

Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton

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Good Shepherd Centres



~ Charity Unlimited ~



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2004, the Street-Involved Youth Managers (SIYM) committee approached the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) to develop a community plan for working with the growing population of street-involved and homeless youth in Hamilton. The SIYM identified that service providers were having difficulty meeting the unique needs of the growing numbers of street-involved youth.

From the outset of this project the objectives were, 1) to develop a profile of street-involved youth in Hamilton, 2) to develop a best practices model for working with street-involved youth and 3) to conduct a gaps analysis of the service system in Hamilton that would ultimately inform a community plan.

In order to meet these objectives, we used the following methods:

- Review of current literature on street-involvement in youth and best practices
- Living Rock database and program statistics analysis
- Community mapping with front-line workers, managers and key stakeholders in the community
- Key informant interviews with community leaders
- Focus groups with twenty-nine (29) street-involved youth
- Written stories from four (4) street-involved youth
- One-on-one interviews with ten (10) street-involved youth.

Definition of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth

Defining street-involved and homeless youth for the research was complicated because of the diverse composition and cyclical experiences of homelessness.

For the purpose of this research, street-involved youth are young people:

- aged 16-21 years old
- absolutely homeless and/or;
- very precariously housed and/or;
- using services for street-involved youth and/or;
- finding their identities and sole support networks and who spend the majority of their time on the streets.

A subsection of street-involved youth are homeless youth. The vast majority of youth we spoke with had been homeless at some point in the last year. These are young people:

- aged 16-21 years old
- with no place to live and stay in homeless shelters, in abandoned buildings, in unsafe, crowded accommodations (flop houses) or outside.

These experiences tend to be cyclical and were for many of the youth we spoke with.

How Many Youth in Hamilton are Street-Involved and Homeless?

Counting homeless people has long proven difficult. Understanding that the numbers are likely under-representative of the actual number of homeless youth, the statistics provided by the five agencies indicate that in 2004 there were at least 600 street-involved youth in Hamilton. This means that at least 1.5% of Hamilton's total youth population is street-involved¹.

Key Issues Facing Street-Involved Youth

Through focus groups and interviews with street-involved youth and by the literature surrounding this issue, the following profile of pathways on, pathways off and issues on the street was developed.

Family conflict and abuse are key contributing factors to street-involvement in young people.

In 1999, the Report of the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force in Toronto indicated, "more than 70 percent of young people leave home for the streets because of physical and/or sexual abuse".

Street-involved youth face higher than average rates of mental health issues and substance use.

Of the fourteen interview and written story participants, all fourteen had done drugs at some point in their lives. All of the interview participants (ten participants) report doing drugs or drinking alcohol at least once per week; six use substances everyday. Many street-involved youth talked about using substances to help cope with the mental health issues they were facing; particularly around depression, stress and anxiety.

Street-involved youth experience cycles of absolute homelessness.

Of the 38 youth we interviewed or who participated in focus groups, 34 had been absolutely homeless (with no place to stay) at least once in their lives. Eleven of the youth were currently housed but had been homeless in the last year.

Youth of colour, Aboriginal youth and LGBTQ youth are over-represented among street-involved youth and face additional barriers on the streets.

According to research done by the Native community in Hamilton in 2001, 17% of a total of 202 survey respondents reported being under the age 25 and absolutely or relatively homeless.² In a research study on street-involved youth in Vancouver, only half of those

¹ According to 2001 Census data there were 39 750 youth aged 16-21 years old in Hamilton.

² Hamilton Executive Directors Aboriginal Coalition, 2001

surveyed identified themselves as heterosexual. There is a strong presence of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth on the streets.

Street-involved youth demonstrate great resilience and coping.

As a response to the trauma and adversity faced on the street, street-involved youth demonstrate great resilience and coping. Often talked about by the youth as “street smarts”, this seems to be the capacity to stay healthy, fed, sheltered and safe.

Best Practices for Working with Street-Involved Youth

The purpose of developing a “best practices” model is to identify constructive and relevant applications based on literature and past work for use in a community.³ Some best practices literature identifies past projects and initiatives to be duplicated in similar situations. For the purpose of this research, we will look at more general ways to address the issues that arise in the literature.

After a review of the literature, which identifies abuse, physical and mental health, sex, education, substance use and systems involvement as crucial issues, the following fifteen best practices were developed.

1. Prevention and early intervention strategies must be emphasized.
2. Street-involved youth respond well to street-outreach services.
3. Youth benefit from a multi-service approach to service.
4. Services for street-involved youth need to be youth-centred, client-centred, accessible and flexible for youth wherever they are, whenever they might be ready.
5. Youth need emergency shelter beds that they can access easily if needed.
6. Transitional housing with supports is an essential component in the re-housing process.
7. Services for street-involved youth should always look at mental health, suicide prevention and substance use and misuse.
8. Approaching substance use and misuse among street-involved youth should offer help on a continuum of treatment options and should include harm reduction.
9. Unemployment continues to be a critical issue causing poverty in youth and is even more pronounced for youth who are street-involved. Services with supports that address unemployment, lack of education and concrete skills are useful.
10. Street-involved youth need alternatives to mainstream education.
11. Sex is a big issue for street-involved youth; therefore they need to be kept educated and empowered to make safe and healthy decisions.
12. Street-involved youth need accessible primary health services.
13. Male and female youth have different experiences on the street. Service provision and policy responses must reflect gender diversity.

³ Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1999

14. With growing diversity in our communities, services for street-involved youth need to be responsive by creating spaces which value and foster diversity.
15. Evaluation is an important component of addressing and reducing street-involvement among youth. Evaluation needs to happen at both the agency and community level. Services should implement evaluation models into their program design in order to make ensure meaningful and effective service.
16. An integrated policy framework is required to respond effectively to street-involved youth.

Hamilton's Response to Street-Involved Youth: Strengths and Gaps

Hamilton is relatively resource rich in its services addressing homelessness. There is a core group of services for street-involved youth specifically. Through focus groups, community mapping exercises with front-line workers, managers and the broader community we asked participants to talk about the strengths and challenges in the service system for street-involved youth in Hamilton.

We found that the strengths in the Hamilton community for helping street-involved and homeless youth were:

- Youth segregated services
- Communication and cohesion in the service system
- Partnerships and on-site links to service
- Front line staff and youth-centred programming
- Food security
- Connecting with alternative education programs

We found that the challenges and gaps in the Hamilton community for helping street-involved and homeless youth were:

- Transitional/supportive housing
- Street-outreach
- Mental health services
- Substance use and misuse services
- Mentoring/counselling/emotional support
- Barriers to diverse youth

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on identifying the unique needs of Hamilton's street-involved and homeless youth population, review of the best practices and input from the community, a number of areas that require additional sources and support were identified. Each of these recommendations needs to be built on a foundation of gender and diversity analysis. As these recommendations are implemented, working groups should examine how service design and provision is different for women, LGBTQ youth and youth from diverse communities and how to be responsive to these differences.

Prevention and Pathways Off the Street

1. It is recommended that a working group made up of the SIYM, Family Services of Hamilton, Catholic Family Services of Hamilton, the Children's Aid Society and the Catholic Children's Aid Society examine child welfare policy and its impacts on street-involvement in youth. Additionally, this group could have the capacity to identify strategies for preventing street-involvement including primary prevention with supports early on for parents to limit the incidence of family conflict and abuse. Finally, the Children's Aid Society and the Catholic Children's Aid Society might have creative responses to early intervention with youth who have runaway that could be shared with the community.
2. The school boards, hospitals, health clinics, recreation centres and other large institutions require tools to enable their staff to recognize and intervene with at-risk youth, to prevent street-involvement and homelessness. It is recommended that the SIYN develop an "at-risk checklist" with options for follow-through and provide it to the appropriate organizations and institutions.
3. Research, explore and develop strategies to prevent family breakdown due to: sexual orientation issues, the struggles faced by newcomer families, justice issues and addictions, particularly for families with youth who are 16-19 years old. The Rainbow Youth Drop-In, Settlement and Integration Service Organization, the John Howard Society and the various addiction treatment services do this work with families and would benefit from continuing and building on this work in their programming.

Current Service Design

4. That the SIYN continue meeting on a regular basis to discuss service provision issues for street-involved youth.
5. Street-involved youth do not have open access services available twenty-four hours a day. It is recommended that the community identify resources to guarantee that youth have an open-access program open to them at all times of the day.
6. The community requires the dissemination of current effective program models and the development of further investigation of effective service design and provision for street-involved youth, including an examination of work happening in other municipalities. It is recommended that the SPRC work with the SIYM to identify

7. resources to carry out this research. It is recommended that the SIYM explore models of an early intervention team to respond within 24 to 48 hours when youth first leave home.

Mental Health Services

8. It is recommended that the Children's Service System committee (with research and support) identify, develop and implement effective treatment models that are specific to meet the unique needs of street-involved youth (including concurrent disorders and living in a culture of use). Additionally, it is recommended that this group advocate for funding envelopes targeted for youth mental health or substance use to identify a percentage of the allocation for street-involved youth to be delivered on-site for street-involved youth. Where the resources already exist in the community, these should be built on; when the group finds areas where no resources or mechanisms for this work exist, the group should identify ways to make this happen.
9. It is recommended that services for street-involved youth build the capacity in their staff to address the unique and complex needs of the population, particularly around mental health issues and substance use and misuse issues. This requires several steps including:
 - a. Resources for hiring highly trained front-line workers.
 - b. Resources for professional development of the front-line workers.
 - c. Clinical support for front-line workers.

Substance Use and Misuse

10. The Hamilton community has an existing network that works on addictions issues in the community. The Hamilton Addictions Services Coalition (HASC) has the mandate to do system planning for our community. In this capacity it is recommended that they work to address some of the gaps in Hamilton's response to street-involved youth substance use and misuse including:
 - a. Advocating for the funding support necessary to develop services that are appropriate and reflect best practices for street-involved youth affected by substance use.
 - b. Increased accessibility to a continuum of substance use treatment services appropriate for their needs including - education, community treatment, day/evening treatment, withdrawal management, residential - all with built on a harm reduction philosophy.
 - c. Increased understanding and community capacity to provide integrated treatment for street-involved youth with concurrent mental health and substance use concerns.
 - d. Consideration of the use of peer support/educator programs as part of a harm reduction strategy that may address the culture of use.

Holistic Supports Around Education and Employment

11. It is recommended that the community expand and ensure adequate and consistent funding of pre-employment programs to ensure continuity and availability.
12. It is recommended that issues around employment and education, as they pertain to street-involved youth, be brought to the Skills and Training Flagship through the City of Hamilton to ensure a stronger profile and attention are afforded to issues faced by street-involved youth.
13. It is recommended that a group representing the School Boards, alternative education providers and the SIYN convene to discuss the ways to create programming so that youth can access school in some way at the moment they are ready, developing options for youth on waiting lists for alternative education programs (for example, youth could touch base with the teacher three times a week, have homework assignments). Additionally, discussions about how to keep youth supported and connected to educational programs when the relationship with the school ends would be beneficial.

Diversity

14. Build on and continue existing efforts to be explicit and open in stating (with defined follow through) that racism, homophobia, sexism and ableism will not be tolerated in services for street-involved youth.
15. The SIYM and the SIYN should develop outreach strategies, including getting to know services in Hamilton that serve marginalized groups (at a minimum, this would include, the AIDS Network, Settlement and Integration Services Organization (SISO), the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre) to understand issues and develop strategies around meeting the needs of diverse youth. A number of initiatives could be addressed such as including staff and volunteers from cultural communities, posters welcoming diversity, rainbow stickers near main access points indicating safe spaces for LGBTQ youth.
16. An outreach strategy, in conjunction with SISO, should be developed by the SIYN for understanding and connecting with the different cultural communities of Hamilton.
17. More research is needed on the needs of street-involved youth from cultural communities.
18. That the SIYN agencies work with a variety of services that work with diverse youth (including but not limited to, the AIDS Network, SISO, the Afro- Canadian Caribbean Association, the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre) to create spaces that bring together youth based on culture (for example, substance use support group for gay youth, open-access programming for Native youth).

Transitional Housing with Supports

19. That the community work to increase the range of transitional housing options for street-involved youth who require a variety of housing options. This range should be creative, flexible and offer a range of levels of support and structure. There are a number of community stakeholders who need to be involved including the City of Hamilton, the SIYM and the SIYN.
 - a. Research on effective models of transitional housing from other communities is needed to inform the above efforts.

Emotional Support

20. That the SIYM explore effective models of peer counselling, given its complex nature. The integration of peer support in street-involved youth services will engage youth who like to work with young people and will help to alleviate some of the responsibility front line workers feel in addressing the emotional needs of all of the youth who access those services. This might look like a program modeled on other mentorship programs for children, specifically for street-involved youth.

Resilience and Coping

21. That the SIYN work to identify models for engaging youth appropriately in decision-making.
22. That street-involved youth agencies continue to build on and expand their existing work with youth involvement initiatives and should publicize these opportunities widely.

Policy Reform - Ontario Works

23. That the SIYM and SIYN work with the community and City of Hamilton in lobbying for change in the Ontario Works policy directive for Applicants Under Age 18 in order to make sure youth are not homeless because they lack any income. Key stakeholders in the community who could join this effort include the Food Shelter and Housing Committee, the Children and Families Flagship Initiative, the Campaign for Adequate Welfare and Disability Benefits working group and the Social Justice Policy working group.
 - a. This effort should also look at the ways to allow older youth (18-21 years old) to engage in work without the risk of losing their benefits, should their employment situation break down. Initial efforts at employment are often tenuous for street-involved youth and Ontario Works policy states that an applicant loses benefits for three months if they are fired or quit.
24. That Ontario Works provide access to youth to complete applications for benefits and receive information on-site at street-involved youth agencies.

Counting and More Research

25. That the SIYN work with the City of Hamilton to explore a model (HIFIS or similar) that can be implemented to identify and track the demographics of street-involved youth in Hamilton in order to ensure appropriate service design and provision. This system should be present at open access programs as well as the shelters. Quarterly results should be reported to both the SIYN and the SIYM.
26. That the SIYM access resources for an evaluation of community progress on this plan. This should include identification of community indicators, a process for monitoring the implementation of the plan and identifying and reporting emerging issues.
27. A research alliance be formed between McMaster University and the above named working groups to identify best practices, evidence-based program models and other academic research on street-involved youth particularly around mental health issues, substance use and misuse and sex trade work.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the Street-Involved Youth Managers (SIYM) committee approached the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC) to develop a community plan for working with the growing population of street-involved youth in Hamilton. The SIYM identified that service providers were having difficulty meeting the unique needs of the growing numbers of street-involved youth. In partnership with the SIYM, the SPRC received a grant from the National Crime Prevention Centre to develop a community plan. This report represents the first phase of this report.

The SIYM committee is comprised of managers from the street-involved youth service sector in Hamilton: Living Rock Ministries, Wesley Urban Ministries, Good Shepherd Centres (Youth Services) and Alternatives for Youth. This group endeavors to meet the needs of street-involved youth in our community by identifying and addressing issues experienced by this population. The objectives of the Managers group are:

- To encourage collaboration and enhance communications between street-involved youth service providers.
- To identify issues and gaps in service based on research, information from young people and needs identified by the Street-Involved Youth Network (front-line workers who meet and discuss service provision issues).
- To initiate, encourage innovative solutions and system planning and to address issues and gaps in service.
- To strive to heighten public awareness and education concerning street-involved youth.

Together, the SPRC and the SIYM devised a set of objectives for this project and three research questions that would help direct the process. The objectives were, 1) to develop a profile of street-involved youth in Hamilton, 2) to develop a best practices model for working with street-involved youth and 3) to conduct a gaps analysis of the service system in Hamilton that would ultimately inform a community plan. In order to achieve those ends, the following three research questions were taken on:

1. Who are street-involved youth and why are they street-involved?
2. What are the best practices for working with street-involved youth?
3. How can we, as a community, best respond to and reduce homelessness among youth?

To answer these questions, we used the following methods:

- Review of current literature on street-involvement in youth and best practices
- Living Rock database and program statistics analysis
- Community mapping with front-line workers, managers and key stakeholders in the community
- Key informant interviews with community leaders
- Focus groups with twenty-nine (29) street-involved youth

- Written stories from four (4) street-involved youth
- One-on-one interviews with ten (10) street-involved youth

Detailed information on these methods can be found in Appendix B.

This report is divided into the following sections based on the findings:

- Past community research on street-involved youth in Hamilton
- Profile of street-involved and homeless youth in Hamilton
- Best practices for working with street-involved youth
- Hamilton: current service system and design
- Analysis and recommendations

From the findings and the research, recommendations have been made in eleven key areas including: prevention and pathways off the street, current service design, mental health services, substance use and misuse, holistic supports around education and employment, diversity, transitional housing with supports, emotional support, resilience and coping, policy reform - Ontario Works, counting and more research.

The next phase of this project will include consultation with community services, youth and other community stakeholders around prioritizing and implementing the recommendations.

2.0 PAST COMMUNITY RESEARCH ON STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH IN HAMILTON

This report is the first comprehensive look at street-involved youth since the *Community Street Youth Task Force Report* in 1990. In 1990, a group of service providers from youth agencies came together under the direction of the Association of Agencies for Treatment and Development and formed the Community Street Youth Task Force. The Taskforce was initiated to look at "the definition of street youth, determining the extent of the street youth issue and determining the unmet needs of street youth in Hamilton-Wentworth through the identification of gaps in existing services and the need for new services". The Taskforce developed a set of 36 recommendations, which covered a number of areas of service provision for street-involved youth including, shelter, health, education, income security, family supports, sex work, child welfare and justice. Two of the recommendations that were most notably acted on in the Hamilton community were around transitional housing and ensuring the separation of youth and adult services.

In the last six years a number of local reports on homelessness have been published in Hamilton. While none of them are specifically focused on youth homelessness, all of them included some consideration of the issue. There is a consensus in the reports that youth homelessness is a growing concern in the Hamilton community and that youth have unique needs in terms of appropriate service responses. A number of similar recommendation areas were outlined in the various reports, most frequently mentioned were the need for more transitional housing options for youth, more alternative education programs and a change to the Ontario Works legislation for 16 and 17 year olds.

Summaries of these reports can be found in Appendix C.

3.0 PROFILE OF STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH IN HAMILTON

3.1 Who Are the Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton?

Arriving at a comprehensive definition of street-involved youth is complex since the population is incredibly diverse with many complicated stories. A review of the literature affirms this difficulty and so it was decided that a definition would be struck with sole intention of placing parameters around the focus of the research. Therefore, this definition is not meant to be a conclusive statement about street-involved youth. The elements of this definition are based on the street-involved youth service community's identification of youth. While the literature sometimes uses broader age ranges, the committee decided to use a definition that was consistent with their agency mandates.

For the purpose of this research, street-involved youth are young people:

- aged 16-21 years old
- absolutely homeless and/or;
- very precariously housed and/or;
- using services for street-involved youth and/or;
- finding their identities and sole support networks and who spend the majority of their time on the streets.

A subsection of street-involved youth are homeless youth. The vast majority of youth we spoke with had been homeless at some point in the last year. These are young people:

- aged 16-21 years old
- no place to live and stay in homeless shelters, in abandoned buildings, in unsafe, crowded accommodations (flop houses) or outside.

While we spoke to both street-involved and homeless youth, these differentiations tend to be cyclical, so that most of the "street-involved" youth we spoke to had been homeless at some point in their recent past (one year). If street-involved youth have never experienced absolute homelessness, securing safe and affordable housing remains an issue. For this report, we use the term street-involved to reflect both the street-involved and homeless experience and we try to distinguish moments in the report when this differentiation is important.

In order to ensure that we were speaking with youth who met our definition, we had two sets of criteria. First, if a youth was connected to a service for street-involved youth they were eligible to participate. These services were the Living Rock Ministries, the Wesley Youth Shelter, the Transitional Youth Program, Good Shepherd - Notre Dame House and Alternatives for Youth. Second, when accessing youth from agencies beyond those five, a list of criteria was consulted to ensure eligibility. This set of criteria was based on the

1992 Toronto *Drifting and Doing* study⁴. The potential participant must have been younger than 22 years old and answer yes to at least three of these experiences:

- Left school before finishing grade 12.
- Lived away from home (family or guardian) for at least two days in the past year.
- Run away or been kicked out at least once in their life.
- Been homeless (without anywhere to stay) at least once.

⁴ Smart, R., Adlaf, E., Walsh, G. and Zdanowicz, Y. (1992). *Drifting and Doing: Changes in Drug Use Among Toronto Street Youth, 1990 and 1992*. Toronto, Ontario: Addiction Research Foundation.

3.2 Number of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton

Homelessness has long proven difficult to count⁵. Barriers to getting an accurate quantitative picture of the scope of the homeless problem include: the lack of a comprehensive definition of homelessness, the "invisibility" of homelessness (those sleeping in abandoned buildings, on the streets and with many other people in inadequate housing) and the reliance of services to enumerate the homeless when they are often under-funded and short-staffed. Peressini, McDonald and Hulchanski propose the use of service-based enumeration to count homeless people. Recognizing the barriers this creates (losing the numbers of people not accessing services), they suggest that most homeless people will access at least one service in the community at least once in a year and therefore, this is the most effective way of counting. While it is recognized that street-involved youth access a number of services (including adult services and youth services that are not street-involved specific) it was decided to narrow the counting to the five street-involved youth specific agencies as identified by the committee. There are four sources of data for program usage of street-involved youth in Hamilton. They are:

- 1) The Living Rock Ministries database
- 2) HIFIS information for Good Shepherd including Notre Dame and Brennan House
- 3) Wesley Youth Shelter data
- 4) Transitional Youth program data

The following table summarizes information from these sources.

⁵ Peressini, T. McDonald, L. and Hulchanski, D., 1995

Table 1. Statistics from Street-Involved Youth Services, 2004⁶.

Agency	# of different youth per year	Age	Gender	Housing Status	Education	Ethnic origin
OPEN-ACCESS PROGRAMS						
The Living Rock	287 youth (average based on 1433 youth over five years: 2000-2005).	Under 16 - 2% 17-18 - 23% 19-21 - 39% 22-25 - 36%	Female - 46% Male - 54%	Paying rent with friends/family: 26% Living with friends/family, not paying rent: 24% Living in hostels/shelters/drop-ins: 20% Paying rent for an apartment (alone): 17%	Some high school: 62% Grade school or less: 10% Graduated high school: 10%	British: 29% Aboriginal: 14% French: 13% W. Europe: 12% E. Europe: 6% S. Europe: 6% N. Europe: 4% African: 4% Latin, Central & S. America: 4% Caribbean: 4% East/South East Asian, Western Asian, Arab, Southern Asian, Pacific Islands (all less than 1%)
Transitional Youth	608 youth	16-17 yrs. 35% 18-19 yrs. 37% 20-21 yrs. 28%	Female - 41% Male - 59%	N/A	N/A	N/A
OVERNIGHT SHELTERS						
Notre Dame (21 bed capacity)	6801 overnight stays (not different youth)	Average age - 16.8 yrs.	Female - 40.5% Male - 59.5%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Wesley Youth Shelter (15 bed capacity)	4038 overnight stays (not different youth)	16-17 yrs. 41% 18-19 yrs. 30.5% 20-21 yrs. 28.5%	Female-20% Male 80%	N/A	N/A	N/A
TRANSITIONAL HOUSING						
Brennan House (14+1 emerg. bed capacity)	48 youth	Under 16 yrs. 17% 16 yrs. & older 83%	Female-48% Male-52%	N/A	N/A	N/A

⁶ Transitional Youth, Wesley Youth Shelter and Brennan House use a fiscal year count (April 1, 2004 - March 31, 2005). Notre Dame House uses a calendar year count (January 1, 2004 - December 31, 2004).

3.3 Key Findings from the Table

Understanding that the numbers shown are likely under-representative of the actual number of homeless youth, the statistics provided by the five agencies indicate that in 2004 there were at least 600 street-involved youth in Hamilton. This means that at least 1.5% of Hamilton's total youth population is street-involved⁷. Unfortunately, these numbers do not provide us with an understanding of the number of youth who choose not to access services and those youth who are imminently at risk of street-involvement.

A number of important themes that impact our understanding of street-involved youth can be found in the statistics:

3.3.1 There are almost as many female as male street-involved youth in Hamilton.

With the exception of the Wesley Youth Shelter, most of the services are seeing only slightly/ more males than females. Traditionally, male street-involved youth far outnumbered female, however, recent literature reports that the presence of female youth on the streets has been growing in the last few years.

3.3.2 One in five Living Rock clients is absolutely homeless.

The statistics indicate that Living Rock clients are precariously housed. Twenty-four (24%) percent of youth indicated at the time of intake that they were living with friends or family and not paying any rent. Anecdotally, staff suggest that this is often the category that describes couch surfing. Additionally, one in five youth (20%) reported living in hostels/shelters or drop ins which means that those clients accessing the Living Rock are absolutely homeless.

3.3.3 Aboriginal youth are over-represented.

The second highest ethnic origin represented at the Living Rock is Aboriginal. This is important to note since Aboriginal youth are over-represented in street-involvement considering their relatively small number in Hamilton. Also important to note is the relatively small number of East and South East Asian youth accessing Living Rock, considering the agency's close proximity to these communities.

3.3.4 Ten percent of street-involved youth have completed less than grade school.

The Living Rock database reports that 62% of Living Rock clients report having "some high school" at the time of intake. This statistic does not indicate whether or not youth are *still* engaged in school or whether or not they leave school after intake. Front line staff comment that, to their knowledge, most youth have difficulty staying connected to school. The fact that 10% of youth have less than grade school is troubling since we know that the Living Rock has an older youth population indicating that these youth likely are not in the process of finishing grade school but have dropped out before completion.

⁷ According to 2001 Census data there were 39 750 youth aged 16-21 years old in Hamilton.

3.4 Pathways On, Pathways Off and Issues Faced by Youth on the Street

Street-involved youth are a very diverse population. Each story of street-involvement is different and impacted by structural, family and personal experiences. Street-involved youth of colour have a different story than white street-involved youth; a youth who left home because of serious abuse has a different story than a youth who left home because he or she was found with drugs. Each of these stories needs to be heard and understood to capture the whole picture of youth homelessness and street-involvement in Hamilton.

Based on a review of the Canadian literature and the stories from youth in Hamilton, this section looks at some of the broad issues facing street-involved youth. While street-involved youth are diverse, with a complex and varied set of stories there are some common themes and experiences among them.

Please see Appendix A for more detailed stories from street-involved and homeless youth in Hamilton.

3.4.1 Family Conflict

Family conflict is often cited as the highest contributing factor to street-involvement among youth.⁸ This "conflict" ranges in severity and circumstance from disagreement over house rules to physical and sexual abuse.

I started hanging out with the wrong crowd, skipping school, experimenting new things like (drugs and alcohol) and not listening to my parents. They kicked me out. My relationship after my parents kicked me out was totally different. I didn't want to talk to them, it felt weird to even be around them.

(Participant - written story)

Issues like addictions (both on the part of the parents and/or youth), neglect, homophobia toward gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth, intergenerational conflict in newcomer families and parents in conflict with the law all show up in the literature as contributing factors to conflict at home resulting in youth street-involvement.⁹

⁸ McCreary Centre, 2001; Kraus, Eberle and Serge, 2001; Community Street Youth Task Force, 1990; Novac, Serge, Eberle and Brown, 2002; CS/RESORS, 2001; Mayor's Homelessness Action Taskforce, 1999; McKibbin Wakefield Inc., 2001

⁹ McCormick, 2004; CS/RESORS, 2001; McCreary Centre, 2002; Community Street Youth Task Force, 1990; Kraus, Eberle and Serge, 2001; McKinley, 2003; Kudfeldt, Durieux and Nimmo, 1992

3.4.2 Abuse

Abuse is a key contributing factor in the lives of many street youth. In 1999, the *Report of the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force in Toronto* indicated, "more than 70 percent of young people leave home for the streets because of physical and/or sexual abuse". The literature also points to a gendered difference in the experience of abuse in street-involved youth. According to a study conducted in an Ottawa shelter, twice as many young women as men reported "parental abuse" as the key reason for their homelessness.¹⁰ This divide is even more apparent when looking at sexual abuse.

I was sexually abused by my mom's boyfriend - she's still with him today, it's no good... so I figured the best way to deal with it was to get away. I ran away from home for two weeks and I guess after the two weeks everyone stopped looking for me and so I lived on the streets for two years solid.

(Participant - interview, who was 10 years old when she left home)

Almost all sources agree that young women experience sexual abuse in the home far more often than young men.

3.4.3 Child Welfare System

While involvement in the child welfare system itself may not cause street-involvement, many American sources suggest that a history of having been "in care" seems to predicate street-involvement in youth and homelessness in adults¹¹. The fact that family conflict and abuse are the number one reasons child protection agencies see youth is an important consideration when understanding street-involvement and the child welfare system. One of the phenomena that seems to contribute to this relationship is the "aging out" process, which occurs when a young person remains in care, as a Crown ward, (with a foster family, in a group home, with extended relatives) without being adopted until they reach 18 years old. The courts may decide to terminate wardship before 18 years, if extenuating circumstances arise such as pregnancy. The literature points to this process of "aging out" in 16 to 18 year old Crown wards as an unsettling experience for many youth. According to a 2002 *Child Trends Research Brief*, youth aging out of foster care often have a more difficult experience due to a lack of "extended support that most families provide young people in the transition to adulthood".¹²

In this research, no direct questions were asked of the participants about their relationship to the child welfare system. While none of the youth who participated in the research cited the transition from care to independence as the reason for their street-involvement, many had been in care at some point. During one focus group, all five participants had been in the care of a child protection agency at least once in their lives.

¹⁰ Kraus, Eberle and Serge, 2001

¹¹ Kraus, Eberle and Serge, 2001; Roman and Wolfe, 1995; Homes for the Homeless, 1997

¹² Wertheimer, 2002

3.4.4 Health

The physical health of street-involved youth is generally poor. Sexually transmitted infections, dental problems, respiratory infections, podiatric problems, vitamin and nutritional deficiencies and skin infections are the most common health complaints of street-involved youth.¹³ According to the literature Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAS/E) impact street-involved youth in higher rates than the general population.¹⁴ FAS/E can affect a person's physical as well as mental health. In interviews with street-involved youth, health was not raised as an important issue. According to the literature, street-involved youth often do not articulate health problems since they seem secondary to the crisis of being homeless and because they have felt unhealthy for so long that it becomes normalized to them.¹⁵

3.4.5 Mental Health

Emotional and psychological problems, sometimes concurrently diagnosed with addictions, are also common health issues for street-involved youth. Clinical depression, stress, anxiety, self-harm and suicidal thoughts and actions are all reported to be higher among street youth.¹⁶

Depression is one of the biggest things facing street youth...you get into a sinkhole, and it's not like you come up, you just kind of sit there and look around.

(Participant -focus group)

These mental health issues contribute to a greater risk for suicidal ideation and attempts in street-involved youth. According to research cited by Kidd, 2002, street youth attempt suicide at rates over 100 times the national average. Citing a Montreal study, Hwang notes that the mortality rate was 9 times higher for young men and 31 times higher for young women in a small sample of homeless youth than in the general population.¹⁷ In his qualitative study Kidd found themes of hopelessness, addiction, abusive pasts and social stigma as major contributing factors to suicidal ideation in young people. In a British Columbian study of street-involved youth, the McCreary Centre, 2001, found that depression and loneliness were the primary reasons given in more than half of the young peoples suicide attempts.

There were days when I would just cry, I wanted to kill myself, sometimes I had the rope but I would just have to tell myself, one more chance.

(Participant - interview)

¹³ CS/RESORS, 2001; McCreary Centre, 2001; Novac, Serge, Eberle and Brown, 2002; Kraus, Eberle and Serge, 2001

¹⁴ CMHC, 2001; McCreary Centre, 2001

¹⁵ Higgett, Wingert and Ristock, 2003, McCreary Centre, 2001

¹⁶ Novac, Serge, Eberle and Brown, 2002; Kraus, Eberle and Serge, 2001; McCreary Centre, 2001

¹⁷ Hwang, 2000

3.4.6 Substance Use

Inextricably linked to the prevalence of mental health issues is the use of substances including drugs and alcohol in order to cope with life on the street. The authors of *Drifting and Doing: Changes in Drug Use Among Toronto Street Youth*, conclude that while street-involved youth decreased their drug and alcohol use between 1990 and 1992, the rates of illicit drug use remained very high. Alcohol, marijuana and tobacco use appear to be most common among young homeless people; however rates of injection drug use (crack and heroin) were documented to be rising dramatically on the streets.¹⁸ Youth talk about using substances recreationally but more prevalently as a means of coping with mental health and life issues.

Suffering manic depression and anorexia for at least three years, without the knowledge of any friends or family, I finally found something that helped me cope: drugs.

(Participant - written story)

Of the fourteen interview and written story participants, all fourteen had done drugs at some point in their lives. All of the interview participants (ten participants) report doing drugs or drinking alcohol at least once per week; six use substances everyday. Marijuana was the most common drug used - all thirteen participants reported using marijuana either at some point in their life or on a regular basis. This is higher than the general population measured by *The Ontario Student Drug Use Survey* which found that 29.6% of students in Ontario in grades 7-12 had reported using marijuana in 2003.

Of the ten interviewed youth - three reported that they believed their drug use was a "problem" and seven indicated that they did not believe it was a problem but did do drugs on a regular basis to cope with life stresses. None of the interview participants reported wanting to end their substance use.

3.4.7 Absolute Homelessness

Of the 39 youth we interviewed or who participated in focus groups, 34 had been absolutely homeless (with no place to stay) at least once in their lives. Eleven of the youth were currently housed but had been homeless in the last year. Four youth had never experienced absolute homelessness but were very precariously housed or had accessed many services for street-involved youth.

Many of youth who participated in the interviews had had experiences sleeping outside, in abandoned buildings, in "flop houses" and shelters. They talked candidly about these experiences.

¹⁸ Smart, Adlaf, Walsh and Zdanowicz, 1992

(Sleeping outside) is really dangerous, it gets really cold depending on the time of year, the weather is shitty sometimes, it can get really hard.

(Participant - interview)

(Staying in a shelter,) You have more time to think about more worries, more problems, life when you're homeless is at its worst, it can't get any worse and then it does.

(Participant - interview)

(Staying in an abandoned building) I brought my blankets and a mat, it took me a few days to get it all set up, because I had to avoid the police, so they couldn't see me, I had to do this all at night.

(Participant - interview)

(I stayed in) a place with no hydro, no hot water, the animals that they kept in that house, they were able to stay indoors, it was massively flea infested, it was pretty disgusting. I wouldn't even put my feet on the floor, I took my boots off beside my, I guess it was a cot is the best way of putting it, springs poking through, typical what you'd expect.

(Participant - interview)

This is similar to the findings in the literature, which describe homelessness and street-involvement in youth as cyclical.¹⁹

3.4.8 Alternative Support Systems

Traditionally, adolescents have families to rely on for emotional and protective support. While this life stage is often associated with growing distance and independence from parents, parental support is still an important factor in the lives of teens. Given the break from families, street-involved youth often have to find and rely on alternative support systems to cope with life on the street.²⁰ This support is emotional:

My friends are my family because they showed me that they cared when my family didn't, they were there when I needed them when my family wasn't - I find if anything that your family will hurt you before your friends will.

(Participant - interview)

In addition to providing a support network, peer groups offer street-involved youth protection in dangerous situations often encountered on the streets.

¹⁹ Novac, Serge, Eberle and Brown, 2002; Kraus, Eberle and Serge, 2001

²⁰ McCreary Centre, 2001

To stay safe? It was my friend watching my back and me watching his.

(Participant - interview)

3.4.9 Education

Street-involved youth face higher rates of difficulty in school and early school leaving²¹. According to statistics from the Living Rock suggest that 10% of youth accessing the service had completed grade school or less. We know that the Living Rock has an older youth population indicating that these youth likely are not in the process of finishing grade school but have dropped out before completion. Education is an important component to entering into the workforce in Canada. Staying connected to school once a youth is homeless is difficult at best. The lack of stability, regular meals and sleep that mark a street-youths life, all contribute to a lack of success in school. Most youth who were interviewed for this research were not currently enrolled in school. One participant had completed high school. Those that were enrolled in school were attending alternative education programs because of their flexibility. Most of the youth who were not in school had goals of either being in or finishing school in the next five years.

3.4.10 Employment

Youth in Canada have the highest rates of unemployment. Young men, aged 15 to 24 have the highest unemployment rate of all Canadians (14.9%) with women of the same age group following close in second (11.8%).²² Additionally, young people, who lack education and experience, fill the majority of minimum wage positions, which do not pay enough to meet the poverty line in Canada. Street-involved youth lack education, lack training and lack employment transition programs which contribute to a demonstrated difficulty in accessing and maintaining meaningful employment. Additionally, crisis, transience, lack of stability and mental health and substance use issues create additional barriers to meaningful employment.

I had a great job when I was 18 living back in Brantford, I worked in a factory making \$16 an hour, I was happy with that, I always had money and a great girlfriend. But once again I screwed up, lost my job, my girlfriend and my apartment.

(Participant - written story)

One very present reality for street-involved youth trying to engage in employment is the experience of attempting to work while absolutely homeless. Issues like lack of consistent meals, telephone, transportation, place to store belongings, frequent disruptions of sleep make following a rigid schedule difficult.

²¹ Novac, Serge, Eberle, and Brown 2002; Josephson, 2004

²² Statistics Canada, 2004

Living in a shelter and working is too hard. Nobody goes to sleep until late, they're all like drinking Listerine and shit and you are like, shut up I have to get up in a few hours.

(Participant - interview)

3.4.11 Poverty

While poverty may not cause street-involvement, poverty is a marked reality for street-involved youth. According to the literature, family poverty does not cause homelessness in youth. Robertson and Toro (1998), suggest, however, that youth who come from families in poverty might experience homelessness more chronically and/or more often. While family poverty and street-involvement do not have a strong correlation, poverty among youth does factor into the statistics. According to the National Anti-Poverty Organization, 43.1% of youth were "poor" in 2001 as compared to 14.2% of young adults.²³ Several factors contribute to this high incidence of poverty among young people including high unemployment, low wages, rising rents and more restrictions on youth access to social assistance.

Getting cold, kinda get scared sometimes wondering where you're going to sleep, wondering if you're going to be okay, uh, wondering where your next meal is coming from.

(Participant - interview)

The street-involved youth that we spoke with were all very poor. Once a street youth has experienced high rates of poverty, it leads to increased difficulty accessing housing, education and employment. Additionally, the longer a street-involved youth spends "on the street" the more poor they become and the more difficult it is to make the transition to permanent housing. These high rates of persistent poverty also leads to youth meeting basic needs in a number of ways including criminal activity, survival sex²⁴ and panhandling.

3.4.12 Criminal Activity

According to McCarthy and Hagan, engaging in criminal behaviour such as drug use, trafficking, break and entering, theft and violence is "...an integral part of living on the street".²⁵ The youth who participated in the interviews and written stories spoke of a number of experiences that fell into the realm of criminal activity such as, doing drugs, selling drugs, assault, assault with a deadly weapon, break and enter, shoplifting, cheque fraud and stealing cars. Of the fourteen interview and written story participants, twelve identified that they had committed a crime - of those twelve, five had been charged and incarcerated. One participant had participated in a diversion program through the John

²³ NAPO definition of youth: person between 15 and 24 years old. NAPO definition of "poor": individual or family who spends 20 percentage points more of their total income on the essential items of food, clothing and shelter than the average family or individual.

²⁴ Survival sex is the exchange of sex for subsistence in the form of food, drugs and money.

²⁵ McCarthy and Hagan, 1997

Howard Society. Diversion programs are an important component of the relatively new Youth Criminal Justice Act which favours diversion rather than incarceration for young people. Occasionally jail provided respite for the difficulty of life on the streets,

If worst came to worst I would commit a crime which would end my butt in jail. I know there I'm going to be safe, clean and have a roof over my head and something to eat.

(Participant - written story)

3.4.13 Sex On The Street

Sex is a crucial issue for both young men and women who are street-involved. According to a British Columbia study, 81% of street youth as compared with 24% of youth in school reported being sexually active.²⁶ Rates of pregnancy among street youth are high. According to Public Health in Toronto, of the estimated 300 babies born to homeless women annually, at least one third of those are born to teenagers.²⁷ These pregnancies are particularly high risk because since street-involved women are more likely to fear child protection involvement, they may not as readily seek medical attention and parenting supports putting both the mother and baby in potential jeopardy.

In addition to pregnancy, rates of sexually transmitted infections are higher among street-involved youth when compared with the general youth population.²⁸ This could be in part due to the number of sexual partners street-involved youth are engaging with but also can be attributed to the high rate of survival sex as a form of coping with street life. Both young men and young women engage in sex work on the streets, however, service providers report that women are engaging in higher numbers. In addition to these higher numbers, the research shows that if a young woman is not diverted from the sex trade within three or four weeks, the likelihood that she will remain for years is far greater.²⁹

3.4.14 Youth of Colour

A small portion of the literature suggests that with growing diversity in our cities, the number of street-involved youth of colour is growing as well.³⁰ Much of the other literature on street-involvement in youth does not report on the intersections of race and homelessness. In the Hamilton community, there are a small number of youth of colour who access services for street-involved youth. Three potential reasons for this low number were identified, 1) a key informant identified that, youth from cultures that place high value on the family and the home may be forced to remain in potentially dangerous and abusive situations, thus "choosing" a dangerous home over the street, 2) youth of colour are not as safe on the streets and therefore are not as visibly homeless and 3) youth of colour may not feel totally safe and represented in services for street-involved youth.

²⁶ McCreary Centre, 2001

²⁷ Novac, Serge, Eberle and Brown, 2002

²⁸ McCreary Centre, 2001

²⁹ Novac, Serge, Eberle, and Brown 2002; McCreary Centre, 2001

³⁰ Kraus, Eberle and Serge, 2001

3.4.15 Aboriginal Youth

While Aboriginal people comprise only 2% of Hamilton's total population, they are vastly over-represented in the homeless population at 20%.³¹ According to research done by the Native community in Hamilton in 2001, 17% of a total of 202 survey respondents reported being under the age 25 and absolutely or relatively homeless.³² The literature reveals this to be true of many major urban centres, with even higher representations in Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.³³ In Hamilton, we know that 14% of youth accessing the Living Rock Program last year were Aboriginal.³⁴

These statistics cannot be understood in isolation of the historical context of oppression and displacement endured by Canada's Aboriginal population. Intergenerational impacts of the repressive policy relationship between the Canadian state and Aboriginal people include substance abuse, suicide, mental health issues and homelessness³⁵. The historical feelings of displacement from the creation of the reserve system have strong links to contemporary homelessness³⁶.

3.4.16 LGBTQ Youth

In a research study on street-involved youth in Vancouver, only half of those surveyed identified themselves as heterosexual. There is a strong presence of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth on the streets. This is in part related to the causes of street-involvement as many youth who attempt to be open about their sexual identities face heterosexism and homophobia at home.³⁷ Very little appears in Canadian research on the experience of homophobia on the street. This is not an indication that homophobia is not present in the lives of LGBTQ street youth. According to an American study, 46% of violent physical assaults endured by a sample of street-involved youth were homophobic in nature. Nothing appears in the research on youth experiences of homophobia in service settings.

Every time someone new comes here I get worried - worried that they'll be uncomfortable 'cause I'm gay and worried about gay bashing
(Focus group participant)

While we did not explicitly ask youth to disclose their sexual and gender identities, six of the youth we spoke with in the interviews and focus groups self-identified as LGBTQ.

³¹ Hamilton Executive Directors Aboriginal Coalition, 2001; Wingard, McCormack and Neigh, 2003.

³² Hamilton Executive Directors Aboriginal Coalition, 2001

³³ Kraus, Eberle and Serge, 2001

³⁴ Social Planning and Research Council, Living Rock Database Summary, 2004

³⁵ Alfred, 1999

³⁶ Berger, (1999)

³⁷ CS/RESORS, 2001

3.4.17 Safety

While youth did not talk about the specific ways they had been victimized on the street, they left no doubt that street-involvement can be dangerous. For men this seemed to be about physical aggression and theft. For women, these concerns were the same but also included sexual violence.

I've seen people get shot. I've watched a buddy of mine stomp on some guys head because he called him a rat. The stuff you see on the streets and the stuff you see in your own home are definitely a lot different.

(Participant - interview)

When asked what sort of mechanisms they use to stay safe, most youth talked about using friends and large groups of people for protection. Some youth talked about being ready to fight at any time, letting people know that they will fight if they need to. A few youth do carry or have carried weapons for self defense. Women had other ways to stay safe, particularly if sleeping outside.

Sleep with your back to the wall, in a corner if you can and make sure it's somewhat lit so you can see what's going on and that you're fairly hard to get to - make sure you're as hidden as possible but that you can get out of situations.

(Female participant - interview)

3.4.18 Resilience and Coping on the Street

As a response to the trauma and adversity faced on the street, street-involved youth demonstrate great resilience and coping. Often talked about by the youth as "street smarts", this seems to be the capacity to stay healthy, fed, sheltered and safe.

If I had to choose between being book smart or street smart, I'm damn glad I'm street smart...you kind of know the ins and outs of the streets, you kind of catch the drift on the different crews, you basically learn what's around you.

(Participant - interview)

In addition to surviving on the street, resiliency also seems to be articulated by youth as an end to street-involvement for them.

There are street-people and not street-people...I consider myself between it all...I can survive, I just don't want to be a street person for the rest of my life.

(Participant - interview)

4.0 BEST PRACTICES FOR WORKING WITH STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH

The purpose of developing a “best practices” model is to identify constructive and relevant applications based on literature and past work for use in a community.³⁸ Some best practices literature identifies past projects and initiatives to be duplicated in similar situations. For the purpose of this research, we will look at more general ways to address the issues that arise in the literature. These best practices are meant to be used as a guide in the community for developing innovative strategies for eliminating street-involvement among youth. Since each community is different, the best practices should be used to create programs that fit with the size, resources available, population of street youth and culture of the community.

After a review of the literature, which identifies abuse, physical and mental health, sex, education, substance use and systems involvement as crucial issues, the following fifteen best practices will inform community-based approaches to service design for and strategies to reduce street-involvement among youth on a micro to macro continuum.

1. Prevention and early intervention strategies must be emphasized.

Youth are often navigating a complex set of systems where structures must be put in place to prevent street involvement. Since we know that abuse and family conflict contribute largely to youth becoming street-involved, child welfare, health, justice and education systems must work together to ensure that teenagers are being protected and cared for. This includes modifying policies to be able to serve youth better in the child welfare system, opening dialogues about abuse and conflict in health settings and providing support and education in schools about services and options for teens facing conflict at home. In addition to these, there should be communication and coordination both between community services and agencies, and also larger systems like health, child welfare, education and justice.

In addition to an emphasis on prevention, early intervention strategies are useful when working with street-involved youth. This is particularly compelling given the Covenant House literature which suggests that if a young, first-time runner does not experience intervention within the first 24-48 hours, they will be “lost to the street”. Therefore, the longer youth are on the street, the more difficult it is for them to transition into permanent, stable and independent living.

2. Street-involved youth respond well to street-outreach services.

Accessing services can be an intimidating prospect for a person in need. Youth, in particular, may have reservations about seeking out support because of a lack of trust in adults, intimidation and lack of awareness. Therefore, it is crucial that services are set up

³⁸ Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1999

which bring support to youth on the street. Outreach does just that - brings support and service to people in the spaces they occupy and therefore feel most comfortable.

3. Youth benefit from a multi-service approach to service.

Agencies that provide many services in one space work well with youth. An open access program with representation from health, mental health, substance misuse, housing, legal supports, sexual health education, education and employment help and income security provide the most meaningful help to youth who are often reluctant and unable to meet appointments, access transportation and who find traditional services intimidating. Additionally, offering services to street-involved youth in the spaces they access most often and feel most comfortable, helps service providers to build relationships and trust enabling the transition to other services.

4. Services for street-involved youth need to be youth-centred, client-centred, accessible and flexible for youth wherever they are, whenever they might be ready.

Youth culture needs to be a part of the services offered for street-involved youth. Information in accessible language, surroundings that reflect contemporary media, non-judgment to different communication styles and open-mindedness among staff are crucial to offering services that youth can identify with. Key informants in the community also suggest that because of the critical importance peer support has for youth; services should work to staff their programs with young people. Youth need to feel welcome accessing service no matter how ready they are to give up street-involvement and require services that are in operation at non-traditional times of the day and night.

5. Youth need emergency shelter beds that they can access easily if needed.

As the literature notes, many homeless youth are escaping abusive and dangerous home lives. Spaces need to be made accessible for youth to spend the night if necessary. These should be separate youth-spaces as they have different needs. Emergency shelters need to be accessible and fairly lenient in terms of curfew and drug/alcohol use in order to ensure youth will use these spaces instead of sleeping outside.

6. Transitional housing with supports is an essential component in the re-housing process.

Often the transition from homelessness to being housed is an overwhelming experience. As evidenced in the "aging out" literature, youth who are moving from child welfare involvement or incarceration have difficulty with learning basic life skills (cooking, budgeting, cleaning, etc.). Transitional housing with built-in supports could offer youth at risk of street-involvement the chance to learn independence ensuring greater success in maintaining later housing. Part of this practice model includes supporting youth as they transition off of the street and out of street-involved youth services. In order to ensure success once youth find permanent housing, services that offer support around the many issues faced by street-involved youth (health, mental health, substance misuse, housing, legal supports,

sexual health education, education and employment help and income security) should remain present in their lives.

7. Services for street-involved youth should always look at mental health, suicide prevention and substance use and misuse.

With mental health issues such as depression, substance misuse, anxiety, stress and suicidal ideation and attempts contributing to the reality of so many street-involved youth, services need to be able to respond to this. Regardless of the nature of the service provision, front-line staff should be trained to understand and work with issues around suicide in particular since it seems to pervade street life so much. More research needs to be conducted on the link between street-involvement and serious and persistent mental health issues in order to best understand and, therefore, serve the needs of street-involved youth. While counselling services are crucial, services need to be able to provide psychiatric and psychological functions as well in order to best serve youth with serious mental health issues and concurrent disorders. Service providers must also understand that street-involved youth often face difficulty following treatment regimes (such as medication) and often suffer from exacerbated mental health symptoms because of stress, lack of sleep and lack of food.

8. Approaching substance use and misuse among street-involved youth should offer help on a continuum of treatment options and should include harm reduction.

Youth have access to alcohol and drugs on the street. The literature points to addiction and misuse as growing problems in the street-involved youth population. The most effective substance use support for youth is that which identifies underlying issues and meets youth where they are in their readiness for treatment. Therefore, youth need to be offered a range of addictions services from education to live-in abstinence treatment all following a harm reduction approach. Spaces need to be available for youth when they are ready to engage in treatment. Long waiting lists often disrupt treatment goals and efforts. Programs for street-involved youth must, therefore, be flexible. Also, in understanding the close relationship between substance use and mental health, substance use and mental health support programs are most useful if they are integrated and willing to address and treat concurrent disorders.

9. Unemployment continues to be a critical issue causing poverty in youth and is even more pronounced for youth who are street-involved. Services with supports that address unemployment, lack of education and concrete skills are useful.

Youth are among the poorest populations in Canada. This is due, in large part, to the under-education, lack of concrete skills and high unemployment rates for youth. Street-involved youth in particular have a difficult time completing educational pursuits and therefore miss out on meaningful and sustaining employment opportunities. Programs need to be coordinated - to make education, skill building and obtaining employment manageable in one central, accessible place. Because street-involved youth are not ready to launch into employment without supports and without ensuring other parts of their lives are more

stable, pre-employment and employment linkage programs work well. Long waiting lists can be extremely discouraging for youth when they finally decide to seek out support. Programs must work to ensure youth are not waiting long for employment services.

10. Street-involved youth need alternatives to mainstream education.

Street-involved youth often have difficulty staying connected to school due to crisis, lack of consistent shelter and stress. Street-involved youth are best served by alternative education approaches, which recognize the unique and complicated lives of each student and work toward being flexible to ensure success. Alternative education programs often allow students to work at their own pace, offer one-on-one support and have flexible hours and deadlines. It is crucial that support be in place when youth are in the process of dropping out or being asked to leave school so they can be connected to alternative education programs and not lost from the system entirely.

11. Sex is a big issue for street-involved youth; therefore they need to be kept educated and empowered to make safe and healthy decisions.

Sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, unsafe sex practices, sex work, survival sex and sexual violence are all realities for street-involved youth. In order to reduce the harm around potentially unsafe sex practices, youth should be provided with services that are accessible, sex-positive and non-judgmental where they can talk about and learn about sex in a youth-friendly way. Accessibility to safer sex education and resources need to be provided.

Young, street-involved women face unique sexual issues in terms of pregnancy, higher rates of sex work and higher rates of sexual violence. Service providers must be cognizant of these gender differences and modify sexual education programs to best serve the needs of women and men differently.

12. Street-involved youth need accessible primary health services.

Street-involved youth often suffer from poor health such as sexually transmitted diseases, dental problems, respiratory infections, podiatric problems, vitamin and nutritional deficiencies and skin infections. Health services should be accessible, non-judgmental and easy to get to. Street-involved youth often have trouble keeping track of identification (like health cards) and when these things do go missing, the process and cost of replacing them are barriers. Linked to the multi-service approach to service, the integration of health and social services further contributes to the accessibility of health services for street-involved youth.

13. Male and female youth have different experiences on the street. Service provision and policy responses must reflect gender diversity.

While slightly more young men than women find themselves street-involved, the experience of life on the street can be very different based on gender. The violence many young women have faced both in their families and intimate relationships can impact on women's willingness to access help and shelter. Co-ed services and shelters might be perceived as a safety risk to young women whose options may be limited, thus creating more risk. Service providers, policy makers and researchers must be cognizant of the gendered differences of street-involvement for youth when designing and delivering services for youth. This will include the consideration of gender specific services for men and women. Additionally diversity within the realm of gender needs to be respected in order to provide inclusive and anti-oppressive service.

14. With growing diversity in our communities, services for street-involved youth need to be responsive by creating spaces which value and foster diversity.

Services and policies that consider the diversity of its service population are ultimately more successful at creating real change for people. Aboriginal youth, youth of colour and LGBTQ youth comprise an uneven percentage of those homeless in Canada. A solid framework for understanding the marginalization faced by traditionally oppressed groups, needs to be addressed by anyone seeking to help street-involved youth. Being explicit about anti-racism, anti-oppression efforts in places meant to serve street-involved youth is crucial to creating a service system that is inclusive and serving all needs.

15. Evaluation is an important component of addressing and reducing street-involvement among youth. Evaluation needs to happen at both the agency and community level. Services should implement evaluation models into their program design in order to make ensure meaningful and effective service.

At the agency level, evaluation is an important tool in service delivery. Regularly monitoring the strengths and gaps in service ultimately benefits clients by ensuring effective program design and delivery. Evaluation does not have to be expensive and time consuming. Checking in with clients, asking for reflections from staff, having services users fill out simple questionnaires all work to help service providers understand what is working and what is not working as well to ensure useful and meaningful help for clients.

At the community level, evaluation should be used to monitor progress toward community wide benchmarks as well as documenting progress or steps taken in working with street-involved youth.

16. An integrated policy framework is required to respond effectively to street-involved youth.

Street-involved youth interact with many different policy systems: child welfare, justice, health, education, housing, and income maintenance.

There are two policies in particular in Ontario that need to be examined in their relationship to street-involvement in youth. 1) The "aging out" process in the child welfare system has a strong correlation to homelessness in the literature. Before the relationship between the child welfare body and the youth terminates, services should be put in place to ensure the client is adequately prepared for and supported through the first stages of independence. 2) The Ontario Works Policy Directive on Applicants under 18 years old sets out guidelines for 16 and 17 year olds accessing financial support that is complicated. Requiring youth to maintain near-perfect attendance or risk losing benefits can be particular barrier for street-involved youth who often lack stability. While not wanting to promote incentives for leaving home and school, this policy must be reworked to ensure that youth are not at risk of homelessness, without access to financial support.

5.0 HAMILTON: CURRENT SERVICE SYSTEM AND DESIGN

5.1 What do we have in Hamilton?

Street-involved youth have access to services in Hamilton. Some of these services are specifically mandated to address their needs as homeless youth, some are general homelessness services that street-youth choose to access and some are systems level structures that impact their lives as street-involved youth. This is meant to represent a picture of the services street-involved youth in Hamilton access to get their needs met. Other than the services specifically for street-involved youth, these lists are not exhaustive and are meant to provide examples of the types of services youth are accessing.

See "Chart 1. Services for Street-Involved Youth in Hamilton".

Chart 1 - Services for Street-Involved Youth in Hamilton

Services that meet the specific needs of street-involved youth:

- ✓ Living Rock Ministries
- ✓ Notre Dame/Brennan House
- ✓ Wesley Youth Shelter
- ✓ Transitional Youth Program
- ✓ Alternatives for Youth
- ✓ City of Hamilton and Wesley Urban Ministries - Mental Health Outreach Team

Examples of services that meet the needs of youth (but not necessarily street-involvement specific):

- ✓ Teen Health Clinic
- ✓ St. Martin's Manor/Grace Haven
- ✓ Outlook Residence

Examples of services that meet the needs of homeless people (but not necessarily youth specific):

- ✓ Community Health Centres
- ✓ Out of the Cold
- ✓ Food banks

Examples of larger institutions, community agencies and networks that impact on street-involved youth but may not be able to meet their specific needs around being young and/or being street-involved:

- ✓ Hospitals, health services
- ✓ Children's Aid Society/Catholic Children's Aid Society
- ✓ School Boards
- ✓ City of Hamilton - Ontario Works
- ✓ Cultural and ethnic community groups
- ✓ Children and adult mental health services

5.2 Hamilton's Response to Street-Involved Youth: Strengths and Gaps

Hamilton is relatively resource rich in its services addressing homelessness. There is a core group of services for street-involved youth specifically. Through focus groups, community mapping exercises with front-line workers, managers and the broader community we asked participants to talk about the strengths and challenges in the service system for street-involved youth in Hamilton. Based on this feedback we found Hamilton is doing well at serving street-involved youth in a number of crucial areas. However, major gaps were also identified.

The money allocated in the first phase of the Supporting Community Partnership Initiative (SCPI) provided important funding to the street-involved youth service community to implement new and vital programs. Youth were named a priority in the Hamilton community for the 2000-20003 SCPI allocation.

5.3 What Are We Doing Well as a Community to Help Street-Involved Youth?

5.3.1 Youth Segregated Services

Youth and service providers alike talked about the need for youth specific services. Youth identified three reasons this segregation is important, 1) the poor influence adults can have on youth, 2) the lack of safety youth feel with some adults and 3) the different needs youth face. The Hamilton community recognizes these diverse needs and have responded accordingly. Some examples of services youth can access that are segregated from adult services include emergency beds, food bank, hot meal programs, resource centres, laundry, shower, open-access programs, primary health, mental health and substance misuse services.

5.3.2 Communication and Cohesion in the Service System

The service providers for street-involved youth are a cohesive and communicative group particularly since the formation of the SIYN. This cohesion translates into a resourceful, referral-ready community and a resourceful, connected population of street-involved youth. Youth and the service providers who work with them, know where they can go to get their needs met within the network.

5.3.3 Partnerships and On-Site Links to Service

On-site delivery of service is occurring in a number of the agencies working with street-involved youth in Hamilton. This method of service delivery is more accessible for street-involved youth and it creates a more fluid, comfortable referral system (i.e. If I see "Sue" from the local youth substance abuse agency at the breakfast program that I attend, I will likely be more open to accessing that service directly in the future)

5.3.4 Front Line Staff and Youth-Centred Programming

The programs for street-involved youth in Hamilton and the front line workers who staff them have been commended by youth and the community alike for being youth-centred, creative, engaged and flexible. The new weekend hours at Transitional Youth indicates that service providers and the community are listening to the needs of youth, particularly to have services available at non-traditional business hours.

5.3.5 Food Security

Street-involved youth in Hamilton report having plenty of access to food. A youth specific food bank and hot meal programs are well used and mean that youth are not experiencing persistent hunger given the current funding environment.

5.3.6 Connecting with Alternative Education Programs

Youth have access to and support connecting with education programs. Alternative education programs and the involvement of front-line workers in connecting youth to education means that when youth are ready to be engaged, there is likely a program to suit their needs. Examples of innovative alternative education programs that meet the needs of specific populations of street-involved youth include the program at Notre Dame (for homeless youth accessing the shelter), the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre (for Aboriginal youth) and the Salvation Army Grace Haven and St. Martin (for pregnant and parenting teen moms). Unfortunately, waiting lists make these services inaccessible to some youth.

5.4 What are the Challenges and Gaps in Our Community for Street-Involved Youth?

5.4.1 Transitional/Supportive Housing

Right now we only have one transitional housing program for street-involved youth. Many service providers, managers and key informants agree that that with extra supports through the transition from street-involvement to permanent housing, more youth would succeed. Many youth agreed that the structured nature of transitional housing is a deterrent to them. Therefore, for some street-involved youth, supportive housing might be more appropriate. Many youth described some form of supportive housing when asked what they would do for street-involved youth.

5.4.2 Street-Outreach

Youth talked about the value of the one street-outreach worker in Hamilton. However, with only one outreach worker for youth, the Hamilton community is lacking in specialized outreach services for this particular population. The mapping exercises uncovered the need for broader hours, a wider catchment area and more outreach workers doing specific outreach to youth (housing, substance use, harm reduction, mental health and sex work).

5.4.3 Mental Health Services

The lack of appropriate mental health services for street-involved youth was highlighted as a major gap in the Hamilton community. Traditional mental health services are not meeting the specialized needs of street-involved youth. Youth and service providers agree that street-involved youth are sometimes accessing primary health care services for their mental health needs. This is at least, in part, attributable to youth requiring immediate care. However, the lack of access to primary health care services (lack of family doctors, long waits in emergency) make this alternative barrier-ridden as well.

Waiting lists, rigid appointment schedules and travel do not work well in the street-involved youth population. According to one focus group participant, "long waiting lists and long assessments take months - so we suffer alone and in silence, some people might commit suicide during those times". The community indicated that there is a gap in the psychiatric and psychological support street-involved youth have access to - services that are often attached to more formal service provision. Youth are often excluded from mental health services because they are facing addictions. Additionally, in terms of treatment, youth often face barriers in accessing potentially useful drug therapies because of their inability to maintain a medication schedule and because they lack funding in regularly obtaining medications. Youth agree that in addition to seeking the help of family and walk-in clinic doctors, many are accessing peers for mental health support. There is currently a lack of youth centred mental health services which are important as youth have different needs and would benefit from talking to other youth about mental health issues.

5.4.4 Substance Use and Misuse Services

As evidenced in the interviews with the 10 youth interviewed, many street-involved youth identify substance use but the desire to stop or reduce their use is often absent or fleeting. These youth find that substance use helps them cope with mental health issues, instability and the trauma in their lives. According to an interview participant, "I use drugs because I have so many problems - when I use drugs I don't notice them".

Two substance misuse counsellors from Alternatives for Youth (one of which focuses on pregnant and parenting youth) spend time at Notre Dame, Transitional Youth and Living Rock connecting with youth, providing information, opportunity for informal discussions and more structured groups and individual counselling. Given the changing nature of the motivation for change, it is important that staff are available when youth are ready to enter into these discussions. For those youth who are ready to enter withdrawal management services or residential treatment (most are not) the lack of youth specific services, waiting lists for the youth specific residential programs and their distance from Hamilton are all deterrents. Youth often have to be put on long waiting lists in order to go to treatment centres far from their communities. This poses a problem for this population that has difficulty with commitment and has high levels of transience. The existing substance misuse residential treatment programs in Ontario are not designed or resourced to meet the mental health, social, emotional and behavioural issues of this population.

Street-involved youth have a perception that theirs is a culture of use; that all of their peers are using drugs. This cultural understanding is strengthened by the reality that smoking marijuana, taking Ecstasy and drinking alcohol are all ways in which they can share a sense of community and camaraderie.

5.4.5 Mentoring/Counselling/Emotional Support

Many of the street-involved youth (female in particular) talked about the need for counselling and emotional supports. According to one service provider, "it's sad when you do an intake and you ask for an emergency contact name and they say, let's see, can I use my probation officer?". Some of the youth talked about missing out on "having people to talk to" in replacement of family and more traditional support networks. While front-line staff can provide this service and do, all youth talked about how busy and overstretched these staff are. Therefore, street-involved youth report feeling lonely with limited access to programs in the community that address informal support and mentorship (beyond front-line staff in street-involved youth services).

5.4.6 Barriers to Diverse Youth

Since we were connecting with youth based on their service usage, we did not find out about barriers from youth who are not using services. For youth of colour, Aboriginal youth and LGBTQ youth a shortage of representation of culturally diverse staff in services for street-involved youth can be a barrier to youth who do need help. Past incidents with explicit and overt racism at two of the services for street-involved youth diminish a sense of safety for culturally diverse youth. The diverse youth that we did talk to expressed two issues, 1) that they did not feel represented in terms of their culture in some of the agencies meant to serve youth - "I don't know what some white doctor is going to think about me", "we need staff with similar ideas and experiences to represent us", and 2) wanting services where their cultural identities are fostered.

Native youth were vocal about their need for culturally centred approaches to service. For example when asked what a Native youth would do for street-involved youth, he said "a service where Native kids could go, well and anyone else, but a place where they do stuff that my people do, Indian people - crafts, drumming and dancing, learning our language".

Youth from the LGBTQ community reiterated this opinion in needing more services that celebrate and are explicit about their gay-friendliness. One gay youth talked about the stress that his identity can put on his ability to access services safely, "every time someone new comes here I get worried - worried that they'll be uncomfortable 'cause I'm gay and worried about gay bashing". The youth discussed the need for their cultures to be openly celebrated so that "you can learn about your background, be in touch with ourselves".

Community agencies reiterated this concern when asked about challenges in our increasingly diverse community citing that youth are often not comfortable accessing services because of their difference, and that staff are sometimes not comfortable providing service.

6.0 ANALYSIS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the community, a number of areas that require additional sources and support were identified. The SIYM, in convening a comprehensive steering committee that will meet quarterly (and with support from the SPRC), will guide the process of developing the recommendations into a community plan. Each of these recommendations needs to be built on a foundation of gender and diversity analysis. As these recommendations are implemented, working groups should examine how service design and provision is different for women, LGBTQ youth and youth from diverse communities and how to be responsive to these differences.

6.1 Prevention and Pathways Off the Street

Family conflict and abuse are major causes of street-involvement and this area has major implications for identifying youth at risk, potentially preventing street-involvement and establishing pathways off the street. Services that come in contact with youth on a regular basis are a good place to establish mechanisms for both understanding at-risk characteristics, identifying youth who might be experiencing major conflict or abuse in the home and educating youth about alternative options to the street if safety is a concern. This understanding of family conflict and abuse also can inform the service communities understanding of pathways off the street if we understand that youth might not be able to go home or may need support around trauma and conflict resolution if they do make the choice to return.

Our current service system for youth in Hamilton is doing well at helping street-involved youth in the immediate needs related to their street-involvement (shelter, food security, open access programming). However, there is a lack of mechanisms for identifying at-risk youth and therefore, potentially preventing street-involvement. Additionally, there is a lack of adequate resources in the community to provide the needed support to make the transition from street-involvement successful for all youth. The child welfare system has a significant opportunity to provide meaningful contributions to the prevention of street-involvement in youth because they are in regular contact with youth who are facing family conflict and abuse.

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended that a working group made up of the SIYM, Family Services of Hamilton, Catholic Family Services of Hamilton, the Children's Aid Society and the Catholic Children's Aid Society examine child welfare policy and its impacts on street-involvement in youth. Additionally, this group could have the capacity to identify strategies for preventing street-involvement including primary prevention with supports early on for parents to limit the incidence of family conflict and abuse. Finally, the Children's Aid Society and the Catholic Children's Aid Society might have creative responses to early intervention with youth who have runaway that could be shared with the community.

2. The school boards, hospitals, health clinics, recreation centres and other large institutions require tools to enable their staff to recognize and intervene with at-risk youth, to prevent street-involvement and homelessness. It is recommended that the SIYN develop an "at-risk checklist" with options for follow-through and provide it to the appropriate organizations and institutions.
3. Research, explore and develop strategies to prevent family breakdown due to: sexual orientation issues, the struggles faced by newcomer families, justice issues and addictions, particularly for families with youth who are 16-19 years old. The Rainbow Youth Drop-In, Settlement and Integration Service Organization, the John Howard Society and the various addiction treatment services do this work with families and would benefit from continuing and building on this work in their programming.

6.2 Current Service Design

Street-involved youth have unique needs in terms of useful service design and provision. Outreach services, flexible hours, loosely structured programming, offering multiple chances, youth centredness and youth friendliness all contribute to meaningful and successful services for street-involved youth.

In Hamilton, many of the specific services for street-involved youth utilize a framework for service provision that is responsive to the needs of this population. As demonstrated in the research, early intervention strategies are an important tool for working effectively to decrease street-involvement among youth.

Recommendations:

4. That the SIYN continue meeting on a regular basis to discuss service provision issues for street-involved youth.
5. Street-involved youth do not have open access services available twenty-four hours a day. It is recommended that the community identify resources to guarantee that youth have an open-access program open to them at all times of the day.
6. The community requires the dissemination of current effective program models and the development of further investigation of effective service design and provision for street-involved youth, including an examination of work happening in other municipalities. It is recommended that the SPRC work with the SIYM to identify resources to carry out this research.
7. It is recommended that the SIYM explore models of an early intervention team to respond within 24 to 48 hours when youth first leave home.

6.3 Mental Health Services

There is an overrepresentation of youth facing mental health issues on the street. Research shows that street-involved youth face a unique set of issues in terms of their mental health including coping with the trauma which often led them to the street (for

example, abuse) and the trauma of the experience of living on the street. Street-involved youth are also over-represented in suicide attempts and completions. In terms of service design, youth often do not engage well with formal systems for helping with mental health issues because of long waiting lists, rigid appointment schedules and the burden of engaging with, often, formal services. Therefore, instead of accessing services specifically to work with mental health issues, street-involved youth often rely on the front line workers, with whom they build trusting relationships, to go to for help with mental health issues. This mental health work and suicide detection and prevention can be difficult on front-line workers who are often feeling the stress of funding cuts, increasing numbers of youth to work with and a lack of complete training around serious mental health issues.

The current mental health service system design for street-involved youth is not adequate. While front-line workers in street-involved youth agencies should be commended for their commitment to working with youth through their mental health issues, the utilization of appropriate models of service that address these unique needs in a more deliberate manner is lacking in this community. The current avenues youth are expected to navigate to access mental health supports are formal. The research also shows that the link between mental health issues and substance use to cope with trauma demands more attention by mental health services.

Appropriate mental health services for street-involved youth are youth specific, understand the unique needs of street-involved youth (family breakdown, trauma of living on the street, concurrent disorders, complete lack of stable environment in order to work through issues), be flexible, have young people and/or people who have experienced street-involvement as part of the team, on-site at street-involved youth services, if not on-site - have staff who do some outreach, have a range of treatment models (including psychiatry, psychology, medical assessment and management) and understand the prevalence of concurrent disorders with this population.

Recommendations:

8. It is recommended that the Children's Service System committee (with research and support) identify, develop and implement effective treatment models that are specific to meet the unique needs of street-involved youth (including concurrent disorders and living in a culture of use). Additionally, it is recommended that this group advocate for funding envelopes targeted for youth mental health or substance use to identify a percentage of the allocation for street-involved youth to be delivered on-site for street-involved youth. Where the resources already exist in the community, these should be built on; when the group finds areas where no resources or mechanisms for this work exist, the group should identify ways to make this happen.
9. It is recommended that services for street-involved youth build the capacity in their staff to address the unique and complex needs of the population, particularly around mental health issues and substance use and misuse issues. This requires several steps including:
 - a. Resources for hiring highly trained front-line workers.

- b. Resources for professional development of the front-line workers.
- c. Clinical support for front-line workers.

6.4 Substance Use and Misuse

The research suggests that street-involved youth are engaged in high rates of drug and alcohol use. Youths' readiness to quit or reduce their use is reported to fall on a wide range from pre-contemplative to having participated in some form of treatment and willing to go again. Their readiness can change quickly in part because of the power substance use has to provide immediate relief to the range of issues they may face. Serious and persistent mental health issues, the traumatic causes of street-involvement and the trauma and crisis that mark the street-experience are all contributing factors that need to shape service provision. Additionally, strategies to address the street-involved culture, which normalizes and encourages drug and alcohol use will be necessary.

The youth substance misuse agency in Hamilton, through provision of services at the three primary service specific providers for street-involved youth, is in keeping with the best practice guideline pertaining to providing services where youth are. The provision of informal opportunities to develop trust, receive information and enter into discussions appears to be well utilized, in addition to a number of groups and opportunities for individual assessments, counselling and facilitating referrals to more intensive treatment services such as withdrawal management and residential treatment programs. This agency however feels limited by the lack of knowledge and program models that have demonstrated effectiveness with this population and by the inadequate staff resources dedicated to meet this population's needs. Given the high prevalence of mental health concerns in the youth who are also using substances, integrated interventions appear warranted.

The lack of youth specific withdrawal management, day/evening treatment and residential treatment programs in close proximity renders these services not accessible to most of this population of youth. The residential programs that do exist in Ontario are not designed or resourced to manage the needs of street involved youth.

Harm reduction, as a philosophy for engaging youth around substance use issues, is very effective and is being utilized by the substance misuse agency and by others providing services to this population. It, however, could be further developed.

Recommendations:

10. The Hamilton community has an existing network that works on addictions issues in the community. The Hamilton Addictions Services Coalition (HASC) has the mandate to do system planning for our community. In this capacity it is recommended that they work to address some of the gaps in Hamilton's response to street-involved youth substance use and misuse including:

- a. Advocating for the funding support necessary to develop services that are appropriate and reflect best practices for street-involved youth affected by substance use.
- b. Increased accessibility to a continuum of substance use treatment services appropriate for their needs including - education, community treatment, day/evening treatment, withdrawal management, residential - all with built on a harm reduction philosophy.
- c. Increased understanding and community capacity to provide integrated treatment for street-involved youth with concurrent mental health and substance use concerns.
- d. Consideration of the use of peer support/educator programs as part of a harm reduction strategy that may address the culture of use.

6.5 Holistic Supports Around Education and Employment

Street-involved youth often leave school before they graduate and have limited success in achieving meaningful and adequate employment. Since education is often seen as a prerequisite to a successful life and economic security, street-involved youth require support in this area. With their lives marked with instability and lack of basic needs, the research indicates that without holistic supports like shelter, permanent housing, food security, mental health and addictions - education and employment are difficult to attain and maintain. Youth and service providers recognize that youth face major barriers to employment when they have not completed formal education. Therefore, education should be a priority in meeting the needs of street-involved youth.

There are alternative education programs in Hamilton. Hamilton also has limited number pre-employment programs for street-involved youth. However, unstable funding has created an unstable program with the pre-employment programs and the alternative schools have limited holistic supports built-in. Additionally, the alternative education programs all have waiting lists, which makes the sort of accessibility youth need (instant when youth are ready) impossible.

Recommendations:

11. It is recommended that the community expand and ensure adequate and consistent funding of pre-employment programs to ensure continuity and availability.
12. It is recommended that issues around employment and education, as they pertain to street-involved youth, be brought to the Skills and Training Flagship through the City of Hamilton to ensure a stronger profile and attention are afforded to issues faced by street-involved youth.
13. It is recommended that a group representing the School Boards, alternative education providers and the SIYN convene to discuss the ways to create programming so that youth can access school in some way at the moment they are ready, developing options for youth on waiting lists for alternative education programs (for example, youth could touch base with the teacher three times a week,

have homework assignments). Additionally, discussions about how to keep youth supported and connected to educational programs when the relationship with the school ends would be beneficial.

6.6 Diversity

The research shows that youth of colour, Aboriginal youth and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth navigate the world from a place of marginalization. Feelings of lack of safety and lack of representation are a present reality reported both in the literature and by diverse street-involved youth.

In Hamilton, agency staff and managers do try to create spaces in their agencies that are inclusive and safe for all youth. However, the research uncovered three issues that have potential impact on diverse youth: 1) the managers talked about incidents of overt racism by their clients, 2) youth of colour, Native youth and LGBTQ youth talked about feeling underrepresented by staff and volunteers and feeling unsafe and, 3) overtly racist statements were made during the focus groups. Additionally there is a general lack of connection between services for street-involved youth and the many cultural communities in Hamilton creating limited knowledge of the needs of diverse youth. Finally, Hamilton has limited specific services for diverse street-involved youth (for example, open-access programs that focus on Aboriginal culture).

Recommendations:

14. Build on and continue existing efforts to be explicit and open in stating (with defined follow through) that racism, homophobia, sexism and ableism will not be tolerated in services for street-involved youth.
15. The SIYM and the SIYN should develop outreach strategies including getting to know services in Hamilton that serve marginalized groups (at a minimum, this would include, the AIDS Network, Settlement and Integration Services Organization (SISO), the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre) to understand issues and develop strategies around meeting the needs of diverse youth. A number of initiatives could be addressed such as including staff and volunteers from cultural communities, posters welcoming diversity, rainbow stickers near main access points indicating safe spaces for LGBTQ youth.
16. An outreach strategy, in conjunction with SISO, should be developed by the SIYN for understanding and connecting with the different cultural communities of Hamilton.
17. More research is needed on the needs of street-involved youth from cultural communities.
18. That the SIYN agencies work with a variety of services that work with diverse youth (including but not limited to, the AIDS Network, SISO, the Afro- Canadian Caribbean Association, the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre) to create spaces that bring together youth based on culture (for example, substance use support group for gay youth, open-access programming for Native youth).

6.7 Transitional Housing with Supports

Street-involved youth are experiencing cycles of absolute homelessness. Youth are sleeping outside, in abandoned buildings, in shelters or in very unsafe conditions. Research indicates that without supports and life-skills development, youth have difficulty in successfully maintaining permanent housing. Transitional housing offers the opportunity for youth to be housed in a more stable and permanent way than emergency shelter and offers built-in supports to foster independence and develop life-skills to ensure a successful transition to permanent housing.

The Hamilton community does have one transitional housing program for street-involved youth; however, the community agrees that this is not adequate for the number of youth in need. Additionally there is limited programming for youth that have difficulty with the structure of traditional, transitional housing programs.

Recommendations:

19. That the community work to increase the range of transitional housing options for street-involved youth who require a variety of housing options. This range should be creative, flexible and offer a range of levels of support and structure. There are a number of community stakeholders who need to be involved including the City of Hamilton, the SIYM and the SIYN.
 - a. Research on effective models of transitional housing from other communities is needed to inform the above efforts.

6.8 Emotional Support

According to the literature, because of family breakdown and the isolation of street life, street-involved youth feel lonely and in need of emotional support - particularly young women. Positive role-modeling, formal and informal counselling and partnering youth with adults for emotional support are programs which would fulfill the immediate need of companionship and support but could also potentially extend beyond into empowerment, life-skills development and confidence-building.

Currently, youth report that they can access many supports through agency staff, often on an informal basis, which is an important mode of service delivery for street-involved youth. However, there are a lack of formal mentorship programs and emotional support options when staff are busy and overstretched.

Recommendations:

20. That the SIYM explore effective models of peer counselling, given its complex nature. The integration of peer support in street-involved youth services will engage youth who like to work with young people and will help to alleviate some of the responsibility front line workers feel in addressing the emotional needs of all of

the youth who access those services. This might look like a program modeled on other mentorship programs for children, specifically for street-involved youth.

6.9 Resilience and Coping

According to the research, street-involved youth demonstrate great resilience and creativity in getting their needs met. Planning tables and service providers can use stories of resilience and coping from youth to inform program development. However, often the resources are unavailable and this resilience and coping remains untapped.

In Hamilton agencies for street-involved youth, there are some creative strategies for including youths' perspectives including board involvement, youth committees, focus groups and informal "check-ins". In Hamilton, street-involved youth are invited to provide feedback and ideas for service provision however, there is a lack of youth representation at most system level decision-making tables. Often youth are not aware of how they can engage in decision-making opportunities.

Recommendations:

21. That the SIYN work to identify models for engaging youth appropriately in decision-making.
22. That street-involved youth agencies continue to build on and expand their existing work with youth involvement initiatives and should publicize these opportunities widely.

6.10 Policy Reform - Ontario Works

Street-involved youth are living with very little or no income and therefore, are experiencing total poverty. The research shows that this poverty is at least, in part, a result of restrictions to income support programs. Ontario Works legislation makes it difficult for 16 and 17 year olds to access support. In order to ensure that support does not provide financial incentive to leave home and does not encourage leaving school, written documentation (from parents if possible) and regular attendance in school are mandatory. These facets of the legislation have long been criticized for creating barriers to young street-involved youth.

Recommendations:

23. That the SIYM and SIYN work with the community and City of Hamilton in lobbying for change in the Ontario Works policy directive for Applicants Under Age 18 in order to make sure youth are not homeless because they lack any income. Key stakeholders in the community who could join this effort include the Food Shelter and Housing Committee, the Children and Families Flagship, the Campaign for

- Adequate Welfare and Disability Benefits working group and the Social Justice Policy working group.
- a. This effort should also look at the ways to allow older youth (18-21 years old) to engage in work without the risk of losing their benefits, should their employment situation break down. Initial efforts at employment are often tenuous for street-involved youth and Ontario Works policy states that an applicant loses benefits for three months if they are fired or quit.
24. That Ontario Works provide access to youth to complete applications for benefits and receive information on-site at street-involved youth agencies.

6.11 Counting and More Research

While there is a wide body of literature on the issues facing street-involved youth, there is little known about the number of youth on the street and the demographics of this population. The Homeless Individuals and Families Information System Initiative (HIFIS) is a national response to the problem of counting homeless people who access shelter services. Using a Canada-wide electronic information sharing system, the HIFIS Initiative will capture both the local and national scope of homelessness and attempt to connect the various responses to it. However, the numbers that HIFIS uncovers must be understood as a part of the picture, lacking the capacity to count those who are hidden and potentially do not access services, an issue particularly relevant to street-involved and homeless youth.

HIFIS is being used in the shelters in Hamilton and will bring some clarity to the number of homeless people (and has the capacity to count homeless youth specifically). Additionally, one of the street-involved youth services received money and support to run a database that incorporates a cross-section of issues facing youth. However, most services in Hamilton lack the funding and staff to devote the required time to keeping data on street-involved youth and there is a missing connection to diverse and cultural communities.

Recommendations:

25. That the SIYN work with the City of Hamilton to explore a model (HIFIS or similar) that can be implemented to identify and track the demographics of street-involved youth in Hamilton in order to ensure appropriate service design and provision. This system should be present at open access programs as well as the shelters. Quarterly results should be reported to both the SIYN and the SIYM.
26. That the SIYM access resources for an evaluation of community progress on this plan. This should include identification of community indicators, a process for monitoring the implementation of the plan and identifying and reporting emerging issues.
27. A research alliance be formed between McMaster University and the above named working groups to identify best practices, evidence-based program models and other academic research on street-involved youth particularly around mental health issues, substance use and misuse and sex trade work.

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Appendix A

Stories from Youth

Interview with B at Living Rock - March 15th, 2005

B describes himself as "pretty outgoing, I like constructive criticism, I like to draw a little bit, I like to write, and I like to smoke weed. I'm about to be a daddy and I'm really happy about that". B became street involved when he had just turned 18 years old. Before becoming homeless, B lived with his girlfriend and her family and says he hasn't lived with his own family in "a long time - like four years ago" and attributes this separation to both of his parents dying. B became separated from his girlfriend and her family due to conflict in the home. B says that when he left that house, he came to a youth shelter. B says he hasn't been connected to anyone in his own family for "a few years now, because of conflict and some grudges - we've lost touch over the years". B says he has replaced this lack of support with friends who, "they are like my family, that's who I can really count on when things get bad".

B says that he was homeless for more than a year, with no breaks in his street-involvement. He says he stayed at Beasley Park a couple of times with friends and at the Wesley Youth Shelter. B stayed in Beasley Park for about a week when he first became homeless around the end of the fall and describes that experience as "really cold". He found out about a local youth shelter from the "buzz going around about it" and stayed there as much as he could for the rest of the year that he was homeless. He says that staying at the youth shelter was "okay, not bad...it was kind of weird coming from an apartment and then going to a shelter, that whole transition was weird...meeting some of the people, hearing some of their stories because they've had some pretty bad experiences".

B says that he now is on Ontario Works and is looking actively for a job. Before getting assistance, he tried panhandling and engaged in "criminal activity" like selling drugs but has never been caught. B says he is still selling drugs occasionally to make ends meet when his Ontario Works cheque is not enough. B says that panhandling was "rough, it was hard because not a lot of people want to give to you". B also participated in a work to earn program. He also ate at a hot meal program. Now that he is in his own apartment, he still eats at a hot meal program for youth when he can and accesses programs and meals at the Living Rock. He also uses the food bank twice a month. For medical help, B would talk to a Public Health Nurse.

In order to stay safe on the street B says, "it was my friend watching my back and me watching his". B says that he never had anything stolen despite knowing this is a big problem among street-kids and says that he "tried to be a really light sleeper".

B says he smokes marijuana often and drinks alcohol occasionally. He never has considered it a problem. B has tried Ecstasy and Cocaine but also never considered them a problem - he does say however, that he "cut down on all that because it was time" and says he just got tired of doing those drugs.

B has been involved in illegal activity. He considers "assault with a weapon causing bodily harm" the most serious thing he has ever done and is the only criminal activity he has ever

been arrested and put in jail for. B also has dealt and continues to deal drugs but only occasionally. B does say that he has cut down a "whole lot" because "I have something, I guess I just have something to live for, something better than doing what I was doing - the whole situation, having my own apartment, my girlfriend, the baby".

B isn't in school right now but is trying to get into a local alternative school because things are "looking up". B currently has some grade nine credits but has only completed grade 7. He is planning on doing his GED and should complete it within one year.

When asked what is good about living on the street B answers that it was in fact how bad it was that contributed to anything good about it. He says that "it was enough to kick me on the ass and say, okay, you've got to do something - it was like a blessing in disguise".

When asked what is bad about living on the street, B talks about lack of personal safety, poor quality of life and the harsh reality of how hard it is, "it's really dangerous, it gets really cold depending on the time of year, the weather is shitty sometimes, it can get really hard". When asked to expand on what is dangerous about it, B answers, "not eating, not sleeping properly, people trying to rob you for what you have, you trying to rob people for what they have - it's no good".

B found an apartment in October that he shares with his pregnant girlfriend. He credits this to the Living Rock staff who were helpful and the right timing - "I picked the right building, talked to the right landlord and it was good". He says that this was the first time in his year of street-involvement that he tried to find housing and explains that his motivation was his girlfriend. In five years B sees himself "working on a forklift, that's what I want to do, I want to obtain my forklift license". In order to that he says, "first I have to get a job to pay for the courses and then work toward the license".

B says that if he could have all the money and power in the world to help street-involved youth, he would "have more programs like the drop in and I would put more funding into the places that around and make them better". He says he likes the open access program because they have food, it's a good place to get out of the cold or the hot, it's a place to connect with friends and it gives you something constructive to do with all of the programming they offer. B says that more funding would be able to help with the shelter, have more people stay and be able to offer blankets and pillows.

Five months later...

After running into B and allowing him to look over his story, he wanted me to include that his girlfriend is going to have a baby boy in October or November 2005. He is on his way to obtaining his forklift license in January thanks to the help of Ontario Works.

Interview with C at Transitional Youth – March 24, 2005

C describes herself as "I'm 21 years old, I've been I guess street-involved for two and a half years now, um, moved out when I was 18 because I couldn't handle what was going on at home and learned to get around pretty well in Hamilton". C has moved thirty-eight times in her life and attributes this instability to her and her single mom moving around a lot because the family didn't have much money. Her experiences with street-involvement include couch surfing, sleeping outside, staying in "flop houses" and staying in shelters. C has had at least three times in the past two and a half years where she was not homeless. One experience she describes is "I got a bachelor apartment in the basement of a house in Brampton with my ex, I was there for four months, I was Ontario Works starting to get everything straightened out...then my ex started to seriously beat on me, she always used to shove me around a little but she actually started leaving bruises and stuff, so I charged her and started couch surfing again".

C relocated to Hamilton nine months ago where she ended up in what she calls "basically a flop house...a place with no hydro, no hot water, the animals that they kept at the house, they were allowed to go indoors, it was massively flea infested, it was pretty disgusting". She explains that a couple that was known by the street kids as "mom and dad" ran the place and youth were not charged anything to stay. She did not enjoy this experience and said, "I wouldn't even put my feet on the floor, I took my boots off beside my, I guess it was a cot is the best way of putting it, springs poking through, typical what you'd expect". C said that thirteen people, three dogs, many cats and some turtles were staying in this house together. C stayed there for three weeks and then moved to a local women's shelter and enjoyed that experience. C said "I wasn't used to the amount of food, it was always really clean, there was always something to do, they didn't have too many rules". C left Hamilton when her grandfather died and when she returned went to stay at a shelter where she says that "the staff weren't as friendly, the staff didn't trust you...I didn't expect to be treated like I didn't know anything, like I didn't know what I wanted for myself". C stayed there for two weeks. She then went to another "flop house" - a one-bedroom apartment where whoever showed up could stay and C stayed for three months. She appreciated the lack of structure but didn't like the fact that it was overcrowded and dirty. In between each of these experiences, C slept outside and says that she spent some time in places that she knew were safe to stay outside and places that really weren't safe, like "Gage Park, Jackson Square - sleeping anywhere in the downtown core can be a little bit sketchy, you don't want to go too far from the main area". C says that she slept on the street instead of going to shelters because she didn't know about any youth shelters and was on Ontario Works and didn't know if staying in a shelter would compromise her benefits. C estimates that she slept outside a couple of dozen times, mostly in the summer but also in the winter and fall a couple of times.

C describes her relationship with her step father as full of conflict, "he tried to hit me, he's an ex-prison guard and he's six foot four...he brought his fist back and ran at me and the only reason that he didn't hit me is because my mother stepped in front of him". She describes having been physically abused by him since at least grade six when the Children's Aid Society almost took her and her siblings away but didn't. She explains, "there has

always been a lot, a lot of pressure to be perfect and to be exactly what everyone else is, to fit the mould". She describes her relationship with her biological father as "it's fine, but we don't talk" but doesn't get along at all with her stepmother. C explains that her parents did not know that she was staying in flop houses, shelters or sleeping outside because since she had to get an abortion two years ago, they made it clear that "don't exactly want to know everything that is going on in my life, if it's good they want to know but if it's not good, they don't want to know". When asked how she feels about being able to only share the good parts in her life when she has faced so much adversity, C replies, "it used to, but I've kind of gotten over it. It's kind of like, you know what, you're supposed to be my family, you're supposed to be there no matter what but I understand that you're not, so I guess I'm over it". C speaks with her parents every two or three weeks and sees them every couple of months and in terms of what kind of support she receives from them, "My father will give me money, my brothers will give me dope and my mother and stepfather will smoke me a couple of joints...they'll want to sit quietly with me - it's just kind of an obligatory relationship".

C says that when she first became street-involved, "I was really, really self-conscious about it, like I was really worried. I guess you just have to get used to it, like you stop caring what other people think and you start caring about what you need, because that's what matters". She thinks that process of becoming more comfortable with her street-involvement took at least a year. When asked what it was that worried her, C replied, "that people thought I was worthless, thought I was stupid, silly little things, like that you were dirty".

C found many ways to make money when she was living on the street, panhandling, working at a local youth agency (getting bus tickets and selling them), save up to buy a pack of cigarettes and then sell them for fifty cents a piece. C did strip for six months. She didn't find it too bad but found that she was doing more drugs and drinking a lot more. She was offered money for sex but turned it down because "I wasn't desperate enough, I can understand people being desperate enough, my mom at one point was a crack whore, when I was 11 years old - she would bring the guys home while my brother and I were in the house and would smoke the crack there too". C talks about how important and private sex is for her and attributes that to her choices to not engage in sex work. She does talk about one experience in Hamilton in which, "I let some guy with a really big foot fetish give me a foot massage for twenty bucks, I didn't know him, he just came up to me and started talking to me and when he asked I just thought, 'you are some creepy dude, this is disgusting, this puts me in a really awkward situation but I need the money". C also did illegal activities to get money including picking pockets, selling drugs. C did not like picking pockets and has since stopped because it's "taking something away from someone that they earned, I think stealing from big stores is different, it's not stealing from somebody but stealing from somebody...is not exactly fair. It was a matter of I had no food, nowhere to stay, I had nothing it was this or go hungry for a night and sleep out in the rain". C has never been caught for theft or dealing drugs and has never been to jail.

In order to stay safe in her time on the streets, C would carry a throwing knife strapped to her inner arm and at times carried, "an extended steel...basically like a beat stick, like the cops carry". C says that she had to use both of her weapons quite a few times, "it tends to

be more when your alone, in seedier areas, mostly people looking for money for drugs". C also dressed to make herself look more masculine in a bomber jacket and boots in order to disguise herself as a man because she says being a woman is a much more vulnerable identity on the street (vulnerable to sexual assault). C also talks about learning where to go and where not to go, gaining "street smarts" and making sure you stick with other people as much as possible. When C slept outside she would typically be alone, in order to stay safe in that situation, she said, "sleep with your back to wall, in a corner if you can and make sure it's somewhat lit so you can what's going on and that you're fairly hard to get to - make sure you're as hidden as possible but that you can get out of situations".

C does do drugs and drink alcohol on a regular basis. She says that she does cocaine, ecstasy, K, marijuana and G. C does ecstasy the most, at least every week and in the height of her street-involvement did it every day. C affords drugs now by selling them, GST cheques, income tax, birthday presents. C believes that her drug use is a problem because "when I think about E I sweat, I know I'm addicted to it because if I go too long without it I start jonesing, like my body craves it". C has tried to get help in some ways, like talking to staff at services she accesses but thinks that she can control it. When asked what might make her want to stop doing ecstasy for good, C says, "changing my life, a change in my lifestyle, in my personality, those kind of changes". C talks about having cut down from doing E every day to once a week as "one night I couldn't sleep, I was craving it so badly that once I put one pill into my body I passed out. I realized at that point that I was so dependent on it that I couldn't do a normal function without that in my system". C talks about knowing that she needs to be on medication right now for depression and anxiety and believes that she uses ecstasy to control those mental health issues, she says "when I first started doing E a lot, it was really, really weak ones and that was just to regulate my moods". C also drinks alcohol every day (12-13 beers or 6 mixed drinks a day) but doesn't consider it to be a problem because she feels she can stop at any time.

C has used many services for youth in Hamilton. To find meals, she would go to a number of hot meal programs and to various food banks. She says that she has definitely experienced hunger a few times, "but then I learned more tricks...if you go up to (a fast food restaurant) and you look fairly presentable and you say, 'I was in here at lunch going through the drive through' and you give them a fairly big order, then you say you were missing some stuff and they'll usually give you a free meal". C has also used each of the above services for help in many areas of her street involvement. She has also used the health clinic for young people and the substance abuse agency for youth in Hamilton.

When asked what is good about living on the street, C answers "there's a lot of freedom to it, when you achieve something you feel good about feeling proud because you worked for it, your brought yourself, I brought myself from living in a flop house that was that disgusting to my apartment now, I've worked really hard and I can feel proud of myself." C also says that making friends is another good thing about life on the street and the fact that it teaches you a lot of self-reliance.

C says that many things are bad about living on the street, "no money, you have to fight for everything, a lot more temptation for drugs, illegal things, it's a hard life, and you have to

learn a lot very quickly...you might have to sleep outside, you might have to bite your tongue, swallow your pride and go to a food bank or a shelter, all that kind of stuff".

C is now on Ontario Works and living in her own apartment in Hamilton and found out the day of the interview that she had been offered subsidized housing where she was planning to move shortly. In five years, she hopes to have a place similar to the one she's about to move into, have a job that she enjoys (but doesn't have particular plans and says, "I'm very nomadic so I'm also going to be very nomadic in my jobs - I want to experience everything"). C graduated high school successfully before becoming street-involved.

With all of the money and power to make changes for street-involved youth, C would "hire a lot more involved staff, like a lot of the problem is that people don't care enough". She would also make it easier to find places to stay (emergency shelters) and create more places open access programs with supports. C would make services that help youth find housing better known and accessible and "get more information out there and more help out there for the youth". C would also like to see more shelters for young women that aren't necessarily in abusive situations. C would also like to see more services for men with families. C would also like youth to be able to access laundry facilities, Internet, medical and especially dental services, which she says, are really lacking.

Five months later...

C wanted to include in her story that she has been living in her apartment for five months. She recently graduated from the first phase of the Tri-Rock program at the Living Rock and is currently looking for a placement. She adds that she has completely cut back on her use of Ecstasy and has only used three times since we last spoke.

Interview with R at Notre Dame - March 15th 2005

R is 16 years old. He left home one month ago due to conflict with his stepfather. R says that his father died (a couple of years ago) and his stepfather "basically tried to take over and I didn't really like that so I left". R moved out of the home and makes it clear that he wouldn't be let back if he tried. He said that they finally all agreed that he couldn't stay at home. He still has a relationship with his mom who he speaks with on the phone three times a week. He also goes to his parents' house for dinner sometimes on Sunday. He did try to return to the home once since he's been gone, but the fighting (yelling and screaming) continued, so he left/was kicked out again. He says that his mom doesn't like the fact that he is staying at the local youth shelter but that "there's nothing she can really do, it's not her house kinda thing, she wants me there but he doesn't".

R went initially to an alternative school program and was enrolled in school there. He was told that he was "too highly educated" and wasn't being stimulated - he and his teachers thought that he'd be best suited for mainstream school. However, Cathedral high school (where R hopes to go) isn't prepared to enroll him this late in the year.

R now stays at a local youth shelter, "basically I live my life as it comes". R says he hangs out with friends when he is not allowed at the Rock (between 8:30 am and 9:00 pm) and is not currently looking for a job because he has one secured for April. R says that going to stay in a shelter is "kind of embarrassing at first because no one wants to live in a shelter". When asked to elaborate about why he felt embarrassed, he responded, "I came from a home, where my parents weren't rich, but they had money kind of thing, now I'm stuck like this so..." At the youth shelter, R sleeps on a mat with a towel. He says that at the shelter, some of the other people are "idiots...there are people who try to cause all the problems and try to get you into it and stuff...being kids in a shelter". He says he sleeps well "sometimes".

When asked how R makes money, he answers that he doesn't and when asked what he does to get stuff that he needs, he laughs and says "I hope it comes to me". R finds breakfast, lunch and dinner at local youth agencies. He has some clothes and gets basic needs (like soap and shampoo) from front-line staff. He says that he can get bus tickets from various agencies sometimes, but "other than that you're screwed". When asked if there are other ways to make money on the street, without having a job, he suggests that someone could sell drugs, but has chosen not to do that because it's dangerous. When asked how he manages to stay safe, living in a shelter and hanging out on the street he says that he is "constantly looking over my shoulder for the wrong people who are making their mistakes and trying to bring kids like me down with them". He also says that possessions are not safe at shelters since there are a lot of "thieves" around.

R accesses programs many of the services offered for street-involved youth. He says he had a "piece of paper" that showed him all the services and has friends who would tell him where to go for drop in programs and food. When talking about a local service for street-involved youth, he says, "it's kind of fun there, some nights people are learning to play guitar that are actually really good". He says he likes to play the guitar and has been teaching

himself for two years, he attributes his interest in music to his "real dad" who was a musician.

R says that he has many friends from his former high school and from the street. His friends stay in shelters, have their own apartments and live with their families. R spends much of his time with friends, hanging out in their apartments. He says that he does smoke marijuana and drink alcohol but does not feel this is a problem and doesn't think there would be until "I'm actually needing it every day". When I first went in, he was relaying a story about a friend he was with last night who had to be rushed to the hospital with alcohol poisoning. He says that he mostly smokes marijuana alone because it's "a downer drug, it helps me calm down and relax".

In five years, R hopes to be in college or university where he wants to be playing football. R was playing football as a quarter back for his previous high school and would like to pursue professional football or hockey player or to own a team as a career when he's older. To this he plans on going to Cathedral High School where he'll be on the football team and hopes that could turn into a scholarship. R is hesitant to go on Ontario Works because doesn't "like just like getting money for free kind of thing, I like working for my money" but he recognizes that working and going to school is too hard. He feels frustrated about the "whole parent/guardian signature thing, because my parents won't sign for welfare for me" and finds it hard to get a third party letter written. He hopes to be in his own apartment by the end of April.

When asked if he had all the money and power in the world, what would he do to make things better for street-involved youth in Hamilton R says that he'd like to "get all the kids off the street" and suggests that more shelters need to be built - places, he says, like the local emergency shelters. He also says that he'd like to clean up Hamilton to help the youth because it would "help them get back on their feet". He suggests that there should be more drop-in in the morning because now, some youth are finding "wrong stuff to do" in those times when programming isn't available, stuff like "going to the mall and then they've got no money because they live in at shelter, so they'll go in the stores and steal. Some people get caught and some people don't so they go do it again, you're eventually going to get caught".

Five months later...

R is still staying in the shelter but has all the same aspirations he did when we spoke.

Appendix B

Methodology

METHODOLOGY

Literature Review

A number of academic, government and community-based research documents highlighting key issues, causes, pathways out and existing services for street youth were consulted. Consistent emerging themes were identified in literature consulted for this research. In addition to a number of fact sheets, websites, studies and best practices documents, a few comprehensive, current research papers exist which helped to inform much of this review including: *Research Report, Environmental Scan of Youth Homelessness (CMHC)*, *On Her Own: Young Women and Homelessness in Canada* (Novac, Serge, Eberle and Brown), *Gap Analysis of Research Literature of Issues Related to Street-Involved Youth (CS/RESORS)* and *No Place to Call Home: A Profile of Street Youth in British Columbia* (McCreary Centre).

The purpose of the literature review was to examine the factors contributing to street involvement in youth, to develop a profile of common characteristics in street youth and to establish a best practices model for working with street involved youth and determining pathways off the street.

Focus Groups

We talked to 29 youth in six focus groups. Six different agencies were chosen to represent a range of issues identified in the street-involved youth literature.

Wesley Youth Shelter	Youth facing absolute homelessness
Transitional Youth	Co-ed, diverse youth
Hamilton Regional Indian Centre	Aboriginal youth
Brennan House	Youth of colour
Grace Haven	Pregnant and parenting young women
Salvation Army Booth Centre	Male youth accessing adult services

Connections were made with staff contacts at each of the agency, sending them an outline of the focus group and an overview of the project. Each staff was to select five youth. The agencies that were connected to the project³⁹, via the Street-Involved Youth Network were free to choose whichever youth accessed their services - the rationale being that any youth who accessed these services would be street-involved. For the two services that were not connected to the project⁴⁰, a set of criteria was developed in order to ensure that

³⁹ Good Shepherd - Brennan House, Transitional Youth, Salvation Army Booth Centre and the Wesley Youth Shelter

⁴⁰ Salvation Army - Grace Haven and the Alternative Education Program at the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre

the youth participated were in fact, street involved. This set of criteria was developed based on the one used in the *Drifting and Doing* study in 1992⁴¹.

Criteria for Participation in Focus Groups:

The potential participant must be younger than 22 years old and answer yes to at least three of these experiences:

Left school before finishing grade 12.

Lived away from home (family or guardian) for at least two days in the past year.

Run away or been kicked out at least once in their life.

Been homeless (without anywhere to stay) at least once.

The purpose of the focus groups was to understand the gaps and strengths in the service system from a street-involved youth perspective. Therefore, a number of "types of service" for street-involved youth in Hamilton were identified and for each type of service three probing questions were asked. Each focus group took approximately one hour to complete. I facilitated and had a colleague taking notes. This colleague was free to clarify where needed and ask any follow up questions. Confidentiality was explained at the beginning of each focus group. The participants received \$10.00 (cash) at the end of the session for their participation.

Interviews

We accessed the stories of fourteen street-involved youth using two different methods. We talked to ten youth in one-on-one interviews and partnered with Notre Dame School to have four youth complete written stories. These youth were selected by service providers from a number of agencies serving street-involved youth in Hamilton⁴². Again, it was important to access a number of perspectives and so I explicitly asked staff to ensure representation from a range of issues faced by street-involved youth.

The purpose of the interviews and written work was to hear the stories of street-involvement from youth. In this exercise we were hoping to hear some of the causes of homelessness, some of the coping mechanisms and experiences on the street and some of the plans or actions to get off the street. Agency contacts were welcome to negotiate with the potential participants how the interview would happen (where and whether they wanted staff in the room for safety, comfort, etc.). The agency contacts were provided with the interview guides so that they were able to help the potential participant make an informed decision (for example, talking about how personal the questions were). The interviews were conducted in the various agencies and were one-on-one with the interviewer and participant.

⁴¹ Smart, R., Adlaf, E., Walsh, G. and Zdanowicz, Y. (1992). *Drifting and Doing: Changes in Drug Use Among Toronto Street Youth, 1990 and 1992*. Toronto, Ontario: Addiction Research Foundation.

⁴² Wesley Youth Shelter, Transitional Youth, Living Rock Ministries, Alternatives for Youth, Good Shepherd - Notre Dame House

In one interview, the staff person from the agency stayed in the room, separate from the interview, to create a more comfortable space for the client. Again, participants were given \$10.00 cash as payment for their participation. Confidentiality was explained and participants were told that they did not have to answer questions that made them uncomfortable.

We decided that it would be permissible for youth who participated in the focus group to also participate in the interviews since such different information was being gathered. In total forty-one different youth participated (two youth participated in both a focus group and an interview).

Written Stories

For the written stories a connection was made with a teacher at the Notre Dame School, Tom Montgomery. He chose five students based on the set of range of issues identified (above). I went into Notre Dame School to explain the exercise to students. They were to work on a list of questions, selecting at least five. These questions mirrored the interview guide but had a creative component included at the end to allow students to submit a poem, short story, drawing or photograph if they so chose. Mr. Montgomery agreed to supervise the project; the students were given two weeks to complete the assignments and had the opportunity to use school time. The students were told that they would not be graded on the paper, but would receive \$10.00 cash once it was submitted. In the end, one participant was unable to finish her story because of extenuating family circumstances.

Appendix C

Background

BACKGROUND

COMMUNITY STREET YOUTH TASK FORCE (1990)

In 1990, a group of service providers from youth agencies got together under the direction of the Association of Agencies for Treatment and Development and formed the Community Street Youth Task Force. The Taskforce was initiated to look at "the definition of street youth, determining the extent of the street youth issue and determining the unmet needs of street youth in Hamilton-Wentworth through the identification of gaps in existing services and the need for new services". The Taskforce developed a set of 36 recommendations, which covered a number of areas of service provision for street-involved youth including, shelter, health, education, income security, family supports, sex work, child welfare and justice. Two of the recommendations that were most notably acted on in the Hamilton community were around transitional housing and ensuring the separation of youth and adult services.

Shelter

Health

Education

Income security

Transportation

Family supports

Abuse

Sex work

Child welfare

Justice

Service provision

Good Shepherd Brennan House was developed soon after in 1990 following through on the recommendations of the *Taskforce Report*.

OUR HOMES AND OUR STREETS: HOMELESSNESS IN HAMILTON-WENTWORTH (1999)

Our Homes and Our Streets was a report developed to provide Hamilton with a comprehensive look at the homelessness situation followed up with a set of 42 recommendations. A choice was made to do focus groups with youth upon hearing that this population was facing increasing rates of homelessness from service providers. In the focus groups, the researchers ascertained that youth face stigma, loneliness and isolation, they want adequate, affordable housing options, they are facing difficulty accessing welfare and that they wanted support in making the transition from homelessness to independent living. Based on this qualitative information, four youth-centred recommendations were made:

Developing drop in programs for visible minority youth

Ensuring that 17 and 18 year olds are eligible for social assistance despite school absence

Increasing resources for alternative education programs

Developing youth-specific, non-profit housing.

COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN ON HOMELESSNESS IN HAMILTON-WENTWORTH (2000)

The Community Action Plan on Homelessness in Hamilton-Wentworth from October 2000 utilized broad community consultation to develop a plan for addressing homelessness in Hamilton. The section on Systemic Issues does not specifically highlight youth as a population facing homelessness, however, throughout the report; youth are mentioned for the high risk of homelessness they face. Attributing poverty in youth to the low incomes they tend to experience in the workforce, the *Action Plan* makes two recommendations specifically addressing the needs of youth:

**More research and funding is needed for alternative education programs in Hamilton
The province modify their policy to ensure that 16 and 17 year olds are eligible to access social assistance regardless of school attendance.**

More generally, the *Community Action Plan* suggests that the Region needs to address housing needs for youth facing addictions and that open access programs should be developed for a number of populations who do not fit into men services including youth.

EMERGENCY SHELTER GAPS ANALYSIS (2001)

The Emergency Shelter Gaps Analysis seeks to understand the homeless shelter system in Hamilton to determine where more focus is needed. Youth issues are mentioned throughout report, addressing the issues of growing youth homelessness and the special needs that youth face including education, financial support, employment support and life skills training. McGibbon found, through key informant interviews and community consultation, that youth may not be accessing shelter beds when in need of accommodation but spending time with friends and family, "one estimate stated that probably more than 200 youths per night need accommodation but do not come to the shelters". One of the main findings in the report is that the mainstream shelter users (men) are being adequately served by the existing shelter system, however special populations including youth need more supports. The two recommendations pertaining to youth homelessness include:

More emergency, non-structured shelter space for youth (20 + beds)

Transitional support for youth moving from emergency shelter to independent living (15 beds)

REPORT CARD ON HOMELESSNESS IN HAMILTON (2002)

Following up on the work of the *Our Homes and Our Streets* and *Community Action Plan* reports, the focus of the Report Card on Homelessness was divided into two sections: an

update on homelessness in Hamilton and an evaluation of the progress made on the *Community Action Plan* recommendations in 2000. Within the trends piece, the report uses emergency shelter usage statistics from Notre Dame House, the only emergency youth shelter at the time. From November 1998 to November 2000, the numbers of youth staying at Notre Dame on any given night range from very close to at capacity. More telling of the growing number of youth facing homelessness and inadequacy of the shelter system to accommodate them in 2000 was the statistic that 17 youth were turned away from Notre Dame on a given night in November 2001.

The report then examines at how well the Hamilton community has been able to respond to the recommendations from the *Community Action Plan*. In terms of the youth specific recommendations:

Action had been taken to ensure some progress had been made on addressing the alternative education needs of youth. The report identifies more work needed in the public school system to support and retain students.

In terms of ensuring that 16 and 17 year olds have access to social assistance without having to meet school attendance requirements, no action had been made to address this.

PROGRESS REPORT ON HOMELESSNESS IN HAMILTON (MAY 2003)

As a follow up to the *Report Card on Homelessness in Hamilton* in 2002, the *Progress Report* re-examines homelessness in Hamilton, reports progress made in the priority areas defined by the past reports and includes separate spaces for analysis of systemic barriers. The *Progress Report* acknowledges that youth are among the fastest growing populations facing homelessness and are confronted with barriers such as discrimination, lack of affordable housing and lack of support. The *Progress Report* cites progress in services for youth in terms of new emergency shelter beds, innovative programming, expanded health services and more support for teen parents. In terms of youth and homelessness, the *Progress Report* recommends:

More transitional and supportive housing to address the unique needs of youth.

THE HOMELESSNESS CONTINUUM: A COMMUNITY PLAN FOR HAMILTON (OCTOBER 2003)

In 2003, the City of Hamilton released its community plan for addressing homelessness both at a service and policy level, utilizing a continuum understanding of homelessness. The report gives a brief profile of youth homelessness in Hamilton and recognizes some of the innovative programming addressing youth issues in the community. The *Community Plan* suggests:

Supportive/supported housing programs incorporating life skills, pre-employment training, education, mental health and substance use support.

More mental health services for youth.

Accessibility to child welfare supports for 16 year olds.

Alternative education options.

Substance use treatment.

Preventative measures including: family mediation, recreation centres, student retention programs.

Appendix D

List of Participating Community Organizations

LIST OF PARTICIPATING COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Adolescent Community Care Program
Afro-Canadian Caribbean Association
Alternatives for Youth
Cambodian Community - Khmer Association
Cathedral High School
City of Hamilton - Access and Equity Department
City of Hamilton - Mental Health Outreach/VAN Needle Exchange/Street Health
City of Hamilton - Ontario Works, Youth and Newcomer Team
City of Hamilton/Wesley Urban Ministries - Mental Health Outreach
CONTACT Hamilton
Crisis Outreach and Support Team
Elizabeth Fry Society
Good Shepherd - Youth Services
Good Shepherd Centres - Women's Services
Hamilton AIDS Network (Rainbow Youth Group)
Hamilton Catholic Children's Aid Society
Hamilton Children's Aid Society
Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys' and Girls' Club
Hamilton Health Sciences - General Hospital - Emergency Department
Hamilton Health Sciences - McMaster Hospital - Emergency Department
Hamilton Police Service
Hamilton Public Library
Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board
Hamilton Wentworth Detention Centre - Case Management Department
Hamilton Wentworth Detention Centre - Chaplaincy Program
Hamilton Wentworth District School Board
Living Rock Ministries
McMaster University, School of Nursing
Mission Services/Marty Karl Centre
North Hamilton Community Health Centre
North Hamilton Community Health Centre - Teen Health Clinic
Nya:weh Program
Probation Services
St. Martin's Manor
Salvation Army - Booth Centre
Salvation Army - Grace Haven
Sir John A. MacDonald Secondary School
Stewart Memorial Church
Urban Core Community Health Centre
Wesley Urban Ministries
Wilma's Place
Wraparound
Youth Net Hamilton
Youth Serving Agencies Network/ City of Hamilton, Culture and Recreation Department

Appendix E

Street-Involved Youth Agencies in Hamilton

STREET-INVOLVED YOUTH AGENCIES IN HAMILTON ⁴³

Street-involved youth access a number of services in Hamilton (including adult services and youth services that are not street-involved youth specific). However, for the purpose of describing street-involved youth agencies, it was decided to display those, which are represented by the steering committee of the project. It is important to note that these services exist in a community which supports these efforts and supports street-involved youth. For more information on the broader service community that works with street-involved youth please see the Inform Hamilton website (www.inform.hamilton.ca). Additionally, Youth Net Hamilton has a *Youth Services Guide* available to the community. Please call Lorraine Grypstra at Youth Net for more information.

ALTERNATIVES FOR YOUTH	
Agency:	Alternatives for Youth
Address:	Century 21 Bldg 100 Main St E, Ste 110 Hamilton, ON L8N 3W4
Phone number:	905-527-4469
Description of services:	<p>A variety of services are available for youth, 13-22 years of age, who are experiencing difficulties related to substance use/abuse. Support is given to their families. The groups are professionally led. Services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Assessments * Individual counselling * Family support * Parent Support Group * Group counselling * Speakers for drug/alcohol presentations * Consultations <p>This program runs out of various locations throughout the City, appointments should be made through the central office.</p>

⁴³ The descriptions have been copied from the Inform Hamilton website (www.inform.hamilton.ca)

GOOD SHEPHERD CENTRES	
Agency:	Good Shepherd - Brennan House
Address:	614 King St E Hamilton, ON L8N 1E2
Phone number:	905-577-1166
Description of services:	Brennan House is a 14-bed co-ed transitional residence for street youth. A case manager is available to work with each individual to ensure s/he receives counselling and the services necessary to rebuild his/her life. A fundraising event called Miles for Smiles take place each year.
Agency:	Good Shepherd - Notre Dame House
Address:	14 Cannon St W Hamilton, ON L8R 2B3
Phone number:	(905) 308-8090
Description of services:	<p>Notre Dame House provides emergency shelter and a one-stop, multi-agency resource centre for homeless teens. Case workers are available 24 hours a day to help troubled teens get off the streets and get their lives back on track.</p> <p>Services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A 20 bed emergency shelter * A multi-agency resource centre * A nourishing meal program * Free laundry facilities <p>Resources available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Help getting back into school; finding a job; applying for Ontario Works * Housing assistance * Counselling for personal/legal issues * Trusteeship program * Assistance with medical/mental health issues * Free laundry facilities

LIVING ROCK MINISTRIES	
Agency:	Living Rock Ministries
Address:	30 Wilson St Hamilton, ON L8R 1C5
Phone number:	905-528-7625
Description of services:	<p>Living Rock Ministries is an interdenominational resource and outreach that provides support, safety, training, social-recreational programs and positive relationships, enabling street-involved youth to find direction and purpose. Services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The Rock Youth Resource Centre * The Evening Program "Link to the Community & Culture" provides evening meals for youth between the hours of 6:30pm - 9:30pm on Tue, Wed, Thu * Breakfast Program runs Mon - Fri from 8:00am - 9:30am * Sports at YMCA on Wed, jam sessions, movie nights, themes and groups at Oasis Coffee House (Tue - Thu evening) * Youth-focused food bank and clothing exchange * "Just for Gurlz" - sharing, crafts and a special program for pregnant & parenting teens * TRI-Rock Program for 10-weeks of life skills and 20-weeks of work experience * Summer Youth Project: Work and volunteer opportunities through the summer * Special Events: special dinner groups and other activities take place throughout the year * Rock Experience Program (REP): work experience program for youth * Rock Resources: Individual case management and "work to earn" for youth * Follow-up program for young offenders in Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre * Chapel Service: Wednesday at noon and Sundays located at The Rock Youth Resource Centre * Anti-Racism Project * Open Art Studio (call for schedule)

WESLEY URBAN MINISTRIES INC.	
Agency:	Wesley Urban Ministries - Transitional Youth Program
Address:	2 Catharine St N Hamilton, ON L8R 1H8
Phone number:	905-522-0863
Description of services:	<p>The Transitional Youth Program is a support oriented program that utilizes socialization and relationship building to improve interpersonal skills and motivate clients towards personal growth and development in support of their efforts to make healthier life choices. The program serves youth from the ages of 16 until their 22nd birthday.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Daily supportive counselling, information, referrals and advocacy * Groups are offered to the Transitional Youth Program participants * Formal program activities/trips * Informal social/recreational activities (i.e. movie night) * Meals provided * Basic hygiene items * Job board to assist youth in their employment search * Computer centre for youth to assist with resume writing, homework, computer skills, etc. * Seconded staff offering assistance with: addictions, harm reduction, health, prenatal, etc.
Agency:	Wesley Urban Ministries - Wesley Youth Shelter
Address:	30 Wilson St Hamilton, ON L8R 1C5
Phone number:	905-529-0476
Description of services:	The Youth Shelter provides emergency sleeping services for up to 15 youth. There are separate sleeping areas for young men and young women as well as access to basic necessities such as shower facilities and hygiene products. Breakfast is served every morning, and services are offered in coordination with The Living Rock Ministries.