

## Turning Off the Tap on Homelessness



### Context

For most of us, we have never had to worry about where we are going to sleep tonight. Maybe it isn't the newest place, the cleanest, the best located, but we've had a place to sleep and arrange our belongings in a way that makes us call it home. This is not the reality for many Canadians. Every night in Canada there are approximately 35,000 people experiencing homelessness, adding up to at least 235,000 every year<sup>1</sup>. Of the entire homeless population, over 40% had their first experience of homelessness before the age of 16 a time when most of us are getting our first driver's license and finishing up Grade 10. A shocking 76% of these youth have experienced multiple episodes of being homeless. Research shows that the younger youth are leaving home, the greater adversity and hardship they face<sup>2</sup>.

The reasons people become homeless are varying and complex, reflecting an interplay of relational factors, broader population based structural factors and public institutions creating vulnerability to homelessness. Each individual's situation is unique. These intersecting factors leading to homelessness include inadequate income, lack of access to affordable housing, lack of access to health supports (physical and mental), being a visible minority, inadequate discharge from child welfare,

hospitals, correctional facilities and mental health and addiction facilities, traumatic events, personal crises, domestic violence and many more<sup>3</sup>. With youth, the issues leading to homelessness include family conflict (80% reported this), childhood trauma and abuse (63% reported this), child welfare (60% reported this), bullying (85%), learning disability (50%), mental health (43% reported at least one suicide attempt), LGBTQ+ (25-40%), visible minorities and many more<sup>4</sup>. Despite the strong links between poverty and homelessness, about 50% of homeless youth come from middle and upper income families<sup>5</sup>.

Not only does homelessness affect these individuals in unimaginable ways, it casts a major burden on the system. Each year homelessness costs the Canadian economy approximately \$7.05 billion. These costs are related to the use of emergency shelters, community supports, associated emergency services, healthcare, the criminal justice system and others<sup>6</sup>.

Despite homelessness seeming entrenched in Canadian society, ending homelessness is possible. It is a commonly discussed and visible problem in Canada, but we can no longer accept the current reactive responses to homelessness because these responses are not working. The only way to make transformational and measureable change is to commit to stopping homelessness before it even occurs. Raising the Roof, established in 1996, is the national leader dedicated to long-term, proactive solutions to ending homelessness in Canada. We work with more than 50 community partners each year to support and implement the most effective and innovative programs to prevent, reduce and end homelessness. We have developed

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<sup>1</sup> Gaetz, Dej, Richter, Redman (2016)

<sup>2</sup> Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd, Schwan (2016)

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<sup>3</sup> Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, Gulliver (2013)

<sup>4</sup> Facts and Stats (nd)

<sup>5</sup> Monsebraaten (2016)

<sup>6</sup> Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, Gulliver (2013)

ground-breaking research and tools and have brought public attention to Canada's homeless. Our Toque Campaign has raised over \$7 million to benefit nearly 200 homelessness agencies across Canada.

In order to effectively prevent homelessness, we need to step up to the plate in a very different way. Through years of research, experience and collaborating with the most effective community partners across the country, Raising the Roof has been able to identify the highest needs and common challenges facing those experiencing homelessness. Taking this knowledge and understanding, we have searched internationally for the most promising and effective programs to prevent homelessness. Raising the Roof is proud to bring The Upstream Project, Host Homes and Reside to Canadian soil to change how Canada is combating homelessness. Through these keystone programs, Raising the Roof will be able to turn the tap off on homelessness all together.

## The Upstream Project

# THE UPSTREAM PROJECT

Each year thousands of Canadian youth are entering into homelessness and facing immeasurable and difficult to overcome hardships. The youth population is thus very important to target. The Upstream Project prevents youth homelessness by developing responses in schools. Virtually every young person who becomes homeless was in school and very likely there was an

adult in contact with them (teacher, guidance counselor, coach) who knew something was wrong but didn't know how to help.

The Upstream Project works collaboratively with partner agencies and school boards to provide support to students who are at risk of homelessness. The first step is to identify and assess these students at risk through a proven screening method known as the *Canadian Index of Adolescent Development*. Front-line agency staff and teachers administer the survey in the classroom. Once these students have been identified as at-risk, the student success team at the school will connect them with wrap-around services through the partner community agency tailored to their specific needs. The families of these youth will also be connected with support services. These services are co-located in schools by agencies that are already delivering successful programming in each community, thus have a deep local and experience-based understanding. By recognizing and intervening before these youth feel like they have no choice but to leave their homes, thousands of people will avoid entering homelessness. Finally, this program will be measured and replicated in schools and communities across Canada.

The Upstream Project concept comes from an Australian program called The Geelong Project (TGP). During the pilot in 2013 TGP proactively identified and intervened with 95 young people and 43 family members, where homelessness and school disengagement were identified as high risk. As a result of this intervention, 100% of the young people have remained engaged in school, increased engagement or returned to school and 100% of the young people supported have retained or obtained safe sustainable accommodation. This proven model should be adapted for use in Canada.

The costs associated with implementing this project across all schools in Canada are minimal compared to the costs associated with these youth entering into homelessness. The population of those who entered into homelessness before the age of 16 is approximately 94,000 Canadians<sup>7</sup>. Translating this to costs on the system, these homeless young Canadians cost approximately \$2.82 billion annually<sup>8</sup>. If implementing The Upstream Project in high schools across Canada costs \$646 million<sup>9</sup>, then this would be saving the system at least \$2.17 billion annually and preventing almost 100,000 Canadians from entering into homelessness in the first place.

Raising the Roof is committed to working with local agencies and school boards to train them to use this intervention. We will build the important relationships between the agencies and school boards, and will provide both with the tools and resources they need to effectively implement this program.

## Host Homes



When a youth makes the unimaginable decision to leave their home, they are faced with few options. They will likely be street

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<sup>7</sup> Based on 40% of 235,000 people who experience homelessness each year in Canada.

<sup>8</sup> Based on 40% of the annual figure of \$7.05 billion.

<sup>9</sup> Based on the project costing \$190,000 per school and there being 3,400 secondary schools across the country according to The Council of Ministers of Education.

sleeping, couch surfing, accessing emergency shelter beds (which are limited) and have very few other options. Wouldn't it be better for these young people to stay in a home setting? Host Homes offer an alternative to emergency shelters for youth, with members of the community opening their homes to provide safe and peaceful accommodations for young people at-risk.

When these youth are able to stay in a community member's home, this not only results in shelter diversion, but also provides a host of other benefits to these youth. The period immediately following leaving home can be impossibly difficult and devastating for youth. By staying in a home environment this can help youth through this bewildering time. Host Homes can also foster family reunification through paring the youth with a caseworker who can administer family mediation. When family reunification is not possible, these host homes can help a youth transition to independent living. These temporary homes can also ease the transition of youth who are exiting the foster care system into independent living.

The Host Homes program concept comes from Nightstop, which has been running for 30 years. Nightstop originally came from the U.K. and now operates in 33 communities across the country. In 2017, 360 Kids brought Nightstop to Canada and offers community housing to youth who need it and remuneration to those community members to assist with associated expenses.

Beyond improving the quality of life for these youth on the verge of homelessness, there are measureable cost savings in relation to this intervention. The immediate cost savings are related to the cost of housing someone in a shelter, which is approximately \$1,932 per month<sup>10</sup>. In

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<sup>10</sup> Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, Gulliver (2013)

addition, the goal of this program is to stop these youth from entering into homelessness, therefore costs will be saved by not having these people in the homeless system and instead as integrated members of Canadian society<sup>11</sup>.

Raising the Roof has recently began to implement the Host Homes program in Halton, in collaboration with Bridging the Gap and hopes to soon scale it across the country. We work within the community to support community members opening their homes to these youth for temporary housing accommodations. These community members receive a daily stipend to cover the associated costs. We help pair these youth with a case worker from an existing community agency to provide wrap-around services. The successes so far have been immense and need to be widened.

## Reside



There is a detrimental housing crisis currently leaving many Canadians facing unstable and unaffordable housing. Lack of access to affordable housing is one of the biggest predictors for homelessness in Canada. In Toronto alone there are more than 5,000 homeless people and nearly 80,000 people on affordable housing waiting

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<sup>11</sup> It would cost approximately \$981 million to implement Host Homes in all municipalities across Canada (of which there are 5,162 according to the 2016 Census), based on a cost estimation of \$190,000 to bring Host Homes to each community.

lists<sup>12</sup>. Raising the Roof has identified a program that could provide thousands of Canadians with affordable housing options. Reside is a program that takes vacant buildings and transforms them into affordable housing for those who are homeless or unstably housed. There are thousands of these empty facilities across the country, including heritage buildings owned by the city and unrented office buildings unsuitable to the market. These vacant facilities prove a burden for landlords, neighbourhoods and communities by being costly and attracting vandalism and squatting.

We will start with a pilot in the GTA, where there are approximately 835 vacant buildings<sup>13</sup>, then work to bring this across the country. In an effort to maximize the social value of this project, Raising the Roof will contract Building Up to carry out the renovations and retrofits of the homes. Building Up is an experienced non-profit contractor that trains and employs youth facing barriers to employment to improve our city's infrastructure. By working with Building Up, Raising the Roof will not only use this opportunity to create affordable housing options, but will simultaneously provide work experience that diverts marginalized youth from experiencing homelessness themselves.

The Reside project concept comes from Canopy Housing in the UK. Canopy renovates empty and derelict houses that have been standing empty for years, and transforms them into homes through the hard work and commitment of their volunteers and tenants. These homes provide decent affordable accommodation for people that are homeless or in housing need.

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<sup>12</sup> Community Profiles: Toronto, ON (2017)

<sup>13</sup> Fletcher (2014)

The risk of operating as usual – keeping these buildings empty and building new buildings for affordable housing – is costly both financially and socially. The City of Toronto can lay offences of up to \$100,000 to owners of vacant buildings that do not meet safety standards<sup>14</sup>. The city itself owns many of these homes and spends a significant amount on upkeep and safety. Spending \$1 on the rental of these buildings and approximately \$100,000-\$150,000 on necessary renovations, Reside will save the system significant dollars.

Raising the Roof is ideally positioned to bring this effective solution to Canada to address the affordable housing crises. As local agencies are already strapped for resources, Raising the Roof will provide the skills, training and tools necessary to support communities to utilize existing housing stock to prevent homelessness. Beginning with a pilot in Toronto, Raising the Roof will lease the buildings from current owners for \$1 for a period of 10 to 20 years, renovate the houses to be suitable for rental housing, and enter into agreements with local not-for-profit organizations to operate the homes.

## Call to Action

For the first time, ending homeless in Canada is now a real possibility.

However, this will only happen by acknowledging that current approaches haven't been successful enough in preventing homelessness.

The good news is that socially innovative and effective programs to prevent homelessness already exist!

Moving forward, Raising the Roof has made a ten year commitment to prevent homelessness in Canada by identifying the

most effective programs from all over the world, adapting them as necessary, testing them, and then ensuring they are available to organizations across the country.

We can't do this alone. Our ten year agenda for change calls for prevention programs in every province and territory across Canada. This will require \$10,000,000 in incremental funding from corporations, governments, foundation and others for whom ending homelessness has been made a priority. Over the next year, we will be adding 5 new homes with Reside, 4 new Upstream programs and a Host Homes pilot. Doing this will require \$1,000,000.

We need your help to turn off the tap on homelessness in our country for good.

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Website: [www.RaisingTheRoof.org](http://www.RaisingTheRoof.org)

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid

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