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WESLEY YOUTH HOUSING: THE OUTCOMES OF HAMILTON'S APPLICATION OF A YOUTH FOYER APPROACH

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Wesley Youth Housing: The outcomes of Hamilton's application of a Youth Foyer approach

DISCLAIMER

The quantitative data presented in this report were collected and recorded by staff at Wesley Youth Housing. The data were provided to Woodhall-Melnik Research & Professional Services (WMRPS) by management at Wesley Youth Housing. The qualitative data were collected by WMRPS. The lead researcher and owner of WMRPS, Dr. Julia Woodhall-Melnik, analyzed all data and provided interpretations of the data. The views in this document are those of WMRPS and may not necessarily reflect those of the Wesley Youth Housing, its funders or Wesley Urban Ministries. For inquiries, please contact: woodhallmelnikj@gmail.com.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Wesley Youth Housing provides supportive housing to youth who are aged 16 to 21 years. In this report, we first investigated the principles of fidelity for Youth Foyers in Canada. We then used those principles to analyze responses from staff at Wesley Youth Housing to gain a better understanding of which Foyer principles they employ. The main findings of this report are:

- Approximately 84% of youth who left or graduated from the program were housed
- Approximately 70% of youth who left or graduated from the program were employed and/or in school. Approximately 30% of youth who left or graduated the program were not employed or in school; however, 43% of these youth had completed high school
- The 8 principles of Youth Foyers in Canada that are suggested by Gaetz and Scott (2012) were agreed upon by a community of practice that was contacted to determine the importance of each principle to a Canadian Foyer approach
- The staff/management's responses indicate that Wesley Youth Housing program's work and mandates are in alignment with 7 of the 8 principles. The principle that Wesley Youth Housing was not in alignment with was the principle that foyer programs are not time limited. Wesley Youth Housing's program access for youth is time limited. However, to extend program enrollment, funding would need to be available to increase the number of spaces that Wesley has available for youth or Wesley would need to accept fewer youth. This is problematic because the level of need in Hamilton is quite high
- Former Wesley Youth Housing clients may benefit from providing resources to offer additional, dedicated hours that are used for aftercare
- Additional data are needed to measure the long-term outcomes of youth who participate in the Wesley Youth Housing program
- The Foyer model is novel in Canada. Our search determined that there are 8 other programs operating across Canada that provide youth with housing, education, employment and life skills supports. However, not all of these 8 programs call themselves Youth Foyers

BACKGROUND

Adolescence is an extremely important time in one's life course. It is during this time that people make the transition to independent adulthood. This process is often described as challenging for all youth, even for those who are enrolled in post-secondary education and come from middle and upper class backgrounds. Researchers find that youth from working class homes experience greater difficulty during this transitionary period. Further, youth from the poorest backgrounds experience immense struggles as they transition to adulthood[1]. These youth are more likely to be involved with the youth criminal justice and child welfare systems[2]. Youth involved with these systems often lose many of their supports during

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[1] Osgood, D. W., Foster, E. M., & Courtney, M. E. (2010). Vulnerable populations and the transition to adulthood. The future of children, 209-229.

[2] Osgood, D. W., Foster, E. M., & Courtney, M. E. (2010). Vulnerable populations and the transition to adulthood. The future of children, 209-229.

this transition period and this creates additional challenges. Youth who experience struggles during this transitionary stage are at increased risk of homelessness which has both short and long-term consequences for youth. For example, youth who experience homelessness are more likely to become victims of violent crime than their housed peers[3]. Entry into homelessness during adolescence is also a pathway into long-term, adult homelessness which contributes to long-term involvement with social services and poor physical and mental health outcomes[4].

Wesley Youth Housing, established in 2007, is a supported housing program for youth aged 16 to 21 years in Hamilton, Ontario. The program provides housing with on-site staff support to up to 19 youth at a time who are experiencing or are at imminent risk of homelessness. The objective of the Wesley Youth Housing program is to provide youth with a safe living environment and the supports that they need to build skills that are required for successful independent living. Youth begin the program in stage 1 where they live in a congregate setting with their own rooms and shared common spaces. During this time, youth work with staff to stabilize housing and set goals. They also work with a specialized life skills coach. Stage 2 provides youth with their own bachelor apartments. During this stage, youth practice the skills that they learned in the first stage and work toward further independence. Youth enrolled in the Wesley Youth Housing program are required to pay a program expense that equates to 30% of their income. They are asked to refrain from using substances while they are on site at Wesley Youth Housing; however, no restrictions are placed on their offsite substance use. They are also required to be enrolled in school, attending an educational program or working.

In 2018, the Wesley Youth Housing program had a question about their program. They believed they were following a Youth Foyer approach, but they were unsure as to whether they met the program fidelity criteria. The Youth Foyer approach aims to promote stability in youth at risk of homelessness and unemployment through the provision of supported housing that centres on teaching youth skills for independent living. Additionally, youth are required to participate in education and/or employment[5]. The primary goal of programs that follow the Youth Foyer approach is to provide youth with support while they transition to independence that is sustainable throughout their lives.

The Youth Foyer approach is designed to promote independence and long-term housing stability in youth who experience housing instability and/or homelessness. Youth Foyers originated in post-war France to provide accommodations to youth who moved from rural to urban areas in search of employment[6]. In the 1990s, the model was adapted in the United Kingdom to provide supported housing to youth experiencing homelessness. Youth Foyer programs have only recently emerged as a mechanism for countering homelessness and unemployment in youth in Canada, the United States and Australia[7].

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[3] Baron, S. W. (2003). Street youth violence and victimization. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 4(1), 22-44.
[4] Woodhall-Melnik, J., Dunn, J. R., Svenson, S., Patterson, C., & Matheson, F. I. (2018). Men's experiences of early life trauma and pathways into long-term homelessness. Child abuse & neglect, 80, 216-225.
[5] Steen, A., & MacKenzie, D. (2017). The sustainability of the Youth Foyer Model: a comparison of the UK and Australia. Social Policy and Society, 16(3), 391-404.
[6] Steen, A., & Mackenzie, D. (2013). Financial analysis of foyer and foyer-like youth housing models. Swinburne University, Homelessness Research Collaboration, Melbourne.
[7] Steen, A., & Mackenzie, D. (2013). Financial analysis of foyer and foyer-like youth housing models. Swinburne University, Homelessness Research Collaboration, Melbourne.

Fidelity measurement is a key part of evaluation science, as it goes beyond the assessment of program outcomes. Fidelity evaluations assess whether a treatment or intervention is provided to clients in the way that it was originally intended[8][9]. Put simply, if we view a program or intervention as a medicine, we could say that fidelity measurements allow practitioners and researchers to determine whether they have provided the right type and dose of medication to their clients. Organizations such as the Foyer Federation in the UK and the Foyer Foundation in Australia have emerged to assist their national Foyer programs with fidelity evaluations and quality assurance reviews. However, there has yet to be an evaluation of Youth Foyer fidelity in Canada. It is important that program fidelity principles are adapted to national context as this allows policy makers, practitioners and researchers to account for international differences in the delivery of social welfare.

The objective of this research was to establish fidelity criteria for a Canadian Youth Foyer model and to determine whether Wesley Youth Housing employs these criteria in the delivery of their program.

METHODS

Phase I: Developing Fidelity Criteria

The aim of this study was to determine whether Wesley Youth Housing adheres to a Youth Foyer program model. Fidelity criteria had not yet been tested in Canada and research suggests that program fidelity measures should consider local contexts[10]. Therefore, our first step was to develop a list of key criteria that could be used to accurately and comprehensively summarize the Foyer model in Canada. In 2012, Gaetz and Scott[11] proposed 8 criteria for Canadian Youth Foyers. These criteria were derived from their extensive review of the literature on Youth Foyers and from their work on youth homelessness in Canada. To test the applicability of these principles in Canada, we used the 8 principles to construct a web-based survey. We also included one false principle which was used to ensure that participants were knowledgeable about Foyer programs and were not experiencing participant fatigue when responding to the survey. Participants were recruited from nine housing providers across Canada who offered housing to youth and who self-identified as Youth Foyer providers. Each housing provider was sent an email, followed by a reminder email, with a study description, survey link, and a password. The survey was open for 14 days and we received 10 unique responses. Two respondents answered that they were not aware of what Youth Foyer models were and these participants were asked not to complete the remainder of the survey. The responses were anonymous; therefore, we are unable to associate any individual response with a housing service provider. The responses were collected in September, 2018.

The participants were asked to rank the importance each potential fidelity measure and the false measure to the Youth Foyer model in Canada. To do this, they were asked to rank each item using a five-point Likert scale, with one indicating no importance and five indicating extreme importance. Participants were also provided with space to give qualitative feedback on the potential and false

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[8] Summerfelt, W. T. (2003). Program strength and fidelity in evaluation. Applied Developmental Science, 7(2), 55-61.

[9] Gomez, C. R., Walis, S., & Baird, S. (2007). On the same page: Seeking fidelity of intervention. Young Exceptional Children, 10(4), 20-29.

[10] Breitenstein, S. M., Gross, D., Garvey, C. A., Hill, C., Fogg, L., & Resnick, B. (2010). Implementation fidelity in community-based interventions. Research in nursing & health, 33(2), 164-173.

[11] Gaetz, S., & Scott, F. (2012). Live, learn, grow: Supporting transitions to adulthood for homeless youth—a framework for the foyer in Canada. Canadian Homelessness Research Network.

principles. They were also given space to suggest additional fidelity principles that were not listed. No additional principles were suggested. The results of the rankings are displayed in Table 1. The potential measures were ranked as very important by the participants, with scores that ranged from 4.13-5.00. The false measure scored 2.13. One individual ranked the false principle as important. However, his or her qualitative response illustrated disagreement with the false principle. He or she said:

> I think in these types of cases (and even if a youth is consistently taking medication) it is very important that Foyer model facilitates mental health supports and connecting youth to mental health resources. I believe it is extremely important that youth who have been prescribed medication for mental health take it as prescribed, however we can't necessarily "enforce compliance" if a youth over 18 is choosing not to take their medication…having resources and education around the effects of inconsistent medication use would be beneficial.

This qualitative response indicates that the individual ranked the false principle as important to the youth fidelity model also expressed decent with the decoy principle as proposed and there was clear engagement with the survey. As such, we accept these as valid responses.

All the valid survey items had a mean ranking of important or above. As such, we chose to adopt the principles of the foyer model in Canada as proposed by Gaetz and Scott. Further, there were no additional principles that were suggested by the community of practice. The only qualitative feedback referred to the false fidelity principle. We used these principles to construct a web-based, open-ended survey for Wesley Youth Housing staff and management. The principles were also used to develop an interview guide and focus group guide for youth residents at Wesley Youth Housing. However, only one youth completed an interview and only one youth was present at a focus group; therefore, we have decided to omit these data from our final report.

Table 1: Average Score for Each Potential Fidelity Measure

A focus on helping disadvantaged young people who are homeless or in housing need - including young people leaving care - to achieve the transition from dependence to independence	4.86
A developmentally-appropriate environment to build competence and a feeling of achievement;	4.75
A holistic approach to meeting the young person's needs based on an understanding of adolescent development;	4.63
A formal plan and agreement between the Foyer and young person as to how the Foyer's facilities and local community resources will be used in making the transition to adulthood;	4.63
A supported transition that is not time limited, in which young people can practice independent living;	4.13
An investment in education, training, life skills and meaningful engagement in order to improve long-term life chances;	5.00

The provision of a community of peers and caring adults with emphasis on peer mentoring;	4.88
The provision of necessary and appropriate aftercare to ensure successful transitions to adulthood and independent living	4.88
Enforce mental health medication compliance in youth who have been diagnosed with mental illness	2.13

Phase II: Staff and Management Surveys

We used the eight fidelity principles developed by Gaetz and Scott and validated by our community of practice to develop an open-ended web-based survey for the staff and management of Wesley Youth Housing. A recruitment email was sent from the Director of Wesley Youth Housing to the staff and management on the researcher's behalf. This email included a study information letter, a request for voluntary participation, and a link to the web-based survey. The staff were sent a survey reminder email one week after the first email had been set. In total, five of the 10 staff or management personnel responded to the survey. All the responses were received in November and December, 2018.

The survey responses were thematically coded using the fidelity criteria that were established for this study. The text responses from each staff member were critically assessed to determine whether it fit with or contradicted one or more of the eight fidelity criteria. The data for this analysis were organized using Excel. Phase I and Phase II of this study received Research Ethics Board approval from the University of New Brunswick in Saint John. The results from this analysis are presented in the findings section below.

Administrative Data Analysis

Between September 2007 and April 2019, the staff at Wesley Youth Housing collected administrative data on youth program enrollment, length in program, education and work status at discharge and housing status at discharge. Descriptive summary analyses were preformed on the administrative data. Wesley presently assesses youth outcomes at 3, 6 and 9-months post-discharge; however, the data collected prior to April 2019 are inconsistent. Much of the data from this time is incomplete. This could be because of a lack of consistent tracking or due to previous clients' non-participation. Regardless, these data were not considered reliable for inclusion in this report.

Data on program enrollment were captured by staff for 204 youth beginning in September 2007. However, the discharge status of youth was not tracked until April 2009. We excluded youth from the analysis if they did not have discharge information. 57 youth were excluded from the analysis due to incomplete discharge data. 13 youth were excluded from the analysis as they were still in the program. We also removed 6 youth from the analysis who had stayed with the program for half a month or less, as their exposure to the program would have been non-existent or very minimal. In total, 128 youth were included in the analysis.

FINDINGS:

Administrative Data Summary

Of the 128 youth captured in this analysis, 125 entered Wesley Youth Housing through their stage 1 program. On average, youth stayed in stage one housing for 5.95 months. Total length of stay in stage 1 ranged from 1 month to 16 months. Three participants entered the program directly through stage 2 and 39 youth in total were enrolled in the stage 2 program. The range of stay was 1 month to 17 months and the average length of stay was 6.69 months.

Involvement in a productive activity (e.g. registration in school and employment status) was recorded for each participant when they graduated or left the program. The breakdown of youth education and employment status at program discharge is presented in Table 2. 69.5% of youth participated in work, school or both when they left the program. 30.5% of youth were not in school and not working when they left the program; however, 13 (43.3%) of the youth who were not working and were not in school had completed high school.

Table 2: Education and Employment Status at Program Discharge

Education and Employment Status	Number of Youth (N)	Percentage of Youth (%)
In School and Employed	12	9.4
In School and Not Employed	50	39.1
Not in School and Employed	25	19.5
Not in School and Not Employed	39	30.5
Not Applicable	2	1.6
Total	128	100

Of the 128 youth included in this analysis, data were collected from 114 youth on their housing at program discharge. 14 youth were listed as "unknown" or "not applicable." Of the 114 youth, the majority (84.3%) had positive housing outcomes which included independent or student housing, living with friends, partners or family members and lodging housing. Some of the youth (14.9%) moved to shelters or supportive housing programs and 1 youth was discharged to correctional services.

Table 3: Housing Status at Program Discharge

Housing Status	Number of Youth (N)	Percentage of Youth (%)
Independent Housing/Student Housing	44	38.6
Housed with Friend(s)/Family/Partner	50	43.9
Lodging Home	2	1.8
Shelter or Supported Housing Program	17	14.9
Correctional Services	1	0.9
Total	114	100

Staff Survey Results

As noted above, half of the staff and management of Wesley Youth Housing participated in an open-ended web-based survey. In total, 5 individuals were asked 9 questions each, for a total of 45 responses.

4 of the 45 responses were blank, indicating question non-response. One of the responses was deemed to be contradictory to the fidelity principles. This response is discussed in detail below. 33 responses supported the fidelity criteria and the remaining 7 responses were not detailed enough to be appropriately thematically categorized. Quotes from the data are presented by the fidelity criteria that they most closely represented.

1) **A focus on helping disadvantaged young people who are homeless or in housing need - including young people leaving care - to achieve the transition from dependence to independence**

The first principle of Canadian Youth Foyer fidelity we uncovered was that Foyer programs must focus on helping youth people who are unstably housed, unhoused or about to leave care transition from dependence on others to independence. This is an important principle as it recognizes the gap that youth experience when they do not have supportive adults and stable environments to assist and guide them during the transition from teenager to adult. The Wesley Youth Housing program provides housing for youth aged 16 to 21 years of age who would like to achieve independence but who have not benefited from stable home environments in their teen years. One of the staff members highlighted the transition to independence in his or her response:

> We work on teaching them the skills that they need to be independent, from role modeling to coaching, showing them how to do certain things, walking them through it. the 6 life skills modules that are required include these teachings, we also decrease the amount of involvement they are required to have in the program as they progress through the program, while still holding them accountable

The program is designed to provide youth with a lot of supports when they initially enter it and they scale back the level of supports provided as youth become more independent. One of the staff members highlighted the need for tailored supports and guidance for youth:

> [W]ith the right tools, guidance and support the youth can definitely successfully transition from dependence to Independence. We have life skills coaches who work one on one with the youth around the 6 life skills units: healthy living, time management, household management, cooking/meal planning, money management, independent living. Wesley staff can also tailor the life skills to individualize it to the client (youth's) needs.

The life skills units, which are mandatory for all youth, are designed to teach youth the skills that are useful for independent living. Learning independence is a developmentally normative task[12]. For example, to successfully maintain a healthy household, one must be able to cook, manage finances and preform household chores. These skills are usually modelled by parents or caregivers throughout childhood and adolescence. Youth who are separated from or who do not receive adequate support from their families experience more challenges with independence than other youth. The task of independence is particularly challenging for youth in the care system[13]. If these skills are not provided, youth experience a significant disadvantage when they attempt to live independently.

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[12] English, D. J., Kouidou-Giles, S., & Plocke, M. (1994). Readiness for independence: A study of youth in foster care. Children and Youth Services Review, 16(3-4), 147-158.
[13] English, D. J., Kouidou-Giles, S., & Plocke, M. (1994). Readiness for independence: A study of youth in foster care. Children and Youth Services Review, 16(3-4), 147-158.

2) A developmentally-appropriate environment to build competence and a feeling of achievement

Wesley Youth Housing offers a 2-stage accommodation and skills for living program which is designed to help youth transition from a higher support environment to a lower support environment. This is designed with the philosophy that youth who are starting out can benefit from life skills training, frequent supportive interactions with staff, and closer supervision. Once youth complete skills training courses and enroll in school and/or find a job, they can move to an independent unit on a quieter floor. This is viewed as an achievement, as youth need to demonstrate certain levels of independence before they graduate to the second stage of the program. One of the staff members described this:

> [The] youth start with shared accommodations around other youth and staff regularly to a bachelor apartment unit on a quieter floor. Staff are accessible on the floor below. Much higher independence on second stage. Usually a youth requests to move up, has completed their life skills and is in school or working before they move to the bachelor. Staff work closely with the youth to prepare them for this new level of independence

Youth are required to achieve milestones—completing life skills courses and registering in school and/or finding employment—prior to moving into an independent apartment. This allows them to demonstrate that they are ready for this new stage of independence and it is an achievement for youth. The Wesley Youth Housing program also has graduations for youth who complete the program and who are ready to transition into independent housing in the community. This allows youth to celebrate their success and allows them to reflect on their achievements.

3) A holistic approach to meeting the young person's needs based on an understanding of adolescent development

Adolescence is a unique period. During this time, youth learn to function independently; however, as they continue to learn, they need support and guidance from adults. Research now indicates that the human brain undergoes dramatic developmental changes during adolescence[14]. This means that youth need extra support with the task of learning independence. For example, many youth require social and emotional guidance as they learn to manage relationships and make life decisions. One of the staff members discussed the need to assist youth with a variety of practical, social and emotional tasks:

> [T]hey need to learn how to manage conflict, how to check for bugs, how to budget their money to last, how to engage in their community, how to cook appropriate healthy meals, how to share common spaces and respect roommates, how to advocate for themselves effectively, how to approach situations with confidence and openness. Sometimes its little things like how to book appointments or how to open a bank account…those things that you should have learned from your parents if given the opportunity.

This response emphasizes the need to teach youth practical life skills, such as how to budget money and cook. However, the staff member also discusses teaching youth about social and emotional competencies which includes conflict management, self-advocacy, respect, community and confidence.

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[14] Steinberg, L. (2010). Commentary: A behavioral scientist looks at the science of adolescent brain development. Brain and cognition, 72(1), 160.

This approach goes beyond teaching youth about household maintenance as it provides youth with lessons on soft skills which are needed to successfully navigate adulthood.

4) **A formal plan and agreement between the Foyer and young person as to how the Foyer's facilities and local community resources will be used in making the transition to adulthood**

The youth who are enrolled in Wesley Youth Housing are required to create a plan with the case management team and they are also required to sign an agreement with staff. These plans and agreements provide them with an avenue for outlining their personal goals, so they can measure their own success. They also provide case managers with a plan that they can refer to when engaging with youth. The agreements are in place to ensure that the youth and the staff occupy a safe space which is developmentally appropriate. They also ensure that youth are accountable to the program and to each other. One of the staff members stated that to be in the program, youth must:

> …be in school, or working, or actively seeking to obtain one of them, being able to document evidence of attempt. Follow productivity hours 10-2, complete weekly chores, work on 6 program life skills, attend evening programming run by life skills coaches, at least 6 times a month, pay program expenses. Overall be respectful of others and staff, not using substances or alcohol in program. Formal agreements can be in the way of participation agreements, contracts, conditional notice of discharge, and discharge notices. These can be presented to a youth based on non-compliance with program rules. Efforts are made with youth in the form of check ins and casual conversations prior to needing to use one of these forms.

Another staff member elaborated on this when he or she stated:

> Youth are required to commit to…follow the rules of Wesley Youth Housing, i.e. getting along with others, return to the residence for curfew, or complete expectation to get approved overnights and communicate with staff, complete chores twice weekly of room/ apartment and group chore.

As the one staff member noted, youth who are unable to comply with the formal rules set by Wesley Youth Housing are spoken to by the case management team, given conditional notices of discharge or given discharge notices. Conditional notices of discharge allow the youth to remain in the program so long as he or she changes a behaviour to comply with Wesley Youth Housing's rules. Discharge notices are used when all other avenues for behavioural change have been exhausted and they require youth to exit the program.

5) **A supported transition that is not time limited, in which young people can practice independent living**

The Wesley Youth Housing program allows youth to practice independent living. Youth are provided with support while they practice a variety of practical, social and emotional life skills. Once youth demonstrate that they have learned the skills taught in the first stage of the program—where youth live in congregate accommodations that are more closely monitored by staff—they are offered the opportunity to move to the second stage of the program. The second stage provides them with additional independence. One of the staff members described this process when he or she stated:

> We have a 2-year program. The first year offers more daily support, encouragement and requires more commitment from the residents. They are expected to complete the life skills curriculum and adhere to expectations and once they do this successfully for a year, they move to stage 2. In the second stage, the residents are offered far more freedom and independence. They live in their own bachelor apartments on a separate floor from the staff offices and have the opportunity to make their own choices and learn what works and what doesn't with the safety net of being able to access staff support and direction as needed.

Youth are encouraged to begin the process of learning independent living in the first stage of the program. They are then offered the opportunity to move to the second stage of the program which provides them with greater freedom and gives them the opportunity to practice applying the skills they learned in the first phase in a safe space.

Part of this fidelity principle states that this supported transition toward independence should not be time limited. The Wesley Youth Housing program has not adopted this principle, as youth are limited to a 2-year residency with the program. One of the staff members described this when he or she stated:

> We have done a great job here at WYH but there is so much more potential for what we could do. Hamilton has become an unaffordable city to live in. We need more safe, clean housing. because many of our residents move in at age 16, they graduate and are expected to be fully functioning and independent adults at 18. Although their skills might be strong enough to maintain housing, they're not always emotionally ready to be alone in the world. I would love it if we could offer our youth another year or two of hands-off living

This staff member noted that he or she would like to provide youth with more time to engage with the program. Wesley Youth Housing is limited to 2-years per resident. This is largely due to funding constraints. To meet this fidelity principle, it is recommended that Wesley Youth Housing remove the 2-year time limit on residency. However, it is recognized that to accomplish this, additional funding will be needed.

6) An investment in education, training, life skills and meaningful engagement in order to improve long-term life chances

Youth Foyer programs are designed to encourage youth enrollment in school and/or employment to ensure that youth are working toward creating sustainable lives for their futures. In their survey responses, the staff indicated that Wesley Youth Housing is in a unique position to offer youth these supports, as they are able to partner with Wesley Employment Services. Wesley Employment Services offers youth access to job connect, provides job search assistance, connects youth with paid placement programs and offers a variety of training seminars. Wesley Youth Housing provides residents with homework help and they maintain connections with a variety of traditional and alternative education programs throughout across the city. Wesley also has a youth scholarship which residents are able to access.

7) The provision of a community of peers and caring adults with emphasis on peer mentoring

Youth Foyer programs are designed to provide youth with supportive relationships which allow youth to learn and grow. This is based on the understanding that youth is a period in which a lot of learning from adults on independent living takes place. One of the staff members stated:

> [Youth] receive support from many supportive adults and peers who have been in the program for a longer period of time. Honestly the support could come in any form.

Another staff member stated that youth receive:

> Check ins, formal and informal. Casual conversations, guidance in learning about their options and spectrum of alternatives when making a choice, mental health clinicians, life skill coaches, case managers, housing support workers, from peers.

The youth are able to receive assistance from a variety of people while they are enrolled in the program. This provides them with a large community or network of support to access. One of the staff members noted that support comes from "peers who have been in the program for a longer period of time." Peer support is particularly important to the Youth Foyer model.

8) **The provision of necessary and appropriate aftercare to ensure successful transitions to adulthood and independent living**

Youth who leave the Wesley Youth Housing program are provided with aftercare with the goal of ensuring successful transitions to adulthood and independent living. This support is provided in a few different ways. One staff member described providing informal support to previous residents:

> I speak to at least 8 different youth on a monthly basis. They call or drop by to check in. Some of our graduates are now in their mid to late 20's. Some are parents, some are in post-secondary ... I continue to support our former residents in the same way as I do our current ones. In any way they need through guidance, direction or just by offering a sense of security through my presence.

This particular staff member maintains contact with former residents who approach him or her for support and guidance. They do this by calling or by stopping into the Wesley Youth Housing office. Another staff member described preforming formal check-ins with previous residents:

> [W]e check in with them at 3, 6, and 9-months [after they leave the program]. If they require additional support, they are referred to appropriate programs/opportunities. They are also reminded when they are leaving that they can contact staff if they need further support.

This staff member discussed the phone calls that are placed to residents every 3 months after they leave the program. The purpose of these calls is two-fold. First, they are used to track program outcomes by documenting housing, employment and education status. Second, they are used as an opportunity to connect with previous tenants to provide them with any ongoing supports or referrals for support that they may need.

One of the staff members noted that it would be beneficial to the program to have a position dedicated to aftercare. He or she stated: "We would like a formalized position to give ongoing support once youth leave the program." Research suggests that building trust between clients and social service workers is

integral to maintaining relationships[15]; therefore, it would be essential that a staff member in a dedicated aftercare position would also be able to engage with youth while they are still in the program. Another option would be to hire an additional staff member which would create more time for all staff members. This extra time could be directed to aftercare.

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Youth Foyer approach is designed to provide precariously housed youth with safe, secure housing and supports while they make the transition from dependence to independence. This transition is experienced by all youth; however, for those with histories of systems involvement, homelessness or disconnection from family, this transition can be particularly challenging[16]. The Foyer approach is used to support vulnerable youth during this important developmental phase. Its popularity spread through its uptake in the United Kingdom. Currently, many industrialized countries, including the United States, Canada and Australia, operate Youth Foyer programs.

Although Youth Foyers have been proven successful abroad, researchers have gathered little data about the operation of Foyers in Canada. Our study found that persons who work in and operate Youth Foyers in Canada found the fidelity principles for Canadian Youth Foyers proposed by Gaetz and Scott[17] to be important. They did not propose any additional fidelity principles; therefore, we maintained the principles and used these principles to assess Wesley's application of the Youth Foyer approach.

Our analysis of the data from open-ended surveys with staff and management at Wesley Youth Housing indicates that they meet 7 out of 8 of the fidelity criteria. These 7 principles are:

1) A focus on helping disadvantaged young people who are homeless or in housing need - including young people leaving care - to achieve the transition from dependence to independence;
2) A developmentally-appropriate environment to build competence and a feeling of achievement;
3) A holistic approach to meeting the young person's needs based on an understanding of adolescent development;
4) A formal plan and agreement between the Foyer and young person as to how the Foyer's facilities and local community resources will be used in making the transition to adulthood;
5) An investment in education, training, life skills and meaningful engagement in order to improve long-term life chances;
6) The provision of a community of peers and caring adults with emphasis on peer mentoring;
7) The provision of necessary and appropriate aftercare to ensure successful transitions to adulthood and independent living (adapted from Gaetz and Scott, 2012)

There was one principle that is not being fully achieved: to provide a supported transition that is not time limited, in which young people can practice independent living. The Wesley Youth Housing program

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[15] Ferguson, K. M., Kim, M. A., & McCoy, S. (2011). Enhancing empowerment and leadership among homeless youth in agency and community settings: A grounded theory approach. Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 28(1), 1-22.

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facilitates a supported transition process; however, youth are limited to a maximum of one year in each of the 2 stages of the program. In total, they are limited to 2 years of participation in the program. However, extending this time period could prove problematic, as only 19 spaces are currently funded for youth. This means that a time extension would limit the number of youth who are able to engage with the program. Additional funding should be sought to provide youth with program enrollment that is not time limited.

The staff also discussed providing some aftercare, but they did say that a dedicated position for aftercare would be beneficial. However, youth are often most comfortable when they contact workers with whom they have already built a trusting relationship. As such, we recommend that further resources be allotted to the provision of aftercare.

In addition to exploring the fidelity measures, we preformed an analysis of administrative data from the program. Our findings indicate that most of the youth (84.3%) who are discharged from Wesley Youth Housing are experiencing housing stability. Most of the youth (69.5%) were also maintaining student or employment status at program discharge. These numbers are promising and suggest that the Wesley Youth Housing program is contributing to housing stability, education and employment for vulnerable youth.

CONCLUSION

Our research indicates that youth who live in the Wesley Youth Housing program experience positive housing, education and employment involvement outcomes at and following program discharge. The findings of this report confirm that Wesley Youth Housing follows a Canadian Youth Foyer approach. We recommend that the time limit of 2 years be removed from the program; however, to do this, the program would need to expand its capacity to offer more spots for youth. This study was limited by the inability to connect with youth through interviews and focus groups. We hope that future studies on Youth Foyers in Canada engage youth in their research. Further, a focus on collecting data on housing, employment and education in periods following program discharge would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impacts of the program.

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