Youth Rights! Right Now!

Ending Youth Homelessness:
A HUMAN RIGHTS GUIDE

CANADA WITHOUT POVERTY
CANADA SANS PAUVRETÉ

A WAY HOME
VERS UN CHEZ-SOI
CANADA

About this guide

This guide was developed by Canada Without Poverty, in partnership with A Way Home Canada, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and FEANTSA (the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless). Funding was provided by Maytree and The Laidlaw Foundation.

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Youth Homelessness — the Big Picture

Youth homelessness is a pressing issue worldwide that requires urgent attention.

The European Observatory on Homelessness has called the increase in homeless youth across Europe the most striking trend in homeless demographics. The Department of Justice in the US estimates over 1.9 million teens experience homelessness in the US each year (Bardine et al., 2014). In Canada, approximately 35,000 youth are homeless annually (Gaetz, 2014), while UK sources report at least 83,000 youth were homeless in the UK in 2014 (Clarke et al., 2015).

Consider this:

An American study found one quarter of youth with criminal convictions to be homeless within a year of being released, while in England **nearly 70% of youth without a home reoffend within 2 years.**[1]

A report from Australia stated that **42% of Indigenous persons who are homeless are under 18.**[2]

In Australia, **refugee youth** are six to ten times more likely to experience homelessness.[3]

In Brazil 72% of street children are **boys between the ages of 12-17.**[4]

In Canada, the US and the UK, between **20-40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ2S.**[567]

A snapshot survey showed **more than 50% of homeless youth across Canada experience mental health issues.** 75% of these youth are unable to access adequate housing as a result.[8]

Indigenous youth are overrepresented in homeless populations – in Vancouver, Canada **30% of homeless youth are Indigenous.**[9]

The numbers are stark and the United Nations has taken notice. In her most recent report, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing has challenged governments across the globe to make the elimination of homelessness a top human rights priority with particular attention on youth. This call to action couldn't have come sooner for the youth of the world, who today face record-high unemployment, insurmountable education costs, harsh austerity measures, and increasing economic inequality – conditions that propel homelessness among young people.

Youth homelessness: it's not the same for everyone

The experiences of homeless youth are distinct. Unlike homeless adults, youth who leave home are leaving relationships based on social dependence – a parent or guardian – and suddenly must face the challenges of an adult before they have gained the skills or experience of adults.

We know from research that the longer we let young people become mired in homelessness, the more they are exposed to the risks of sexual and economic exploitation, the more likely they are to experience trauma, declining health, nutritional vulnerability and addictions (Boivin, Roy, Haley, & Gaulbaud du Fort, 2005). Once on the streets it is not long before young people become entrenched in the street youth lifestyle. The long term consequences are considerable, including:

- Increased risk of exploitation, violence, victimization, and physical and sexual abuse (Braitstein et al., 2003).
- Greater involvement with the police and the justice system (Baron, 2013).
- Disengagement from school and difficulty obtaining employment (Gaetz, 2014).
- Stress, depression, anxiety disorders and suicide (Kidd, 2004).
- Increased use of substances to cope (Barnaby, Penn, & Erikson, 2010).

All of this highlights the urgency of doing what we can to both prevent young people from becoming homeless in the first place and for those who do become homeless, ensure that the experience is short and their last.

Certain populations of youth are particularly vulnerable to homelessness and have distinctive experiences of homelessness:

LGBTQ2S youth (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and 2-spirited). The little data that exists is troubling, pointing to a growing group of homeless youth that face discrimination based on their sex or gender identity.

Youth fleeing violence and abuse in their households. Abuse in the home has pushed 61% of young females who are homeless onto the streets.[10]

Newcomer youth. Cultural isolation, language barriers, employment setbacks, family tension and stress – newcomer youth face a number of hurdles.

Youth exiting care. Once deemed an adult, youth "age out" of the government support system, which removes access to pre-existing supports, such as education, funding and housing.

Indigenous youth. Due to a history of colonization and cultural discrimination, Indigenous youth are vastly overrepresented in homeless populations.

Youth with experience in the criminal justice system. Access to stable housing can be a key factor in success, but adequate housing and outside supports (employment, financial help) are too often unavailable.

Youth with mental health issues. A majority of homeless youth face mental health challenges, adding additional risks and obstacles to an already difficult experience.

Specific "at-risk" groups of youth are more susceptible to homelessness, which means they may have experienced a range of human rights violations leading up to, and whilst being, homeless. Placed within a larger socially constructed group of "the homeless", youth become subject to broader discrimination, safety concerns, and a complexity of intersecting emotional and physical challenges. When creating a plan to address youth homelessness, this more general experience of homelessness must be considered alongside the particular causes and experiences of youth homelessness.

Rights in Action!

Groups in Canada that have been successful in understanding their local context have brought together a variety of stakeholders – including representatives from government, local service providers, housing counterparts, members from the business community, as well as homeless youth. The result is that many communities across the country have developed and implemented plans to end youth homelessness that incorporate the needs of homeless youth while examining areas of prevention and systemic causes.

This Guide is for You

Despite the enormity of the problem, important work is being done at national, regional and community levels around the world to prevent and address youth homelessness.

Every day dedicated policymakers, educators, social workers, volunteers and young people are improving the lives of homeless youth. To help with this important work, this guide brings human rights to the forefront of decision making with an aim to assist in the identification of systemic causes of homelessness and human rights solutions.

This Guide is for YOU:

- A NATIONAL POLICYMAKER developing a national strategy to end youth homelessness.

- A MEMBER OF AN ADVISORY BOARD developing a community plan for youth homelessness.

- A YOUNG PERSON AT RISK OF OR EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS with a desire to engage in developing strategies to address it.

- A SOCIAL WORKER at a local shelter or refuge for homeless youth.

- A MEMBER OF A BAND COUNCIL directing efforts to end homelessness in your community.

The Strength of a Human Rights Approach

A human rights framework can ensure that the stakeholders involved in this vital work are better equipped to tackle homelessness.

Inclusion and a participatory approach to decision-making place those directly affected at the table with decision-makers, while a focus on accountability and accessing remedies helps to distinguish roles and responsibilities. This approach also ties in discrimination, government resources and service capacity, and addresses immediate needs while targeting structural causes. Most importantly, it fundamentally changes the way youth homelessness is understood – recognizing it is not simply a result of individual circumstance, but of systemic patterns of inequality, exclusion and neglect and of a failure of states to act on their responsibilities as human rights protectors.

"Too often being homeless is considered a personal and moral failing, when it's actually a structural and political problem." Leilani Farha, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing

Youth and human rights

A human rights approach embraces the idea that all young people have a fundamental, legal right to be free of homelessness and to have access to adequate housing.

National level governments ratify international human rights treaties and report on compliance to international human rights bodies, but all levels of governments are required to comply with ratified treaties. In fact, the implementation of these commitments often happens at the ground level through policies, programs, community services and with support from local officials.

Human rights are everyone's responsibility.

Youth who are homeless face incredible barriers to accessing services, securing safe and affordable housing and claiming rights:

- A landlord turns away a young person on the basis that they don't have a long enough work history and no credit rating.

- A young person becomes homeless and is at best only offered crisis shelter and supports.

- A young person has no access to an LGBTQ2S friendly shelter.

- The city is developing a homelessness strategy and youth aren't involved.

- The police are sweeping city streets, rounding up homeless children and youth, issuing tickets or moving them to urban peripheries.

- A family has migrated to the city looking for economic opportunities but there are no adequate housing options. To get away from the overcrowded conditions and to help generate an income, the young family members are lured to the street.

In a human rights inspired setting each of these everyday occurrences is understood as a failure of human rights implementation requiring a remedy that recognizes the right of the individual to an adequate standard of living.

All human rights apply to youth, however the ones listed below are the most relevant:

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

- Right to an adequate standard of living
- Right to housing
- Right to food
- Right to work
- Right to education
- Right to health

CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

- Freedom of expression
- Right to life
- Right of access to justice
- Freedom of assembly
- Right to personal security and privacy

RIGHT TO FREEDOM FROM DISCRIMINATION & RIGHT TO EQUALITY

You may be aware of the right to housing but are not sure how to enforce it, or you might recognize that some of the tenets of human rights are present in your current strategy but you're unsure how a rights approach can be effective.

Born out of adversity

The history of human rights speaks to their strength and purpose. In the aftermath of the devastation caused by World War II, the global community responded to the atrocities and created an opportunity for humanity to be better – to encode a respect for dignity of all persons in the human family.

We are all equal as human beings and in human rights.

"Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible."
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Below are 7 reasons why you should consider using international human rights to address and eliminate youth homelessness:

IT TARGETS SYSTEMIC CAUSES.

Human rights require a paradigm shift, so that instead of creating laws to punish those who are homeless, these individuals must be recognized as equal in dignity and rights. Governments must address the systemic causes of homelessness, provide legal protections from discrimination and ensure access to adequate housing. Far too often, laws and policies to address homelessness simply reinforce patterns of exclusion and criminalization, often with a focus of minimizing public interactions with those who are homeless.

IT'S A MORAL AND LEGAL OBLIGATION.

The elimination of homelessness is a legal obligation binding on states that have ratified international human rights treaties such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

IT'S EMPOWERING.

Rights allow youth, as rights holders, to bring forward concerns unique to their community and demand that they be addressed as human rights issues. This helps youth experiencing homelessness feel respected and valued in their communities and in the decision-making process.

IT PUTS HOMELESS YOUTH FIRST.

A rights-based approach prioritizes those who are in the most desperate circumstances and addresses their needs on an urgent basis.

IT REQUIRES REMEDIES.

A human rights approach means that when violations occur, homeless youth can access justice to voice their concerns and find effective, genuine and accessible remedies by states and other actors.

IT CHANGES THE WAY DECISIONS ARE MADE.

By embracing human rights as a legal framework for policy and decision-making, governments and other actors are required to be mindful of the effects and consequences of every policy decision (including budgeting decisions or land allocation) for young persons' access to adequate housing.

IT'S AN EFFECTIVE TOOL.

A human rights approach prevents homelessness by coordinating programs and targeting policies that may perpetuate or support homelessness. It looks beyond the physical needs of homeless youth to their social and emotional needs by recognizing them as equal citizens with a right to dignity and full participation.

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Rights set the standard

International treaties outline concrete standards that governments must adhere to. Rights are derived from the idea that we all have inherent dignity that should be respected.

The rights of homeless youth are found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and in a number of international human rights treaties including:

- the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR);
- the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR);
- the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); and
- the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child lists the rights of every human being below the age of eighteen. It is the most widely ratified of all human rights treaties, having been ratified by every country in the world except one (the United States of America).

Often cited as the most important articulation of the right to housing, article 11.1 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights states:

> **Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child says:**
>
> States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement [the right to an adequate standard of living] and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

"The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent."

Responsibilities to protect and implement human rights are best understood when considering the principles that states agree to follow. **Respect, Protect and Fulfill**, speak to the overarching responsibilities of states to ensure rights are realized, while **Recognize, Institutionalize and Accountability**, provide guidance on *how to implement* rights.

RESPECT RIGHTS: a state cannot interfere with existing rights and must refrain from acting in a way that would restrict or infringe upon a right. *Example:* laws that prevent youth from enjoying public spaces	**RECOGNIZE RIGHTS:** states must take steps to recognize rights in laws and policies. *Example:* add the right to housing to the constitution or national/regional legislation
PROTECT RIGHTS: a state must intervene when a third party interferes with an individual's rights. *Example:* a landlord that discriminates against a youth because of their age or gender	**INSTITUTIONALIZE RIGHTS:** ensure institutions that monitor and implement human rights include economic and social rights. *Example:* create a mechanism in your regional/ national Human Rights Institution to monitor the right to housing
FULFIL RIGHTS: a state must take positive steps to ensure all human rights are fulfilled. *Example:* adopting a housing strategy that will ensure that youth have access to emergency housing immediately while setting goals and timelines for youth to access long-term housing	**ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RIGHTS:** ensure avenues for redress if violations occur. *Example:* courts, tribunals, ombudspersons or youth commissioners with authority to hear and review complaints

To simplify, rights can only be respected, protected and fulfilled when they are recognized in law, with institutions dedicated to ensuring the accountability of the state – both to the international community and to rights-holders themselves.

The examples outline how the responsibility to ensure the human rights of youth are not limited to the state, but rather touch on various sectors: the justice system, private sector, social services and public institutions.

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Putting Rights to Work

As a front-line worker at a youth shelter, social worker, national policymaker or youth involved in policy, you may already be using human rights.

For example, by ensuring that young people are engaged in decision-making in a community plan, you are embracing a human rights approach. It's an additional tool in your toolbox.

When planning a youth homelessness strategy or reviewing current strategies, there are several steps you can take to ensure human rights play a prominent role:

Step 1 - Find a Common Definition

Who do we mean by <u>youth</u>? As a category, the definition of "youth" is more fluid than a particular age group. It captures the period of time between the dependency of childhood and the independence gained as an adult. The United Nations Secretariat defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 – 24. **This range should be understood as flexible and adaptable to suit the needs of your community.**

A definition of youth homelessness has to recognize the vast range of experiences of homeless youth and the ways that homelessness can manifest in different circumstances. For some young people this can

Bring Rights Home!

Review existing policies that affect homeless youth. Considering human rights, examine whether any of these policies many perpetuate stigma against the homeless or criminalize them for meeting basic needs such as eating and sleeping.

mean living in a shelter, "rough" on the street, doubled up with friends or "couch surfing". But youth homelessness is more than a lack of walls and a roof.

Without a broad definition, you run the risk of distorting perceptions of who is homeless and otherwise overlooking the needs of vulnerable young people experiencing homelessness. As a young person stated in a consultation session "youth are very resourceful and can be hidden."

What elements does a comprehensive definition include? The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing outlined the following components that should be incorporated into a rights-based definition of homelessness:

ABSENCE OF A HOME.
Homelessness means the absence of a home both in the material sense and social sense. It means a lack of a safe and secure physical space, as well as a place to establish family and social relationships, and participate in community life.

HOMELESSNESS IS A FORM OF DISCRIMINATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION.
Beyond being deprived of a home, those who are homeless are forced into a socially constructed identity – a social group subject to discrimination, social exclusion, and in some cases, criminalization.

THOSE WHO ARE HOMELESS ARE RIGHTS HOLDERS.
Those who are homeless are rights holders resilient in the struggle for survival and dignity. While existing systems create violations of these rights, those who are homeless must be recognized as central agents of the social transformation necessary for the realization of human rights.

"Youth homelessness" refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence.

Youth homelessness is a complex social issue because as a society we have failed to provide young people and their families with the necessary and adequate supports that will enable them to move forward with their lives in a safe and planned way. In addition to experiencing economic deprivation and a lack of secure housing, many young people who are homelessness lack the personal experience of living independently and at the same time may be in the throes of significant developmental (social, physical, emotional and cognitive) changes. As a result, they may not have the resources, resilience, education, social supports or life skills necessary to foster a safe and nurturing transition to adulthood and independence. Few young people choose to be homeless, nor wish to be defined by their homelessness, and the experience is generally negative and stressful.

Youth homelessness is the denial of basic human rights and once identified as such, it must be remedied. All young people have the right to the essentials of life, including adequate housing, food, safety, education and justice.

- Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. (2016). *Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness.* Homeless Hub: www.homelesshub.ca/youthhomelessdefinition

Step 2 - Measuring Youth Homelessness

It can be challenging to measure homelessness among young people, particularly those who may be avoiding the severe repercussions associated with street life and are thus hidden; for example, those who are living temporarily with friends, trading sexual acts for housing or remain in a violent household for lack of alternative housing options.

How do you measure youth homelessness using a human rights approach? Along with quantitative data, such as point-in-time counts, online questionnaires, or shelter surveys, it is important to acquire a qualitative understanding of the needs and circumstances of youth homeless populations based in their experiences. This can be captured through oral testimony, photographs, videos or interviews with frontline workers.

Critical to this process will be to disaggregate, or break down, data to ensure that information gathered on marginalized groups, such as racialized youth, youth with mental health disabilities, and LGBTQ2S, can be considered.

TIP: involve young people directly in data collection and brainstorm innovative ways to reach the population. Tap into youth networks: find the social networks on which homeless youth rely and work within these channels to engage youth and share information.

Step 3 - Refer to Human Rights in Your Strategy

A youth homelessness strategy should explicitly refer to human rights and international human rights obligations. Practically, this can mean specifically naming obligations under particular UN treaties, concluding observations stemming from UN committees or general comments that speak to a specific right. Supportive government legislation or constitutional provisions that recognize human rights should also be referenced. This will help concretize a rights-based approach, help rights claimants identify how rights apply to them, open up avenues to access justice as well as ensure an element of accountability.

A fundamental aspect of a human rights approach, "naming rights" grounds youth homelessness firmly in the context of larger international obligations.

Rights in Action!

The Covenant House is an organization operating in 27 cities across North and South America including Toronto, Ontario and Vancouver, British Columbia. It recognizes the importance of basing homelessness prevention on the protection of the rights of children and youth, while making specific reference to adhering to human rights (such as: the right to a home, food, education, safety, and freedom from abuse and exploitation).

Step 4 - Human Rights Training

It is important to ensure that everyone involved in the plan understands human rights – from policy makers to frontline service providers to the youth themselves. As stated by a participant during the consultations with homeless youth, "change can only happen through education and being committed."

Step 5 - Include Youth in the Process

A human rights approach is not just about what goes into the youth homelessness strategy or community plan, it's also about how the plan or strategy is developed. Youth must be meaningfully engaged at every step of the process. This may be the single most critical aspect to a successful strategy.

As youth who are homeless face a number of challenges that inform their perspective it is important to be sensitive to these experiences. This could include trauma, death of loved ones, dislocation, disease, isolation, poverty, mental illness, domestic violence, child abuse or drug use. All consultations with youth must understand this multidimensional nature of homelessness, and must be conducted in a non-judgmental and anti-oppressive way, with minimal or no risk for the participant.

Here are a few general principles that should guide a consultation process:

Bring Rights Home!

How do you find human rights training programs? The first step is to contact a human rights organization in your community. Not sure who to connect with? You can reach out to Canada Without Poverty (www.cwp-csp.ca), A Way Home Canada (www.awayhome.ca) or FEANTSA (www.feantsa.org) to find out.

Rights in Action!

The Mockingbird Society's Youth Advocates Ending Homelessness program in Seattle involves the participation of over 100 youth aged 13-24 who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness. Youth participants are involved in multiple advocacy processes, in which they work collaboratively with the organization and community to develop strategies and recommendations to end and prevent youth homelessness.

BE ACTIVE AND INFORMED.

- Provide information in plain language about the process and its purpose. Content, language, exercises and all other aspects of consultations must be responsive to the individual circumstances of participants. Various reading and comprehension levels should be considered.

- Create a supportive, respectful, safe space for youth to actively contribute experiences, ideas and opinions.

- Ensure youth are active in the decision-making process, understand their role and how information will be used.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT MUST OCCUR AT ALL STAGES OF THE PROCESS.

- Understand that this is a long-term commitment to youth and the community.

- Create an opportunity for youth to identify goals, targets and priority issues at the outset of the process.

- Ensure youth participate in the implementation and monitoring of progress.

BE MEANINGFUL AND EFFECTIVE.

- Ensure the provision of necessary supports (reimbursement, compensation, accessibility, etc.) at events, forums and discussion groups.

- Create a space where youth feel valued, respected and empowered to participate.

Rights at Work!

Butterflies India works with vulnerable children, including street children. The organization holds children's participation in decision making processes as a core value of its work as a democratic organization, advocating for children's rights to be heard. Butterflies facilitates children's forums and consultations in the Children's Council in order to bring their views into important decision-making processes.

Rights in Action!

A multidisciplinary approach to treatment and programming offered by Casa-Alianza Mexico has been adopted in order to tackle the trauma that many migrant/refugee/unaccompanied youth have faced before arriving in Mexico. In addition, the organization's legal team helps newcomer youth acquire and secure the appropriate documentation and official forms needed to stay in Mexico, for example, as refugees. By ensuring that youth are granted a legal identity, Casa-Alianza is able to guarantee them access to social services, education and employment.

Bring Rights Home!

How do you overcome barriers to youth participation? Below are some practical take-away points to consider when engaging youth experiencing homelessness:

1. **Create a safe space and ensure consent.** Homeless youth are often living without a caregiver, making it difficult to find an adult who can consent for them to participate in research or public engagement. It falls on the facilitator of consultations to keep the best interests of the youth in mind, especially when they are under the age of consent.

2. **Provide adequate compensation.** Offer reimbursement of transportation, child care costs, monetary compensation to replace lost wages or gift cards, food and drink. Participants should be informed of compensation (or non-compensation) prior to the consultations. Compensation geared to homeless youth must be age appropriate, locally available and accessible, and appropriate to the needs that homeless youth may have.

3. **Offer a meal.** A meal can be a draw for youth, but don't just offer junk food – this can reinforce stigma and be viewed negatively. Food and drinks should be provided with consideration for age appropriateness and dietary needs.

4. **Acknowledge stress and trauma.** For many young people, violence can be both a cause and result of homelessness. In an American nation-wide study, 92% of youth reported experiencing emotional abuse, 84% experienced physical abuse and 39% experienced sexual abuse before leaving home. Violence is also a common experience for street-involved youth – the same study found that 55% of youth had witnessed a severe assault, 52% had been threatened with death or serious bodily harm and 52% had experienced a physical assault (Bender et al., 2014). Consultations must be structured in a way that minimizes distress, and should be mindful of possible triggers for homeless youth. Supports should be available to manage these triggers or resulting trauma.

5. **Ensure privacy and safety.** Young people living with their families, perhaps caring for younger siblings, may require additional protections of privacy for fear that disclosure of their situation will lead to removal from their families. Facilitators should be mindful of participants' wishes regarding information collected. Consent must be provided for photographs and participants must know the context in which the photographs will be used.

Step 6 - Set Goals

Human rights standards recognize "**progressive realization**" meaning that while some aspects of a plan may take time to implement (for example: building new housing), governments still have immediate obligations, for example to eliminate discrimination in the administration of programs and policies currently in place as well as repealing local laws that criminalize or stigmatize homeless youth. This is an important action-item. It also ensures there are no "regressive" steps – movements backwards, which deprive people of rights they previously enjoyed.

During this process consideration should be given to at-risk and disadvantaged groups. Targeted measures should also be undertaken to eliminate discrimination, and provide access to effective remedies.

A study of 187 cities in the US uncovered discriminatory practices against youth that criminalized survival behaviour:

- 53% of cities prohibited sitting or lying down

- 18% banned sleeping in public

National Law Centre on Homelessness and Poverty
https://www.nlchp.org/documents/No_Safe_Place

No Safe Place – report

Rights in Action!

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health offers several suggestions for improving the experiences of newcomer youth. Firstly, practicing Cultural Humility – listening and learning about personal realities, while acknowledging diversity and discouraging stereotyping. As a result, staff and other frontline workers gain a greater understanding of individuals' needs. This is alongside the implementation of anti-oppression and anti-racism measures, creating online resources to assist youth with navigating relevant laws, institutions, and systems, and developing multi-service agencies designed specifically to support newcomer youth.

Rights in Action!

The Forty to None Project has been undertaken by an American organization with the express goal of lowering the exceptionally high rate of homeless LGBTQ2S youth from 40% to zero across the country. It has established a network of members that work together to share relevant research, best practices, and facilitate collaboration between groups or individuals that might not otherwise work together.

What kind of immediate, short-term and long-term goals should you be considering in a youth homelessness strategy or community plan? Here are some examples to consider:

IMMEDIATE OBLIGATIONS

Steps that must be taken immediately:
- meeting basic and emergency needs – such as homeless shelters.
- prioritizing the needs of groups most vulnerable to homelessness and discrimination.

SHORT-TERM TARGETS

The plan should contain a set of tangible targets that can be met in the short term (from a few months to a few years). Such obligations could include:
- the completion and review of pilot programs which aim to achieve long-term goals.

LONG-TERM GOALS

The established timeline for the elimination of youth homelessness should be realistic in light of resources and other challenges, but it should also reflect the fact that eliminating youth homelessness – through both prevention and addressing existing homelessness – is a human rights imperative to be achieved without unreasonable delay.
- Goals should consider moving beyond efforts to reduce homelessness to a focus on "absolute zero" – effectively ending homelessness.

Step 7 - Make the Strategy a Budget Priority

Without proper resources, it becomes impossible for youth homelessness strategies or community plans to achieve their goals. A human rights approach requires governments to take positive action and set aside resources in their budgets for the purpose of preventing and addressing youth homelessness.

Maximum Available Resources – what does it mean? This means that "States" (i.e. government actors) must not ignore human rights obligations in favour of "budget constraints". This is especially true for wealthy countries. Governments must allocate resources in a manner that recognizes the central priority of human rights in order to satisfy their international human rights obligations.

Rights in Action!

The City of Toronto's 2015 budget provided $3.8 million in funding for shelters, which included funding for 54 new shelter beds for youth in the city and a new shelter designed specifically for the needs of LGBTQ2S youth.

Step 8 - Monitor and Report on Progress

Accountability is essential for a homelessness strategy to be successful. The rights of youth experiencing homelessness can only be realized if they have a way to hold governments and other key actors responsible for the effective implementation of any strategy. Regularly reporting on goals and benchmarks, demonstrating funding capacity in annual budgets, and offering an open and transparent process, helps to ensure progress is made. As numbers often only tell one side of the story, monitoring should involve checking in with youth and other stakeholders on an ongoing basis.

Monitoring should also assess the extent of criminalization and discrimination experienced by homeless youth. Data could be collected on the number of youth charged with begging, squeegeeing or sleeping in public places, or on government policies that are found to be discriminatory to assess progress toward the elimination of such practices.

Rights in Action!

The City of Kamloops in British Columbia, Canada, has a youth homelessness plan, which includes an external monitoring component by an independent Community Advisory Board. This board has members from diverse backgrounds: provincial government representatives, non-governmental organizations, Indigenous governments, housing and healthcare stakeholders, and youth who have experienced homelessness.

Bring Rights Home!

What are examples of effective monitoring mechanisms? Take-away points to consider:

1. An internal mechanism – like an ombudsperson – can be a useful way for local governments to review their own progress. It's important to stress that there's no weakness in admitting the shortcomings of a plan or its implementation.

2. An external mechanism – like an independent committee – is also necessary to provide fair and objective assessments of progress that can be shared with the public.

Both the internal and external mechanisms should review strategies periodically on a basis laid out clearly in the plan itself. Regardless of method chosen, monitoring bodies must hear from all stakeholders, including youth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and reporting should be done regularly and publicly.

Step 9 - Use the UN System to Push for Change at Home

If you are a young person experiencing homelessness, a front-line worker at an NGO or a part of an organization, did you know that you can access the UN to review your rights concerns? Here are some examples of how:

Civil society organizations and Indigenous organizations can participate in UN committee reviews of countries that have ratified particular treaties. This can involve filing written submissions or even attending the oral review in Geneva where organizations can make brief statements on the state of human rights back at home. It is also a rare chance to meet UN committee members to provide a broad picture of youth homelessness in your country or city. Based on the information received in the review, a UN Committee adopts "concluding observations," which include clear recommendations prescribing what governments need to do to comply with their human rights obligations. Governments are required to consider and respond to these recommendations in good faith, and courts are encouraged to consider them in relevant cases.

The United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is another process that can be helpful in the struggle for the rights of youth who are homeless. It involves a review of the human rights records of all 192 UN Member States once every four years under the auspices of the UN Human Rights Council: through which States review the human rights records of other States. The UPR process has provided new opportunities for civil society, Indigenous organizations and affected groups to provide relevant information and promote accountability.

Another possible avenue to pursue is through special procedures at the United Nations (i.e. UN Special Rapporteurs). The Special Rapporteurs are independent experts who offer a non-biased perspective on state action regarding alleged rights violations. They act as global watchdogs, undertake country missions to assess the implementation of human rights, and can advise on international standards. Perhaps the most notable Special Rapporteur related to youth homelessness is Leilani Farha, who is the current Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing. Her mandate began in June 2014 and could continue until 2020.

If you're a youth homelessness front-line worker and you see a systemic issue affecting homeless youth, you can write to her directly at srhousing@ohchr.org and request an intervention through her UN mandate.

Get Involved!

Learn how to join a Review of Human Rights at the International Level
http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/treaty/index.htm

Step 10 - Give People a Space to Claim Their Rights

Create an open, accessible and responsive complaints procedure for homeless youth and a space to accept information relevant to the human rights of youth.

Youth can document harassment in parks; clearances from pubic spaces; violence; sexual assaults and police harassment with videos and other means. Strategies should ensure that mechanisms are in place through which this documentation can be presented to officials and effective remedies provided. Data can also be shared with human rights commissions; court cases; ombudsman responses; social protests; legislative hearings and media in order to document whether youth are able to claim their rights and to assess the effectiveness of responses to violations of rights.

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checklist

Use the detailed checklist below to build, or adapt, a youth homelessness strategy so that it complies with international law and upholds the rights of youth who experience homelessness.

Your plan should:

- identify homeless youth, including those from marginalized groups;

- make explicit reference to human rights;

- provide human rights training to all relevant parties;

- consult homeless youth in every step of the process;

- commit to the principles of non-discrimination and equality;

- set immediate, short-term and long-term goals in terms of human rights;

- set goals for marginalized groups;

- be adequately resourced;

- engage with other levels of government and stakeholders;

- monitor progress according to a detailed strategy;

- establish both internal and external mechanisms of monitoring and review;

- provide a complaints procedure for individuals and groups.

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