

Solutions Lab Roadmap Report

New Housing Models for Youth Transitioning Out of Care

Executive Summary



“Imagine you’re a child and you’re at home with your family, imagine someone comes into your front door, takes you by the hand, leaves, and takes you to a stranger’s home and says, ‘this is where you live now, okay?’ How would you feel? Would that be home? A sense of home is important because that’s the spatial version of who you are as a person. Everyone needs to have that to just know who they are...For a lot of people, for a long time, our bodies are our homes. That’s the one consistency during a constant state of flux and transition. A home that is our own is made up of pieces of ourselves that we take from inside and expose them out. A place to live can be given or enforced, but a home must be consciously made.”

–**Nicholas Ridiculous**, Youth from Care & Collaborator

About This Project

Funded by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), in partnership with WoodGreen Community Services, PARTISANS and PROCESS, this Solutions Lab aims to develop a set of key architectural design principles and solutions that could inform future built-for-purpose transitional housing sites for youth who are homeless or at risk of being homeless, with a focus on youth aging out of the child welfare system.

Grounding best practices for housing for youth¹ in physical spaces remains a critical component to addressing youths' needs and integrating them into the broader community. Gaps in services when transitioning out of care leave youth vulnerable to housing instability as they often lack the resources and life skills to live independently and access private market rental units. Even without these barriers facing youth leaving care, housing affordability is a challenge across Canada, and especially for youth; over 40% of Canadians aged 20 to 29 live with their parents due to barriers to employment and the rising cost of housing. Housing instability and homelessness makes the already difficult process of transitioning out of care more difficult, jeopardizing opportunities for youth to make steps toward self-sufficiency². By offering stabilizing, holistic supports at this critical stage in the lives of vulnerable youth, the model being developed through this Solutions Lab aims to become an effective intervention for reducing the rates of youth homelessness in Canada.

*This project received funding from the National Housing Strategy under the NHS Solutions Labs, however, the views expressed are the personal views of the author and CMHC accepts no responsibility for them.

A Framework for Transitional Housing for Youth

Guided by an advisory group of youth with lived experience and industry experts, our team conducted background research, interviews and analyzed emerging trends, synthesizing key findings into seven core principles that make up our *Framework for Transitional Housing for Youth Aging Out of Care*.

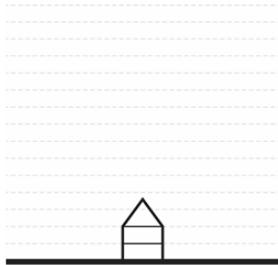
Principle 1: Youth-led and Wraparound Program Models and **Principle 2: Youth-Centered Design** speak to the diversity of program and design considerations for a diversity of youth. These principles highlight the importance of fostering spaces where youth can feel comfortable, learn independence and thrive. **Principles 3: Site Selection** and **4: Community Engagement**, speak to the importance of location and surroundings. A thoughtful site selection and engagement process with the community can be instrumental in determining the success of a transitional housing development. **Principle 5: Operations and Maintenance** addresses the longevity of transitional housing; while **Principles 6: Construction** and **7: Financing and Partnerships** speak to implementation. While each principle is important, they should be considered collectively as an interdependent approach to the design of transitional housing for youth.

¹ Gaetz, S. & Scott, F. (2012b). *The Foyer Toolkit: Foyer Essentials - Accommodation*. Toronto: The Homeless Hub Press. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/FoyerToolkit5.pdf>

² Gaetz, Stephen & Erin Dej. *A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention*. Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, 2017, Toronto.

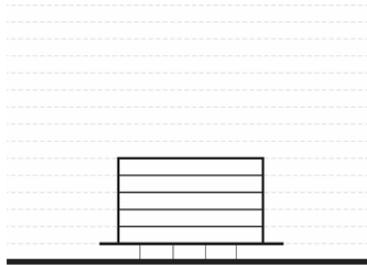
Housing Models

We identified three transitional housing models for youth aging out of care. These three models consider the core principles within the framework and represent a holistic architectural approach to addressing the diversity of youth needs.



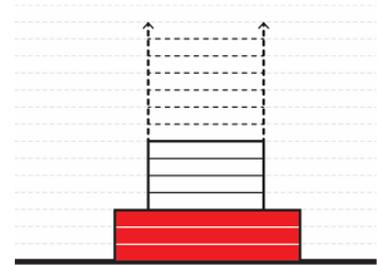
Housing Here

Small scale housing repurposing single family homes



Housing Now

Temporary Modular Construction



Housing+

Transitional housing with a symbiotic additional use (ie. student housing, or public library)

Housing Now: Today's youth need housing now, not five or ten years from now. Housing Now illustrates how modular construction techniques can be employed to deliver new congregate style transitional housing quickly, employing design and programmatic strategies that support youth with high needs.

Housing Here: Housing Here considers opportunities for small-scale transitional housing for youth, scattered in yellow-belt neighbourhoods using infill and densification strategies. By repurposing single-family or low-rise houses, there are opportunities for independent living and to foster paths towards ownership.

Housing+: For youth who need fewer supports, Housing+ investigates how transitional housing for youth can be co-located with other uses or occupants in large-scale developments. This could include cohousing with students in dormitories, intergenerational living, co-location with community services such as a library or building a life and community in private, market rate condominium buildings.

Ecosystem of Support

Throughout this project, we delved deeper into the complex issue of effective and sustainable youth transitional housing. We not only identified a key framework to design and build housing for youth transitioning out of care based on our research findings; we also rendered several housing prototypes to illustrate how transitional housing can be made into an ecosystem of support.

While the above housing typologies can work on their own, they can also work together over time to create resilient communities for youth. Transitional housing should not be viewed as a static product but rather as a dynamic process, space or eco-system that is constantly being activated and reactivated by a diverse group of young people and external community members from all walks of life. Architecture is a process that is in active dialog with its environment and users.

A Way Forward

Throughout our research and process, four key takeaways stand out when considering the development and implementation of youth transitional housing:

1. **Youth-led approaches to programming:** Prioritize youth choice and voice on their path to independence.
2. **Housing is a process, not a product:** Where possible, design flexible spaces for youth to co-create and define overtime. This includes utilizing Housing Now podiums as temporary flexible spaces to pilot how pop-up spaces can be utilized in communities and replicated in future models.
3. **Innovative partnerships and financing models:** These could include collaborative partnerships between public-private-non-profit sectors and new financing tools such as impact investing.
4. **Building Community, not just housing:** Transitional Housing for Youth is an opportunity to build-up communities holistically by providing mutually-beneficial programming to youth and neighbours. This includes opportunities to engage neighbours through the design and development process and once the youth move in. Furthermore, where possible, develop an ecosystem of care where different housing models are located in proximity to each other, to community services and amenities and other systems of care.

We hope that the models produced in this study offer inspiration and guidance and spur much needed action to address the current youth housing crisis.

Acknowledgements

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