of women had been in the child welfare system or in a specialised institution.

**Marsat, Maryse, Jean-Marie Firdion et Monique Meron 2000 *Le passé difficile des jeunes sans domicile*, Population & Sociétés, No. 363, décembre 2000 summary available at: [http://www.ined.fr/publications/pop\\_et\\_soc/pes363/](http://www.ined.fr/publications/pop_et_soc/pes363/)**

A study undertaken by the National Institute of Demographic Studies (Institut national d'études démographiques, INED) of 461 persons between 16 and 24 using services for persons in great difficulty in the Paris region in 1998. The results underline the “difficult” past of this youth. Only 15 percent were still in school – four times less than others of this age group in the region and over half are either without a diploma or have only a certificate of the end of schooling – compared to 10 percent of the comparable population in the region. The study also finds a high proportion of youths born outside of France and/or parents who are foreign-born. In the Paris region, two out of three youths 16-24 still live with their parent(s) while four of six youths in a precarious situation do not have regular contacts with their mother and six out of ten with their father. 38 percent of the men and 47 percent of the women had been badly treated when young and 27 percent of the men and 39 percent of the women had been under state care. Almost half of the men (46 percent) had run away, while 57 percent of the women had done so, with a third of women running away multiple times (29 percent for men). Four in five women had attempted suicide (16 percent more than once), while this proportion was 24 percent for men (14 percent more than

<sup>123</sup> Les enfants de l'A.S.E. (Aide Sociale à l'Enfance) or children of the ASE (Social Aid to Children)

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

once). Youth who had a long history of institutional care had the highest frequency of running away and of suicide attempts.

## **2. Canadian homeless studies showing prevalence of previous care**

**Arboleda-Florez, J. and H.L. Holley. *Calgary Homelessness Study, Final Report. Alberta Health. December 1997.***

The study employed several methodologies in an attempt to investigate the dramatic increase of homelessness in Calgary. The survey of inner city overnight shelter users, consisting of structured interviews with a representative sample of 250 clients, provides data on family background as well as a range of topics including socio-demographic characteristics, housing situation, employment, survival skills, health, and others.

The potential causes of homelessness were examined from the perspective of the homeless participants, including family background and life events that may have caused homelessness.

Of the respondents, 85 percent identified 1-10 family problems and 55 percent identified over 3 family problems (multiple characteristics cited). 23 percent of respondents identified foster care as a characteristic of their early family environment. Other early family disruptions included school suspensions, moving more than five times, living in a single parent family, living with an alcoholic, emotionally ill, and/or mentally ill parent or caregiver, experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse, homelessness, and living with a parent or caregiver on welfare. However, foster parents were identified by less than 5 percent of respondents as their primary caregivers before the age of 18. According to the authors, this did not mean that individuals did not live in foster families, only that they relate to others, usually a parent, as primary caregiver.

The study found that 60 percent of participants felt that life events were more likely the cause of homelessness compared to early family background (29 percent). Foster care was cited among the recent life events causing homelessness by only 2 percent of respondents. Other life events in the year prior to becoming homeless included loss of employment, death of a loved one, divorce or separation, eviction from residence, substance abuse, serious debt, criminal offence, robbed, physically beaten, sexually assaulted, in jail, in hospital (for physical and/or mental illness), gambling addiction, and suffering from a serious accident.

Method:

Consisted of a literature review, a description of different agencies and programs working with the homeless in Calgary, inter-agency data collection and compilation, and a survey of 250 inner city overnight shelter users. Family background and life events information was extracted from the survey interviews of the 250 inner city overnight shelter users.

**Bisson, Louise 1989 *Les Maisons d'Hébergement pour jeunes : État de la situation* Conseil permanent de la jeunesse, Gouvernement du Québec, Québec**

The study presents a review of the literature on the number of homeless youth in Québec, which ranges from 2,000 to 10,000 depending on the age group and sources of information. Two kinds of youth homelessness are noted; structural and conjectural. The first is made up of youth coming out of the institutional network such as group homes and youth protection services. At 18 they are out of this network and often have serious difficulty integrating into society and have little support to deal with serious health and behaviour problems. Conjectural homelessness is linked to the socio-economic conditions confronting youth such as precarious employment or unemployment for those with low levels of schooling and little experience.

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

Data was collected from a network of youth shelters across Quebec - the Regroupement des maisons d'hébergement jeunesse du Québec (RMHJQ *Une alternative pour les jeunes sans-abri: vers une reconnaissance des maisons d'hébergement jeunesse* 1988). These shelters can take in youth between 12 and 30, although some restrict the ages. The average age was 15 for minors (N= 417), and 21 for those of age of majority (N= 497). Among minors, 5 percent were males and 46 percent females, while among those of majority age, 83 percent were males and 17 percent females. In 1987-88 the members of the RMHJQ received 1,538 youth, about 2/3 over 18 years. 83 percent of the minors who applied were accepted while only 30 percent of the young adults. 90 percent of refusals were due to lack of space.

Almost a third of minors (32 percent) came to the shelter from a foster home and another 10 percent came from an institution. The proportions were 2 percent and 9 percent respectively for those over 18. Furthermore, 35 percent of minors had been referred to the shelters by the department of youth protection. After their stay in the shelter (most stays are a maximum of 21 days), 19 percent of the minors went to a foster home and 11 percent went to a residential centre (vs. none of those over 18).

**Gaetz, Stephen, Bill O'Grady and Bryan Vaillancourt. *Making Money—The Shout Clinic Report on Homeless Youth and Employment*. Central Toronto Community Health Centres, 1999.**

Characteristics of the family background of street youth were obtained as part of a study of the employment needs and capacities of street youth. It found that street youth are most likely to have less contact or poor or fair contact with parents from the time they were growing up to the present time. Lack of contact with fathers while growing up and at the present time was especially apparent. Of the youth surveyed, 64 percent came from homes with separated parents and 43 percent had spent some time in foster care or group homes. The study suggests that multiple care-givers and the lack of parental support has significant affects on the youth's ability to develop stability and trust in social, personal, and vocational areas. Other characteristics of family background included one or more deceased parents (17 percent). Among the reasons for leaving home, sexual and physical abuse at home were key reasons cited by the youth.

**Method:**

Surveyed 360 homeless youth under the age of 24 living in Toronto. Homeless youth identified as temporarily, permanently, or at risk of being without shelter. Measured employment needs and capacities of street youth by: current patterns of making money; youth employment expectations, education levels, housing situations, and other supports; knowledge and experience of job options; and capacity for legitimate employment.

**McCarthy, Bill. *On the Streets Youth in Vancouver*. Province of British Columbia Ministry of Social Services, Research, Evaluation and Statistics Branch, July 1995.**

The study of street youth in Vancouver suggests a correlation between youth homelessness and unstable family living arrangements. Most of the youth surveyed had lived in more than three family arrangements before living on the street compared to 10 percent only living in one family arrangement: 17 percent reported living in three family types; 18 percent in four family types; 24 percent in five family types; and 19 percent in six or more family types. The family history of homeless youth indicated a trend of youth having lived with the mother and a stepfather or boyfriend (74 percent), the mother only (66 percent), the biological parents (65 percent), relatives (59 percent), and/or foster parents and group homes (43 percent). Street youth were less likely to have lived with a father only (24 percent) or with a father and a stepmother or girlfriend and were less likely to have a close relationship with the father. The author notes that the findings are consistent with other studies on the family history of street youth. The causes of family disruptions were attributed to parental drug and/or alcohol abuse; parental physical violence or force; youth physical force; sexual abuse, and; family involvement in crime.



***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

Method:

The primary data source was a 1992 study led by researchers at the sociology departments of the University of Victoria and University of Toronto. It consisted of data collection from 152 street youth between the ages of 14-24 without a permanent shelter. Researchers screened and interviewed youth at various locations over a four-day period. Youth participants completed a 23-page questionnaire and a 1.5-hour interview. This data was augmented and compared with 1993 *Adolescent Health Survey of Street Youth in Vancouver*, the 1992 *Adolescent Health Survey* of 16,000 high school students in Vancouver, and 1989 study on BC's Reconnect program (CS/RESORS Consulting).

**Novac, Sylvia, Luba Serge, and Margaret Eberle with the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (forthcoming) *On Her Own, Young Women and Homelessness in Canada, Status of Women Canada, Ottawa***

Custom data for Montreal was obtained from a longitudinal cohort study undertaken since January 1995 by the *Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal-Centre* on the evolution of HIV infection and risk behaviour of street youth in Montreal (led by Dr. Élise Roy of the Infectious Disease Unit). Participants are asked to join the study during regular visits to the twenty principle resources for street youth in Montreal. To be eligible, participants must be between 14 and 25 and have used a shelter for homeless youth more than once in the past year or have regularly used services for street youth. A questionnaire is filled out upon entry to the study and every six months thereafter. Custom data based on the initial questionnaires for 998 youth who joined the study between 1995 and 2000 were used.

Males and females under 18 each represented 12 percent of the group while men over 18 were 56 percent and women over 18 were 20 percent. Contact with institutions and the child welfare system varied by age and by sex. Thus, almost half (49 percent) of the group had been in a "closed" residential facility; two thirds of men under 18; 50 percent for those over 18; 52 percent of women under 18; and 34 percent those over 18. A smaller proportion had been in a residential facility, 38 percent overall; 44 percent for men under 18 and 38 percent for those over 18; 39 percent for women under 18 and 33 percent for those over. Finally, 82 percent of men under 18 and 71 percent of men over 18 have or had a social worker. This proportion is 79 percent and 67 percent respectively for women under and over 18 and 73 percent overall.

59 percent of the street youth had been thrown out of their parental home. Of these over a fifth (23 percent) had been thrown out once; and one quarter (26 percent) had been thrown out two to five times and a 10 percent over 6 times. Furthermore, almost half (48 percent) had first been thrown out when they were 13 years old or over (equally divided between those 13 and 15 and those over 16) and 10 percent were under 12.

Questions about running away were also asked. Two thirds of youth had run away, with an especially high proportion of those under eighteen (80 percent for women and 85 percent for men). Most had run away more than once, almost a quarter (24 percent) two to five times and over one in five (22 percent) had run away more than ten times. The most frequent age at which the youth had first run away was between 13 and 15 years (32 percent), while 17 percent had been 10 to 12 years old and 7 percent under 10. Only 10 percent had run away for the first time at 16 or older.

**Tonkin, Roger S. et al. *No Place To Call Home: A Profile of Street Youth in British Columbia*. Vancouver: The McCreary Centre Society, 2001.**

This study provides the most current information available about the living situation, behaviour and overall health of street youth in BC. Study defines street youth to include adolescents under the age of 19 years who are living on the street or are involved with street life. It included an investigation of the home life experiences of street youth. Of the study sample, 37 percent had a history of government care, including foster care or group home care. The rate was highest in

### ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

BC's largest urban centres, Vancouver (44 percent) and Victoria (42 percent). Other rates include 30 percent in South Fraser, 31 percent in Abbotsford/Mission and Sunshine Coast, and 38 percent in Prince Rupert. Eight percent were adopted (compared to 2 percent in the 1992 school based youth survey). At the time of the survey, between 4 percent (Vancouver) and 15 percent of youth (South Fraser) were living in a foster or group home. During the past year, between 8 percent (Prince Rupert) and 20 percent (Abbotsford/Mission) of youth in six BC communities had been living in a foster or group home. The rates differ by gender. During the past year, 19 percent of females and 8 percent of males in the BC sample had spent time in foster or group homes.

The street youth cited several reasons for being on the street including family problems such as not getting along with parents, being kicked out from home, ran away from home, violence or abuse at home, and conflict at home because of sexual orientation.

#### **Method:**

Research assistants and community workers surveyed 523 street youth in 6 BC communities including Vancouver (145); Victoria (94); Abbotsford/Mission (113); Surrey/White Rock/ Langley (61); Prince Rupert (50); and the Sunshine Coast (60). Study sample was a convenience sample rather than a random sample, as sample was collected from association to various community agencies. Street youth included people under the age of 19 living on the street or involved with street life. Survey results grouped into three groupings: Vancouver; Victoria, and suburban/coastal.

### **Health and Welfare Canada. 1993. *A Study of "Out-of the Mainstream" Youth in Halifax, Nova Scotia.* Ottawa. Minister of Supply and Services.**

The aim of the study was to collect comprehensive information about a group of high-risk youth in the Halifax area. Information was collected on a variety of topics, including demographics, education, place of birth, previous family background, current living arrangements, sources of help sought, use of services, health status etc. Personal interviews were conducted during 2 months in 1991 with 200 youth, ranging from 10 to 24 years. The youth comprised two distinct categories: "Curbs" - those currently living with a birth parent, foster parent or adoptive parent, and "Entrenched" - those with no parental or home connection. Only 1 percent of Curbs were currently living with a foster parent, 47 percent were living with single parents. 5 percent of the Entrenched group were living with a foster parent at the time the youth left home, while 33 percent were living with single and step parents.

## **3. Outcomes of Care**

### **CANADA**

#### **Raychaba, Brian. 1988. *To Be On Our Own With No Direction From Home. A Report on the Special Needs of Youth Leaving the Care of the Child Welfare System.* National Youth In Care Network.**

Discusses the experiences of youth exiting the child welfare system in Canada. Section 1 describes the characteristics of youth in care, section 2 examines the experiences of youth leaving care, and section 3 describes the substantial difficulties that youth encounter upon the termination of care, and their special vulnerability or susceptibility to becoming homeless. Specific recommendations are also put forward.

The most common reasons why youth are brought into care include abuse (physical, sexual, and/or emotional), rejection, inadequate accommodation, and inability of parents to provide care. Most of the children come from poor families as low income parents often run a greater risk of

### ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

encountering problems that reduce their capacity to parent adequately. Issues related to children of minority ethnic groups is also discussed, and it is noted that a high percentage of Native youth are in care particularly in the western provinces of BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

The author discusses how the experiences which necessitate placement have emotional and behavioural ramifications for these young people. For example, the experience of physical abuse tends to encourage a pervasive distrust of others, especially adults. Some of the symptoms in older age groups include eating disorders, repetitive self-abuse, nervous disorders, lack of motivation, poor grades, depression, withdrawal, a need for special attention, and usually among the upper grades, drug and/or alcohol abuse. The effects of physical or emotional neglect can be devastating and long-lasting. In many cases, the young person never resolves the anger, self-blame, and yearning for unattainable family love and belonging and he/she never becomes an integrated and self-directed individual working near his/her potential. Some of the effects of sexual abuse for females include a poor self-image, susceptibility to repeated victimization, difficulty expressing affection, and a lack of confidence regarding relationships. For males, sexual abuse can cause feelings of frustration, confusion and bitterness.

Several issues face troubled or “hard to serve” youth in care, including drug and alcohol use/abuse, delinquency, and transiency. Youth in care often experience multiple placements and different social workers. This experience often encourages a long-lasting hesitancy in forming healthy, meaningful and durable relationships with others. Limited education, with most youth not continuing into post secondary education, is common, as is a lack of employment related skills and general life skills. Many experience general developmental delays and suffer low self-esteem.

With the termination of care, all formal support networks for the youth are dismantled. The young person must leave the group home or institution regardless of how long he/she called it home. The author notes that little research has been done in Canada on what happens to youth once they leave care, but basic themes from the literature identify feelings of loneliness, isolation, lack of support, feelings of rejection and abandonment, economic hardship and continuing emotional/psychological difficulties. Many are plagued by a general lack of life skills, employment-related skills, advanced education, and/or training necessary for successful employment. The problems they deal with related to inner emotional difficulties, depression, anxiety, as well as possible drug and alcohol abuse most likely persist and become compounded. In many ways, the condition of youth in contact with child welfare is prone to steady deterioration once care is terminated.

Section 3 discusses the vulnerability of former foster youth to becoming homeless. Some of the issues identified include:

- Drug/alcohol use/abuse – youth in/from care are more likely to use and occasionally abuse drugs and alcohol.
- Transiency – the notions of constant movement, change, and impermanence of residence are characteristics of a significant number of youth involved in the child welfare system. Mobility often means loss of personal relationships, which in turn discourages the formation and maintenance of future personal relationships.
- Emotional/psychological issues– youth leaving care often still trying to deal with much of the upset, rage, frustration, guilt, and despondence that lingers from earlier life experiences.
- Lack of education, employment-related skills, and general life/social skills - due to numerous reasons related to initial home life, cultural background, reasons for coming into care, and experiences while in care, child welfare youth are noted for their problems and lack of success in school. The lack of social skills also hinders many in their efforts to find and keep a job as well as in finding and maintaining stable accommodation. Many end up on welfare.
- Poor social support systems - youth out of care do not have a functional social support network on which they can rely during the transition from child welfare dependence to adult independence.

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

- High correlation with juvenile prostitution – young people leaving care with minimal education and little if any employment-related skills are dangerously prone to entering into prostitution, a specific form of homelessness.

The author concludes that ex-child welfare youth, as a group, possess a unique predisposition to post-care difficulty, distress, a lack of support, and homelessness. At core is the issue of vulnerability and susceptibility. Youth leaving the care of child welfare authorities are currently threatened by multiple issues of poverty, transiency, loneliness, emotional/mental health problems, and homelessness to a far greater extent than most young people. To help youth leaving the foster care system develop into productive citizens and grow into well-integrated and psychologically functional individuals, the author calls on government and child welfare authorities to make a social investment in these youth by continuing support and services to carry them through the crucial transition period from child welfare dependency to successful adulthood.

Method: This book builds on exploratory research undertaken for a brief submitted to the Ontario Social Assistance Review Committee in March 1987. For this book, the author conducted a greater scan of the available literature, including journals, publications and reports, and conducted informal surveys of agencies servicing Ontario youth in care.

The author notes that it was very difficult to obtain the required information for his study. He cited a scarcity of post-care studies and a lack of in depth clinical research on the characteristics and special needs of young people in care. Analysis was also hindered by a lack of comparable child welfare data collection systems at both the national and provincial levels, and from one individual agency to another.

**Raychaba, Brian. 1987. *A Report on the Special Needs of Youth In/From the Care of the Child Welfare System*. Ottawa: National Youth in Care Network.**

This is an earlier research paper that describes the characteristics of youth involved in the child welfare system and the experiences of these individuals upon leaving the care system. The report also describes the particular vulnerability of this group to post-care poverty, isolation, crisis, and distress.

**U.S.**

**Courtney, Mark, Irving Piliavin, Andrew Grogan-Kaylor and Ande Nesmith. 1998. *Foster Youth Transitions to Adulthood: Outcomes 12 to 18 months After Leaving Out-of-Home Care. Notes and Comments*. School of Social Work and Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison.**

The Foster Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (FYTA) is a project intended to explore the experiences and adjustments of youth after they have been discharged from out-of-home care in Wisconsin. The study involves three waves of interviews. The first wave took place in 1995 while youth were residing in out-of-home care, the second took place 12 to 18 months after they exited care, and the third wave will take place after the youth have been out of care about three years.

Securing stable housing posed as serious problem for some of the youths, although most were able to obtain housing. A total of 12 percent of all youths interviewed in Wave 2 reported being homeless (living on the street or in a shelter) at least once since they were discharged from care. This included 14 percent of the men and 10 percent of the women. In addition, 22 percent had lived in four or more separate places since their discharge from care.

Other findings were as follows:

- Education - At Wave 1, 90 percent of the youths were still attending high school. Seventy-nine percent expressed a desire to enter college and 71 percent expected that they would

### ***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

achieve this goal. By Wave 2, only 55 percent had completed high school, and only an additional 9 percent had entered college.

- Preparedness for Independent Living – About 25 percent of the youth reported a perceived lack of preparedness in several skill areas, particularly how to get a job, manage money, obtain housing, and parenting.
- Finances and employment – Problems meeting financial needs appear to have contributed to or exacerbated problems locating housing and meeting other basic needs. Eighty-one percent of the participants held at least one job at some point between discharge and the Wave 2 interview, however, at the time of the Wave 2 interview only 61 percent were employed. Those who were employed were, on average, earning less than a full-time worker paid the minimum wage.
- Public assistance – 32 percent of youths received some kind of public assistance.
- Mental health – The participants were much less likely to receive mental health services once they exited from care than when they were in the child welfare system. Twenty-one percent of the youth interviewed at Wave 2 said that they received some kind of mental health service in the previous year, a substantial decrease in service usage since Wave 1 when 47 percent reported that they had received such services.
- Social support - 40 percent of the youths reported that they spoke with their previous foster parents at least once a week 12 to 18 months after discharge. Twenty percent agreed that their foster families continued to help them, provided emotional support, and helped them make decisions after discharge.
- Victimization – 25 percent of the men and 15 percent of the women reported some kind of serious physical victimization in the 12 to 18 months since they had left the care of the child welfare system.
- Incarceration – 27 percent of men and 10 percent of the women – an average of 8 percent - had been incarcerated at least once after discharge.

Method: The first wave of interviews was conducted with 141 youth while they were still in care in 1995. The youths were 17 or 18 years old at the time. Only those who had been in foster care for at least 18 months were interviewed. Care included family foster homes, group homes, and residential treatment centres. Most of the youth reported that they had been maltreated prior to placement. The largest proportion, 66 percent had been neglected, 57 percent had experienced physical abuse, and 31 percent had been sexually abused.

The second wave of the study was conducted in 1996 and 1997, 12 to 18 months after the youths were discharged from the child welfare system. In total, 113 young adults were interviewed, 80 percent of those interviewed at Wave 1. The next steps will be to complete the Wave 3 interviews toward the end of 1999.

#### **Mallon, Gerald P. 1998. After Care, Then Where? Outcomes of an Independent Living Program. *Child Welfare*. 77(1) 61-(18p.)**

Offers descriptive and evaluative outcome data for youths discharged from an independent living program in New York City operated by Green Chimneys Children's Services. The purpose was to find out what happens to youths in out-of-home care who are discharged from the Green Chimneys Life Skills Program.

The study found that 46 percent of those studied shared an apartment at discharge. This figure increased to 51 percent at follow-up. Youths noted on average that they lived in three different locations since discharge. One youth was incarcerated at follow-up and another had committed suicide. There was no finding of homelessness. Seventy-five percent of the study population had completed high school or obtained a general equivalency diploma at the time of discharge, and of those who had a diploma, more than one quarter had some college education. The findings with respect to graduation rates were more favourable than graduation rates reported for other populations in out-of-home care. About 72percent of the study population had full-time

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

employment at discharge. At follow-up, the employment rate increased to 78 percent. Also at discharge, 65 percent of the study population had savings accounts, although this had decreased to 39 percent at follow-up.

Method: The authors conducted a study of all youths (N=46) discharged from Green Chimneys to independent living between December 1987 and December 1994.

**Collins, Mary Elizabeth. 2000. *Transition to Adulthood for Vulnerable Youths. A Review of Research and Implications for Policy. Social Services Review. Chicago: The University of Chicago.***

Reviews what is known about young people leaving care in the US and also examines the impact of Independent Living Programs on youth outcomes. The author concludes that further research is needed to learn more about the best methods of aiding youths in the transition to adulthood. The report states that the few research studies on substitute care outcomes suggest that many young people leaving care have poor prospects.

**United States General Accounting Office. 1999. *Foster Care: Challenges in Helping Youths Live Independently, Statement of Cynthia M. Fagnoni, Director Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues Health, Education, and Human Services Division.***

The presenter discusses the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Independent Living Program (ILP) and the needs of youths leaving the foster care system. Her testimony is based on her work for the Subcommittee on Human Resources, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives, and visits to several locations in the U.S., and a preliminary review of about one-third of the 1998 ILP reports submitted to HHS. She notes that the few available studies that track youths who have exited foster care have found that a substantial portion of these youths have not completed high school, are dependent on public assistance, experience periods of homelessness after leaving care, and have other difficulties that impede their progress toward self-sufficiency, such as being unemployed. The ILPs provide many services, including assistance with completing education and finding employment; developing basic skills to live independently such as money management, hygiene, housekeeping, and nutrition; and transitional services, such as supervised practice living arrangements. Several short-falls have been identified with ILPs. For example, some programs do not sufficiently seek out employment opportunities in the community and offer few opportunities for youths to participate in real-life practice opportunities or esteem-building experiences. In addition, some programs could not provide adequate housing or other transitional assistance for youths still in care and those who have left care.

**U.K.**

**Baldwin, Debbie, Bob Coles and Wendy Mitchell 1997 "The formation of an underclass or disparate processes of social exclusion? Evidence from two groupings of 'vulnerable youth' in Robert MacDonald, (ed.), *The 'underclass' and social exclusion*, London ; New York : Routledge**

A review of the research into two vulnerable groups – disabled youth and youth leaving care. Of those leaving care, according to recent studies, 75 percent had no academic qualifications, 50-80 percent are unemployed and at least 13 percent of young women are pregnant or already mothers. Furthermore, 30 percent of young homeless persons have been in care.

The authors emphasise that the children and young persons admitted into care have been taken in because they are "at risk of significant harm" but that behind this shared characteristic is a heterogeneous population. Younger children are more likely to be admitted to protect them from abuse and neglect whereas those in their teens are more likely to be admitted for behavioural

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

reasons “ such as being beyond parental control or in moral danger”. In spite of the heterogeneity of the population, the services provided are homogeneous.

Young persons over 11 are twice as likely to be placed in residential care than younger children and they are more likely to experience a number of different placements. One study found that those admitted into care during their teenage years, half had more than three changes in placement in the last two years of care and one in ten had more than five placements during this period. Besides the impact on “self-identity and feelings of belonging” there is also a movement between schools and its impact on educational attainment. A 1995 study by the Office of Standards in Education and the Social Services Inspectorate found that 12 percent of children and youth of statutory school age either did not attend school on a regular basis or were excluded from school and this increased to 26 percent of those 14-16 years. The lack of qualifications makes entry into the labour market very difficult. A 1986 study found that 50 percent of youth were unemployed a year after leaving care, and this figure rose to 80 percent at the end of the second year.

The relationship to the housing market also is tenuous. In one study it was found that only 20 percent of young people remained in the same accommodation for two years after leaving care and over half had experienced more than three changes. “Young people’s enforced departure from the care system results in accelerated and inherently unstable housing transitions with homelessness being a frequently experienced outcome.”

**Garnett, Louise. 1992. *Leaving Care and After*. London: National Children’s Bureau.**

Examines the experiences of 135 young people leaving care based on interviews with social workers. The two main objectives were to provide information on young people’s care backgrounds and post-care experience, and learn more about what happens next to young people discharged from a variety of different care settings. For the purposes of this study, leaving care referred to the point at which a young person was formally discharged from local authority care.

The study found that less than 25 percent of the sample left care with any formal education qualifications. Only 43 percent of the young people were in full or part-time work or engaged in employment training programs at the time of their discharge from care. Nearly one in seven of the female care leavers was pregnant or a parent by the time they left care. Nearly half the group had moved into some form of semi or fully independent living arrangement before they were discharged. However, some of them were already experiencing difficulties of debt, loneliness and poor and unsuitable housing, or were drifting between hostels, lodgings, squats and Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

**Great Britain, Department of Health. 1991. *Patterns and Outcomes in Child Placement: Messages from Current Research and their Implications*. London: H.M.S.O.**

Includes a review of the practical problems and issues of young people leaving care and moving into independence. Noted are the lack of educational qualifications achieved by the young people and limited employment opportunities. The research shows that the proportion of care leavers without jobs is consistently higher than the local average. Access to housing is another issue of concern, as noted in several studies as follows:

- Care leavers often experience periods of “semi-homelessness” that involve frequent moves between “shoddy bedsits, shared flats, squatting, staying with friends and relatives (Partridge 1989).
- Even when young people obtain a flat, they are often lonely and unable to cope on their limited finances. Out of 15 young people previously in care who were living in a flat at the time of their last placement and whose whereabouts were known two years later, only three were still living there (Garnett, 1992).

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

- The ex-care population has been found to be heavily over-represented among the homeless and often destitute young people in London and other major cities (Centrepont report quoted by Hardwick 1989).

**Hayden, Carol, Jim Goddard, Sarah Gorin and Niki Van Der Spek 1999 *State child care: looking after children?* London ; Philadelphia : Jessica Kingsley Publishers**

In the 1990s the proportion of young people leaving care at 16 has increased – 33 percent in 1993 to 40 percent in 1997. Concern with “high-profile” outcome measures such as inmates in prison and homeless persons are considered to be misleading, since they can include people who have spent “some time in care” and the complex biographies that “lie behind the statistics” should be remembered. Problems with leaving care include difficulties with interagency co-operation and the lack of co-ordination not only between state agencies but also state and private sectors.

Four different studies are used, including a questionnaire administered to 186 young people with experience of life in care, including 65 who had left care. One finding was that “the quality of care had less relevance to explaining post-care outcomes than did the abruptness of exit from care and the level of support between the ages of sixteen and eighteen and the generally poor planning and preparation for leaving care”. About a quarter had experienced periods of unemployment and only one in eight had significant experience with full time employment after leaving care. 18 percent had been homeless.

**Pinkerton, John and Mike Stein. 1995. Responding to the Needs of Young People Leaving State Care: Law, Practice and Policy in England and Northern Ireland. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 17(5/6) 697-709.**

Reviews the legislative framework in the UK for children leaving care. In England and Wales, the *Children’s Act* 1989 sets out responsibilities for children leaving the foster care system. Young people who were looked after by the local authority have the right on leaving care to be advised, assisted and befriended until they are 21 by the local authority in whose care they were. Local authorities have the power to provide financial assistance connected with the person’s education, employment or training and such grants may continue beyond age 21 to allow for completion of education or training. Social services departments are also empowered to request help of other agencies, including education, housing and health authorities to enable them to comply with their duties to provide accommodation and other appropriate services. However, studies in England and Northern Ireland found that policies and practices must be developed within the legislative framework to help young people manage the transition to independence.

In 1990 the Leeds University Leaving Care Research Project (LLCRP) initiated a study that involved surveying a sample of 183 young people aged 16-19 in three English local authorities who had either moved to independence or were discharged from care. Two years later a Northern Ireland Leaving Care Research Project (NILCRP) started at Queen’s University Belfast to describe the experiences of 125 young people who left care in Northern Ireland during a six month period in 1992. Outcome indicators for youth who left care suggest s that they were poorly equipped to deal with the transition of leaving care. Just over one fifth of the youth in the Belfast study and under one fifth in the Leeds study were judged to have been homeless at some point. The Leeds team found that young people with special needs seemed to be at special risk of homelessness.

**Minty, Brian 1999 Annotation: *Outcomes in long-term foster family care*; *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, Elmsford; Oct 1999; Vol. 40, Iss. 7; pg. 991, 9 pgs Association for Child Psychology and Psychiatry**

Focuses on outcomes for long-term foster care in the UK, USA, Canada and France. While studies of adult outcomes seem to be positive, a second group of studies in the UK and the US of



**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

youth shortly after leaving care find high levels of unemployment, homelessness, isolation and poor academic achievement. Reasons for the negative outcome in the second group of studies is attributed to entering permanent care after the age of ten and staying for relatively short periods of time, being in residential rather than foster care, and they may reflect deficiencies in parenting and care that the children brought with them.

**Vernon, Jenni 2000 *Audit and assessment of leaving care services in London*, National Children's Bureau, Department of Health, Rough Sleepers Unit,  
<http://www.housing.dtlr.gov.uk/rsu/audit/index.htm>**

**Rowe, Jane, Marion Hundley and Louise Garnett 1989 *Child care now: a survey of placement patterns* London, England : British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering**

Includes a chapter on "Patterns of outcome".

**The Big Step 2000 *Young People Leaving Care and Benefits, Creating Pathways to Independence?* A report of research into Government proposals to change the benefits system for young people leaving care**

**Burley, Mason and Mina Halpern. 2001. *Educational Attainment of Foster Youth*. Olympia, Washington: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.  
<http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/childfamily/pdf/FCEDReport.pdf>**

**David Maunders, Max Liddell, Margaret Liddell and Sue Green. 1999. *Young people leaving care and protection* Hobart: Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies.  
[http://www.acys.utas.edu.au/ncys/nyars/N17\\_exec.htm](http://www.acys.utas.edu.au/ncys/nyars/N17_exec.htm) The purpose of the research was to describe the experiences of young people discharged from State care and to identify factors which assisted and impeded their transition to independent living.**

#### **4. Other related studies**

**Fitzgerald, Michael D. 1995. Homeless Youths and the Child Welfare System: Implications for Policy and Services. *Child Welfare*. 74(3) 717-731.**

Reviews existing studies and describes some programs for homeless youth in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Notes that child welfare systems in Canada are not designed to deal with the problems and needs of adolescents. A large number of homeless youth have experienced the effects of poverty; family turmoil, break-up, or transiency in dysfunctional homes (alcoholism, drug abuse, marital discord, violence); family changes (separation, divorce, remarriage); or removal from the home (placement into care). The author recommends that homeless youths require both basic care and ongoing support if they are to set their lives toward achieving productive, self-enhancing goals and a useful place within the community. Describes Phoenix House, a long-term residential program for homeless youth, and several other programs.

**Calsyn, Robert J. and Laurie A. Roades. 1994. Predictors of Past and Current Homelessness. *Journal of Community Psychology*. 22: 272-278**

This study found that having been in a foster care or institutional placement as a child did not predict either the length of time since first homeless or the length of the current episode of homelessness. Prior psychiatric hospitalisation did predict the length of time since first homeless, however, it did not predict the length of the current homeless episode. Being older and a military veteran were significant predictors of the length of time currently homeless. This study was consistent with other research that found a lack of education did predict the length of time since first homeless. Multiple regression analysis is used to predict both the length of time since a

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

person was first homeless and the length of the current episode of homelessness. Interviews were conducted with 300 residents from 12 of the 24 homeless shelters in St. Louis.

**Holdaway Doris M. and JoAnn Ray. 1992. Attitudes of Street Kids Toward Foster Care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. 9(4) 307-317.**

Forty-seven street kids who frequented drop-in centres were interviewed to determine their attitudes towards foster care. Participants ranged in age from 14-17. Almost 75 percent of participants had been on the street for longer than one year. Twenty-nine of the 47 respondents had previously lived in foster care. Those children who had experienced living in foster care were asked to rate the quality of care. They reported that foster homes ranged from “good” to “bad” and some children had experienced both. Approximately 20 percent reported physical abuse and 17 percent reported sexual abuse within the foster care home. Almost 30 percent stated that the foster parents “used lots of drugs and alcohol”. Only 38 percent of the participants said they would go to a foster home if there was a place for them. Forty-three percent of those who had experienced foster care would not consider a foster home, while 89 percent of those who had never been in foster care would reject a foster home. The study reported that the major reason for wanting to remain on the street appeared to be the perception that conflict within their family cannot be resolved. With the experience of broken homes of origin, these children are unwilling to risk bonding with a foster family.

**Kellam, Susan. 1999. *Give ‘Em Shelter*. Benton Foundation. Online: <http://www.connectforkids.org>**

Discusses initiatives for youth leaving the foster care system in the U.S. The United Friends for Children initiative provides housing for former foster youth in Los Angeles in safe, multi-ethnic neighbourhoods with access to services, public transportation, markets, job opportunities and community colleges. A social worker lives with the youth and instructs them on independent living skills including cooking and budgeting. The Youth Advocacy Centre in New York is a comprehensive program to train youth in self-advocacy. The goal is to help youth who had been in foster care learn to become more independent and advocate for themselves. The California Youth Connection, an outgrowth of the California Independent Living Programs, follows a youth-empowerment model that gives current and former foster kids a forum to address local and statewide issues. The number one concern identified by youth is the lack of transitional housing.

**Stoner, Madeleine R. 1999. Life After Foster Care: Services and Policies for Former Foster Youth. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*. XXVI (4) 159-175.**

Reviews studies that make the connection between homelessness and foster care from two perspectives. One type of study examines homelessness and other outcomes for youth who have been discharged from foster care. Another body of research demonstrates that former foster youth are over-represented among samples of homeless men and women. Examples include:

- One study of 55 young adults discharged from foster care in the San Francisco Bay area found the youth to be struggling with severe housing problems, ill health, poor education, substance abuse and criminal behaviour (Barth, 1990).
- A national evaluation of the federal independent living initiative found that 58 percent had three or more different living arrangements and 3 percent reported no available housing options (Cook and Ansell, 1991).
- The County of Los Angeles emancipation court order forms for 685 youth in 1998 found that all their housing arrangements were unstable (Stoner 1998).

This article suggests that after-care interventions structured around transitional housing for former foster youth can prevent them from becoming dependent on public assistance, homeless, ill or entering the adult criminal justice system.

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

**Zlotnick, Cheryl, Marjorie J. Robertson and Marguerite A. Wright. 1999. The Impact of Childhood Foster Care and Other Out-Of-Home Placement on Homeless Women and their Children. *Child Abuse and Neglect*. 23(11) 1057-1068.**

Compares homeless women who had childhood histories of foster care or out-of-home placement with other homeless women. The study involved structured interviews with a countrywide probability sample of 179 homeless women. One third of the homeless women reported being raised apart from their parents. Among the homeless women who had children under the age of 18, 61.5 percent had children who lived in foster care or out-of-home placements. The study did not show that homeless mothers who had experienced childhood foster care or other out-of-home placement were more apt to have their children in foster care than other homeless mothers. Factors associated with homeless mothers' children living in foster care or other out-of-home placements included: child was school-age, mother was 35 or older, mother had a current alcohol or drug use disorder, mother experienced childhood sexual abuse, and mother ran away from home. Concludes that parenting is difficult for homeless mothers.

**Boss, Peter, Sue Edwards and Susan Pitman. 1995. *Profile of Young Australians, Facts, Figures and Issues*. South Melbourne: Churchill Livingstone.**

This book includes a chapter on homeless youth. One study (1989) estimated that there were between 20,000 and 25,000 homeless youth in Australia while another (1991) provided an estimate of between 15,000-19,000. This included youth in temporary accommodation such as hostels, staying with friends, in emergency shelters and sleeping rough. Some of the structural reasons given for youth homelessness include unemployment, poverty and lack of affordable housing. The link between physical and sexual abuse of children and young people and homelessness was also noted. Cites a Salvation Army study that revealed that just under 50 percent of homeless youth had been wards of the State. The *Report of the National Inquiry into Homeless Children* in 1989, known as the Burdekin Report, "criticized the States and Territories for failure to exercise their responsibilities toward their charges, and for effectively abandoning them once they leave care". It was also noted that these criticisms were echoed in a study from the University of New South Wales Social Policy Research Centre, which commented on the paucity of programs to assist young people leaving care.

**Boulainne, Louise 1991 *Prévention de l'itinérance auprès des jeunes issus des centres de réadaptation pour jeunes en difficulté*, Conseil de la santé et des services sociaux de la région de Montréal métropolitain, Montréal**

Analysis of issues and proposal of measures to prevent homelessness of youth coming out of the child welfare system.

## **5. Pertinent studies not obtained**

Bell Canada Child Welfare Research Unit. Includes pdf proceedings of the *Canadian Roundtable on Child Welfare Outcomes* March 19 & 20, 1998. <http://www.canadachildwelfareresearch.org/>

Barth, R.P. 1990. On their own: the experiences of youth after foster care. *Child and Adolescent Social Work*. 7(5), 419-438. A study of 55 former foster care youths in the San Francisco Bay Area. This sample of former foster youth was found to be struggling with ill health, poor education, severe housing problems, substance abuse and criminal behaviour.

Cook, R. and D. Ansell. 1986. *Independent living services for youth in substitute care*. Rockville, MD: Westat.

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

Crystal, S. 1984. Homeless men and homeless women: The gender gap. *Urban and Social Change Review*. 17(2) 2-6.

Knickman, J. and C. Weitzman. 1989. *A Study of Homeless Families in New York City: Risk Assessment Models and Strategies*. Health Research Program, New York University, New York City, Monograph, Vol. 1.

Owen, G. J. Heineman & Decker. 1992. *Homelessness in Minnesota: Homeless Adults and Their Children – Final Report*. Wilder Research Center, Monograph 1992.

Piliavin, I., R. Matsueda, M. Soisin and H. Westerfelt. 1990. The Duration of Homeless Careers: An exploratory Study. *Social Service Review*.

Soisin, M. I. Piliavin, and H. Westerfelt. 1990. Toward a longitudinal analysis of homelessness. *Journal of Social Issues*. 46(4) 157-174.

Soisin, M., P. Colson, and S. Grossman. 1988. *Homelessness in Chicago: Poverty and pathology, social institutions, and social change*. Chicago: University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration.

Susser, E, S. Lin, S. Conover, and E. Streuning. 1991. Childhood antecedents of homelessness in psychiatric patients. *American Journal of Psychiatry*. 148, 1026-1030.

Susser, E. E., Struening, and S. Conover. 1987. Childhood experiences of homeless men. *American Journal of Psychiatry*. 144(12) 1589-1601

Hardwick, N. Asleep on the Streets. *Social Work Today*, 5 July 1990. A brief article on homeless teenagers.

Partridge, A. *Young People Leaving Care in Oxford*, Oxfordshire County Council, May 1989. Study commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council. Interviews with 24 young people and adults providing services to them.

Stein, M and K. Carey. 1986. *Leaving Care*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell. An enquiry into the experiences and problems of care leavers based on a series of interviews over a 2 year period with 45 young people in Wakefield.

## **14. Appendix B Review Committee Members**

Lynda Manser, National Director, National Youth In Care Network (Ottawa)

Jonathon Thompson, Director of Social Development, Assembly of First Nations (Ottawa)

Linda Blackmore, President, Canadian Foster Family Assoc. (NB)

Alfred Gay, Policy Analyst, National Assoc. Friendship Centres (Ottawa)

Sylvia Novac, Research Associate, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto

## **15. Appendix C Key Informants**

Jordan Ann Alderman, Canadian Youth in Care Network, Ottawa

Amanda Allard, Policy Officer, National Children's Charities, United Kingdom

Nicola Bacon, Safe in the City, London, UK

Linda Blackmore, President, Canadian Foster Parent Association, New Brunswick

Mark Brangwyn, Association of London Governments, UK

Sarah Chilton, Policy and Research, Centrepoint, London, UK

Ruth D'Acosta, Executive Director, Covenant House, Toronto

Irwin Elman, Pape Adolescent Resource Centre, Toronto

Ellie Lewis, Policy and Research, Centrepoint, London, UK

Sister Paulette LoMonaco, Executive Director, Good Shepard Services, New York City, NY, USA

Varda Mann-Feder, Department of Applied Human Sciences, Concordia University and Batshaw Youth and Family Services

Greg Michaelidis, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD

Sylvia Novac, Research Associate, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto

Irving Piliavin, Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA

Deborah Rutman, Research Associate, Research Initiatives for Social Change School of Social Work, University of Victoria

Jennifer Sinclair, National Aboriginal Women's Assn, Ottawa

Nico Trocme, Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

Family Court Judge, Ontario

## 16. Appendix D Tables Youth Interviewed: had been homeless

### 16.1 Family background

**Table: 12 Who raised you?**

Youth who have been homeless	Mother & father	Mother	Father	Parent(s) & relatives	Parent & step-parent	Relatives	Parent(s) & foster parents/ group homes	Parents / Foster parents / group homes / relatives	Foster parents	Total
Never in care	1	3	1	3	1	1	NA	NA	NA	10
In care	2	4	1	2	1		3	1	2	16

### 16.2 Running away and being thrown out

**Table: 13 Have you ever run away from home or have your parent(s) ever thrown you out of home?<sup>124</sup>**

	Ran away	Thrown out	Both	Neither	Total
Never in care	1	3	4	2	10
Has been in care	3	2	4	7	16

*(Youth in care only) Have you ever run away or been thrown out of a placement?*

Ran away only	2		2	3	7
Thrown out only		1			1
Both				3	3
Neither	1	1	2	1	5
Total	3	2	4	7	16

**Table: 14 How old were you when you first ran away or were thrown out?**

Age first ran away/thrown out	Has been homeless Never in care	Has been homeless In care
10 years or under	1	3
11 to 13 years	4	4
14 to 16 years	1	6

<sup>124</sup> As mentioned in section 8, the responses that youth give to the questions are usually entered as such, given that they reflect the youth's perception of events. However, while one youth referred to the first time he was thrown out when speaking of going into care (and therefore not considered as such) but also indicated that he had been thrown out another time and, because he also run away, is counted as "both" in the table. Another youth, who also answered "yes" to being thrown out by parents, was referring to an occurrence when he was five years old and his father threw his mother out of the home, along with the child. Because the gesture concerned the mother primarily, this was entered as a "no" in the tables. Finally, one youth stated that he had never run away, but answered a preceding question by speaking of being told he had to leave a group home because he had run away so often. He was considered as having run away.

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

over 17 years	2	1
NA		1
Total	8	15

**Table: 15 How many times have you run away and/or been thrown out?**

Number of times	Ran away		Was thrown out	
	Has been homeless Never in care	Has been homeless In care	Has been homeless Never in care	Has been homeless In care
Never	5	3	3	6
1 – 5 times (or “a few”)	3	5	5	8
6 – 10 times	0	1	0	0
Over 10 (or “many”, “numerous” )	2	7	2	2
Total	10	16	10	16

**Table: 16 Where did you stay after running away or being thrown out?**

	Has been homeless Never in care	Has been homeless In care
• With parent(s)	2	3
• With family member(s)	6	2
• With friend(s)	7	12
• On the street/shelter	8	7
• Other	3*	2**
• Total who had run away/been thrown out	8	15

Multiple responses for youth who ran away or were thrown out more than once

\* Includes jail, apartment, room

\*\* Includes group home, “into care”

### 16.3 Current housing situation

**Table: 17 Where do you live right now?**

	On the street	Transition housing / shelter	Shared apartment / house	Own apartment	Room	Won't say	Total
Has been homeless Never in care	1	5	1	1	1	1	10
Has been homeless In care	0	8	5	2	1	0	16



**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

**Table: 18 How long have you been there?**

	Less 6 months	6 months - 1 year	1-2 years	NA/ no response	Total
Has been homeless Never in care	8	1	1		10
Has been homeless In care	10	4	1	1	16

**Table: 19 Do you think you'll stay on much longer?**

	No	Yes	Don't know	Total
Has been homeless Never in care	6	3	1	10
Has been homeless In care	7	6	3	16

**Table: 20 If no or don't know, where will you go (or hope to go)?**

	Into an apartment	Into a hotel	Street	Don't know / no answer	Total
Has been homeless Never in care	2	1		4	7
Has been homeless In care	4		1	5	10

## 16.4 Work and survival

**Table: 21 Are you working right now?**

	Yes	No	Total
Has been homeless Never in care	2	8	10
Has been homeless In care	9	6	16

**Table: 22 If working, how long have you been there?**

	Less than 6 months	6 months to 1 year	More than 1 year	NA	Total
Has been homeless Never in care	2	0			2
Has been homeless In care	2	2	3	1	9

## 16.5 Education and school

**Table: 23 What was the last year of school that you completed?**

Had been homeless Never in care	Did not complete High School	Completed High School	Some college or university	Total
	8	1	1	10

**Are you in school now?**

Yes:	2			2
------	---	--	--	---

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

No:	6	1	1	8
<b>If no, do you plan to go back?</b>				
Yes:	5	1	1	5
No:	1			3
Total	6	1	1	8

*What was the last year of school that you completed?*

<b>Had been homeless and in care</b>	Did not complete High School	Completed High School	Some college or university	Total
		11	4	1

**Are you in school now?**

Yes:	2	1	1	4
No:	9	3		12
<b>If no, do you plan to go back?</b>				
Yes:	7	2		9
No:	2	1		3

## 16.6 Relationships and social contacts

**Table: 24 In the last six months has been in touch with:**

	Parent(s)	Siblings (where applicable)	Other relatives	Childhood friends	Others
<b>Has been homeless Never in care N= 10</b>	9	6	5	6	6
<b>Has been homeless and in care N = 16</b>	14	11	12	8	9

## 17. Appendix E: Youth interviewed: have been in care

### 17.1 Youth in care: Going into care and family background

**Table: 25 Experience of care**

**Has been in care & never homeless**

	Less than 1 year old	1-5 years old	6-10 years old	11-15 years old	Over 15 years	Total
<i>Age first contact with care</i>		2	4	3	1	10

*Number of placements/homes before 18 years*

1 to 3		1	2	2	1	6
4 to 5		1	2			3
6 to 10						
Over 10				1		1
<b>Total</b>		2	4	3	1	10

*Back to parent(s) before 18*

		1	2	2	1	6
--	--	---	---	---	---	---

*Left care before 18*

		1		1		2
--	--	---	--	---	--	---

**Has been in care & homeless**

	Less than 1 year old	1-5 years old	6-10 years old	11-15 years old	Over 15 years	Total
<i>Age of first contact with care</i>	1	3	7	5	1	16

*Number of placements/homes before 18 years*

1 to 3		2	1		1	4
4 to 5		1	2			3
6 to 10			3	3		6
Over 10	1		1	1		3
<b>Total</b>	1	3	7	5	1	16

*Back to parent(s) before 18*

	1	3	6	2		12
--	---	---	---	---	--	----

*Left care before 18*

		2	3	2		7
--	--	---	---	---	--	---

**Table: 26 How many social workers did you have?**

Number of social workers	1 to 5	6 to 10	Over 10	Total
--------------------------	--------	---------	---------	-------

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

Has been in care & never homeless	7	1	2	10
Has been in care & homeless	12	1	3	16

**Table: 27 Type of placement**

	Group home / residential facility	Foster family	Both	Total
Has been in care & never homeless	3	6	1	10
Has been in care & homeless	6	5	5	16

**Table: 28 Who raised you?**

	Mother & father	Mother	Father	Parent(s) & relatives	Parent & step-parent	Relatives	Parent(s) & foster parents / group homes	Parents / Foster parents / group homes / relatives	Foster parents	Total
Has been in care & never homeless	1	2		1			3	1	2	10
Has been in care & homeless	2	4	1	2	1		3	1	2	16

## 17.2 Youth in care: Running away and being thrown out

**Table: 29 Have you ever run away from home or have your parent(s) ever thrown you out of home?**

	Ran away only	Thrown out only	Both	Neither	Total
Has been in care & never homeless	2	0	1	7	10

*Have you ever run away or been thrown out of a placement?*

Ran away only	1			3	4
Thrown out only					
Both					
Neither	1		1	4	6
Total	3	0	1	7	10

*Have you ever run away from home or have your parent(s) ever thrown you out of home?*

	Ran away only	Thrown out only	Both	Neither	Total
Has been in care & homeless	3	2	4	7	16

*Have you ever run away or been thrown out of a placement?*

Ran away only	2		2	3	7
---------------	---	--	---	---	---

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

Thrown out only		1			1
Both				3	3
Neither	1	1	2	1	5
Total	3	2	4	7	16

**Table: 30 How old were you when you first ran away or were thrown out?**

Age first ran away/thrown out	Has been in care & never homeless	Has been in care & homeless
10 years or under	2	3
11 to 13 years	3	4
14 to 16 years		6
over 17 years		1
NA	1	1
Total	6	15

**Table: 31 How many times have you run away and/or been thrown out?**

Number of times:	Ran away		Was thrown out	
	Has been in care & never homeless	Has been in care & homeless	Has been in care & never homeless	Has been in care & homeless
Never	4	3	9	6
1 – 5 times (or “a few”)	2	5		8
6 – 10 times	0	1	1	0
Over 10 (or “many”, “numerous” )	4	7		2
Total	10	16	1	16

**Table: 32 Where did you stay after running away or being thrown out?**

	Has been in care & never homeless	Has been in care & homeless
• With parent(s)	2	3
• With family member(s)	2	4
• With friend(s)	4	6
• On the street	1	1
• Other (drug dealer)	1	
• Into care		1
Total (ran away or thrown out)	6	15

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

\*Multiple responses for youth who ran away or were thrown out more than once

### 17.3 Youth in care: Current housing situation

**Table: 33 Where do you live right now?**

	Transition housing / shelter	Shared apartment / house	Own apartment	Room	With family (including foster family)	Total
Has been in care & never homeless	0	0	5	3	2	10
Has been in care & homeless	8	5	2	1	0	16

**Table: 34 How long have you been there?**

	Less 6 months	6 months - 1 year	1-2 years	Over 2 years	NA/ no response	Total
Has been in care & never homeless	3	1	2	4		10
Has been in care & homeless	10	4	1		1	16

**Table: 35 Do you think you'll stay on much longer?**

	No	Yes	Don't know	Total
Has been in care & never homeless	4	3	3	10
Has been in care & homeless	7	6	3	16

**Table: 36 If no or don't know, where will you go (or hope to go)?**

	Into an apartment	Street	Moving in with roommate	Moving in with boyfriend	Don't know / no answer	Total
Has been in care & never homeless			2	3	2	7
Has been in care & homeless	4	1			5	10

### 17.4 Youth in care: Work and survival

**Table: 37 Are you working right now?**

	Yes	No	Total
Has been in care & never homeless	9	1	10
Has been in care & homeless	9	6	16

**Table: 38 If working, how long have you been there?**

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

	Less than 6 months	6 months to 1 year	More than 1 year	NA	Total
<b>Has been in care &amp; never homeless</b>	1	5	1	2	9
<b>Has been in care &amp; homeless</b>	2	2	3	2	9

## 17.5 Youth in care: Education and school

**Table: 39 Education and school**

### Has been in care & never homeless

*What was the last year of school that you completed?*

	Did not complete High School	Completed High School	Some/ completed college or university	Technical training (HS not completed)	NA	Total
	1	2	5	1	1	10

### Are you in school now?

Yes:		1	2	1	1	5
No:	1	1	3			5

### If no, do you plan to go back?

Yes:	1	1	3			5
No:						

### Has been in care & homeless

**What was the last year of school that you completed?**

	Did not complete High School	Completed High School	Some college or university	Total
	11	4	1	16

### Are you in school now?

Yes:	2	1	1	4
No:	9	3		12

### If no, do you plan to go back?

Yes:	7	2		9
No:	2	1		3

## 17.6 Youth in care: Relationships and social contacts

**Table: 40 In the last six months has been in touch with:**

	Parent(s)	Siblings (where applicable)	Other relatives	Childhood friends	Foster parent / social worker/etc	Others
<b>Has been in care &amp; never homeless N=10</b>	7	9	8	9	9	5
<b>Has been in care &amp; homeless</b>	14	11	12	8	9	9

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

N=16						
------	--	--	--	--	--	--



## 18. Appendix F Youth Interviewed: Over and Under 21 years

**Table: 41 Distribution by group**

Distribution	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total
Over 21	2	5	7
21 and under	8	11	19
Total	10	16	26

**Table: 42 Current housing situation**

	Over 21			21 and under		
	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total
shelter/ transitional housing	1	3	4	4	5	9
own apartment		1	1	1	1	2
sharing apartment				1	5	6
room		1	1	1		
street				1		
NA/won't say	1		1			
<i>total</i>	2	5 <i>100%</i>	7	8	11	19

**Table: 43 How long have you lived there?**

	Over 21			21 and under		
	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total
Less than 6 months	1	3	4	7	7	14
6 months to 1 year	1	1	2		3	3
1-2 years				1	1	2
Over 2 years						
NA		1	1			
<i>total</i>	2	5	7	8	11	19

**Table: 44 Do you plan to stay?**

	Over 21			21 and under		
	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

	care	in care		care	in care	
Yes		2	2	3	4	7
No	1	2	3	5	5	10
Don't know	1	1	2		2	2
<i>total</i>	2	5	7	8	11	19

**Table: 45 Last year of school completed**

	Over 21			21 and under		
	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total
Did not complete high school	1	2	3	7	9	16
High school completed		3	3	1	1	2
Some college / university	1		1		1	1
<i>total</i>	2	5	7	8	11	19

**Table: 46 Are you in school now?**

	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total
Yes		1	1	2	3	5
No	2	4	6	6	8	14
<i>total</i>	2	5	7	8	11	19

**Table: 47 If not in school, do you plan to go back?**

	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total
Yes	2	4	6	6	6	12
No					1	1
Don't know					1	1
<i>total</i>	2	4	6	6	8	14

**Table: 48 Currently working**

	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total	Homeless Never in care	Homeless Had been in care	Total
Yes		4	4	2	6	8

***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

No	2	1	3	6	5	11
<i>total</i>	2	5	7	8	11	19

## **19. Appendix E: Consent forms and Interview Guides**

### **Consent form**

#### **Read out by the interviewer**

I understand that I have agreed to participate in a research project conducted by < organisation(s)> for Human Resource Development Canada. The purpose of this research is to find out about youth homelessness and the possible links to the child welfare system.

- My participation in this study is voluntary and will consist of an interview.
- I can stop the interview at any time
- My interview will be kept confidential and my identity will not be disclosed.
- I may use a made-up name if I wish.
- For my participation I will receive \$30. (Vancouver \$20 plus interviewer buy them lunch, dinner, snack etc. =\$10)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Witness \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

---

### **Draft Questionnaire Youth interviews**

Interviewer notes

Date:

Gender:

Identification (Number or pseudonym)

#### *Introduction*

This is a study being carried out in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal on young persons who are or have been homeless or have been through the child welfare system. The interview will take about two hours and deals with questions about your past experiences and your life right now. All the questions will be treated in utmost confidentiality; your real name will not be used.

Do you have any questions about this?

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

**TO BE FILLED OUT BY ALL:**

1. In what year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your first language/mother tongue? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is your ethnic/cultural background? (*For example: Canadian, aboriginal*)  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Where were your parents born? \_\_\_\_\_
6. *If aboriginal*, were your parents in a residential school?  

No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, both	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, mother only	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, father only	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. How long have you lived in < city >? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What was the last year of school that you completed? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Who raised you (*for example, mother, father, both, grandmother, aunt, uncle, foster parent, etc.*)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Do you have any brothers or sisters?  

No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>

*If yes, how many?*  
Brothers \_\_\_\_\_  
Sisters \_\_\_\_\_  
Did they grow up in the same household as you?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. How would you describe your family's economic situation?  

Fairly comfortable - we could afford most things we wanted.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comfortable – we could afford everything we need but not more.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not very comfortable – we sometimes had problems with money.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not comfortable –we always had money problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

**INTERVIEW I: YOUTH WHO HAVE BEEN HOMELESS / NEVER IN CARE**

1. What were the best things about growing up in your family?
2. What were the worst things about growing up in your family?

**Separation from the family**

3. Have you ever run away from home?

No  Go to Q.4

Yes

- If yes, how many times? \_\_\_\_\_
- How old were you the first time you ran away? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What led you to run away?
- Where did you go?

4. Did your parent(s)/guardian ever throw you out of home?

No

Yes

- If yes, how many times? \_\_\_\_\_
  - How old were you when this happened the first time? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What led to them throwing you out?
  - Where did you go?

5. If yes to Q.3 or 4 Did you go back home?

No  Go to Q.6

Yes

- If yes, how long after leaving?
  - What happened to make you go back?
6. What was the longest time you were ever gone from home?
  7. Since the first time that you left home, tell me about all the places where you have lived.
    - Where?
    - With whom?
    - How long each time?
    - Why did you move away?

8. Have you ever found yourself without a place to spend the night?

No  Go to Q.9

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

Yes

- If yes, what did you do?
- What would have prevented you from being in that situation?

**Social Contacts**

9. Have you been in touch with your mother or father in the last six months?

No

Yes

- If no, how do you feel about this?
- If yes, who are you in touch with?
  - How often do you see them?
  - How do you get along with him/her/them?
  - Do they help you? How?

Where applicable:

10. Have you been in touch with your brother(s) or sister(s) in the last six months?

No

Yes

- If no, how do you feel about this?
- If yes, who?
  - How often do you see them?
  - How do you get along with him/her/them?
  - Do they help you? How?

11. Are you in touch with any other relatives in the last six months?

No

Yes

- If no, how do you feel about this?
- If yes, who?
  - How often do you see them?
  - How well do you get along with them?
  - Do they help you? How?

12. Have you been in touch with friends you grew up with in the last six months??

No

Yes

- If no, how do you feel about this?
- If yes, who?
  - How often do you see them?
  - How well do you get along with them?
  - Do they help you? How?

**Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada**

13. Is there any one else you keep in touch with on a regular basis?

No  Go to Q.14

Yes

- If yes, who?
  - How often do you see them?
  - How well do you get along with them?
  - Do they help you? How?

14. Who do you consider to be your friends now?

- Where did you meet them?
- How do they help you?

**School**

15. Are you in school now?

No

Yes

- If yes, how is it going in school?
- If no, do you think you'd like to go back to school? Why?
  - What were the biggest problems for you at school?
  - What do you think would have helped at the time?

**Work**

16. How do you survive?

- Do you have a job?

No

Yes

- If yes, what do you do?
  - How long have you been working there?
  - Do you think you'd like to keep doing this work?
  - How much do you earn?
- If no, have you tried looking for work?
  - What kind of difficulties did you have with finding work?
- Do you receive income assistance?

No

Yes

- If so, from where and how much do you receive?
- Do you have enough to pay for your necessities (food, shelter, clothing, entertainment)?

**Living situation**

17. Where do you live right now?

- Do you live alone? If no, whom are you living/staying with?
- How long have you been there?
- Do you think you'll stay on much longer?



***Pilot Project: The possible link between the Child Welfare System and Youth Homelessness in Canada***

No

Yes

- If no, why?
  - Where will you go?
  - Is it hard to find a place to live? Why?
18. What do you think is the best thing about your life right now?
19. What do you think is the worst/most challenging?
20. What do you think would help you the most right now? (What would help to make more of the good things happen?)

**INTERVIEW II– YOUTH WHO HAVE BEEN IN CARE (HAVE BEEN HOMELESS OR NOT)**

1. What were the best things about growing up in your family?
2. What were the worst things about growing up in your family?

**Contact with care system**

3. How old do you remember being when you first had contact with the child welfare system?
  - Do you remember what were the circumstances that caused them to contact you?
  - What happened at that point? (social worker began to visit, placed somewhere else)
4. If not placed in care right away, do you remember how old you were when you were placed in care?
5. Where were you placed? (i.e. foster home, group home or institutional environment)
  - How long were you there?
6. You've lived in how many places since that first placement? Tell me about these.
  - If aboriginal, were these aboriginal families or organisations?
7. Did you have the same social worker/child care worker during all this time?

No

Yes

- If no, do you remember how many you had?
8. What was the best thing in your life during this time?
  9. What was the hardest part of this time in your life?
  10. What might have helped you during this time?
  11. Were there any conflicts with foster parents/guardians?

**Exiting care**

12. How old were you when you left care?
  - What led to your leaving care?
  - Was this departure planned? In what way?
  - Were you still in school?
  - Where did you stay immediately after you left?
  - What helped you to be prepared to live on your own?
  - Did you receive help with finding a place to live?
  - Did you receive help with paying rent?
  - Who helped you?
  - What else would have helped you at that time?
  - What was your source of income?

**19.1 Separation from the family/care**

13. Have you ever run away from home/a placement?

No  Go to Q.14

Yes

- If yes, how many times?
  - How old were you the first time you ran away?
  - What led you to run away?

- Where did you go?

14. Did your parent(s)/guardian(s) ever throw you out?

No

Yes

- If yes, how many times?
  - How old were you when this happened the first time?
  - What led to them throwing you out?
  - Where did you go?

15. If yes Q.13 or 14 Did you go back?

No

Yes

- If yes, how long after leaving?
  - What happened to make you go back?
- What was the longest time you were ever gone from your guardians?

16. Since the first time you left home, tell me about all the places where you have lived.

- Where?
- With whom?
- How long each time?
- Why did you move away?

17. Have you ever found yourself without a place to spend the night?

No

Yes

- If yes, what did you do?
- What would have prevented you from being in that situation?

**Social Contacts**

18. Have you been in touch with your mother or father in the last six months?

No

Yes

- If no, how do you feel about this?
- If yes, who are you in touch with?
  - How often do you see them?
  - How do you get along with him/her/them?
  - Do they help you? How?

Where applicable:

19. Have you been in touch with your brother(s) or sister(s) in the last six months?

No

Yes

- If no, how do you feel about this?
- If yes, who?
  - How often do you see them?
  - How do you get along with him/her/them?
  - Do they help you? How?

20. Have you been in touch with any other relatives in the last six months?

No

Yes

- If no, how do you feel about this?
- If yes, who?
  - How often do you see them?
  - How do you get along with him/her/them?
  - Do they help you? How?

21. Have you been in touch with any child welfare persons/workers (e.g., foster parent or social worker) in the last six months?

No

Yes

- If no, how do you feel about this?
- If yes, who?
  - How often do you see them?
  - How do you get along with him/her/them?
  - Do they help you? How?

21. Have you been in touch with friends you grew up with in the last six months?

No

Yes

- If no, how do you feel about this?
- If yes, who?
  - How often do you see them?
  - How well do you get along with them?
  - Do they help you? How?

22. Is there any one else you keep in touch with on a regular basis?

No  Go to Q.23

Yes

- If yes, who?

- How often do you see them?
- How well do you get along with them?
- Do they help you? How?

23. Who do you consider to be your friends now?

- Where did you meet them?
- How do they help you?

*School*

24. Are you in school now?

No

Yes

- If yes, how is it going in school?
- If no, do you think you'd like to go back to school? Why?
  - What were the biggest problems for you at school?
  - What do you think would have helped at the time?

*Work*

25. How do you survive?

- Do you have a job?

No

Yes

- If yes, what do you do?
  - How long have you been working there?
  - Do you think you'd like to keep doing this work?
  - How much do you earn?

- If no, have you tried looking for work?

No

Yes

- What kind of difficulties did you have with finding work?
- Do you receive income assistance)?
- If so, from where and how much do you receive?
- Do you have enough to pay for your necessities (food, shelter, clothing, entertainment)?

*Living situation*

26. Where do you live right now?

- Do you live alone? If no, whom are you living/staying with?
- How long have you been there?
- Do you think you'll stay on much longer?
  - If no, why?
  - Where will you go?
- Is it hard to find a place to live? Why?

27. What do you think is the best thing about your life right now?

28. What do you think is the worst/most challenging?

29. What do you think would help you the most right now? (What would help to make more of the good things happen?)