Prairie Research Centre: Youth Homelessness
Including the voices of youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in northern Manitoba
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KEY FINDINGS

- All participants identified that there is a strong need to support youth and families in Thompson, Manitoba when addressing homelessness.
- The main causes of homelessness and housing instability identified in this study by participants was a dysfuncational family life or lack of housing. In most casues these two causes are interconnected.
- Additional factors identified by participants that contribute to homelessness and housing instability were the criminal justice system; poverty; parental addictions; aging out of care; lack of activites for youth; intergenerational trauma; parents are homeless; mental health issues; racism; physical health; sexual identity; high rent and co-signer issues; and substance abuse such as alcoholism.
- This study identified the importance of providing support to parents who may be experienencing poverty, mental health issues and substance abuse issues so that they can support their children and create healthy communities to eliminate homelessness.
- The two most common ages when becoming homeless identified in this study were 18 and 21 years old.
- A high percentage (74%) of participants that are homeless were not attending schools and most of these were female.
- 97% of youth who reported having experience with the foster care system identified as homeless or experiencing housing stability.

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the University of Manitoba and the University of College North with the support of the city of Thompson, Manitoba conducted its first Youth Count on the issue of housing instability and homelessness. This Youth Count study was adapted and modified to be more encompassing and reflective of definitions of youth from local and Indigenous organizations working with youth in Thompson including the Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Centre among 10 other local organizations listed below. The Thompson Youth Count is part

of a larger project "Youth Homelessness Including the voices of youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in northern Manitoba" funded by the UAKN. This study examines the questions "Who are the youth in Thompson experiencing homelessness and housing instability"; "What are the pathways and the causes of youth homelessness?"; "What changes would youth like to see in Thompson to support youth and their families?" This project focuses on including the voices of youth in discussions about homelessness and housing instability.

Summary of Statistics from the Youth Count, Between May 11 and 19th, 2016
- *69 female, male, transgender, and LGBTQ youth between the ages of 16-29 were surveyed in Thompson.*
- *There were more females (57%) than males (38%) who identified that they were experiencing homelessness or housing instability.*
- *Average youth surveyed was 22.3 years old.*
- *85% identified as Indigenous.*
- *47% of youth come from communities outside of Thompson.*
- *46% said that they were either in foster care or had been involved with foster care.*
- *52% said that they had been involved with the criminal justice system.*
- *50% of Indigenous and Metis youth did not have a stable place to stay in a regular basis.*
- *87% said that housing instability was an issue for youth in Thompson*

PARTNERSHIPS
Boys and Girls Club of Thompson
Keewatin Tribal Council – Youth Wellness and Education
Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Centre
Manitoba Government
Macdonald Youth Services
Northern Health Region – Aboriginal Health Services
Pride North of 55
R.D. Parker High School – Youth Aboriginal Council
Thompson Youth Build
Futures Program (alternative high school for youth at risk)
Marymound North Youth Services
Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO)
Probation Services

METHODOLOGY

This project was developed in three phases, phase one included a community café and focus groups to generate dialogue and build relationships. The second phase was the Youth Count and this was conducted between May 11-19, 2016. The Youth Count greatly contributed to the information gathered in phase one. Phase three focused on the development of a colloborative community action plan for youth who are homeless or experiencing housing instability including Thompson and the surrounding communities.

The approach throughout this study has been to use participatory community-based research methods. This means a collaborative approach with researchers, community groups and youth was used to generate idea on how to address youth homelessness in their community. During the final phase of the project we will colloborate with community groups to develop a Community Action Plan to End Homelessness where youth will also be invited to participate.

65 people participated in the two focus groups, including youth, service providers, community members, students and faculty members. The following picture shows the common words that summarize the voices of participants during their group discussions.
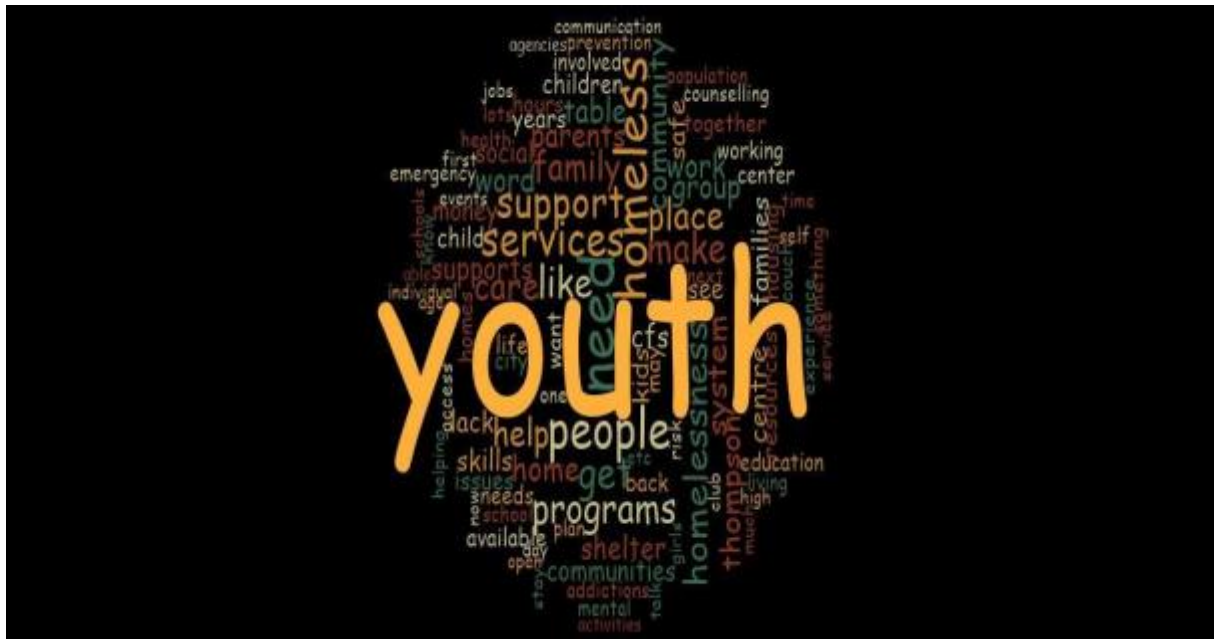

Figure 21 - Voices of participants to begin community action plan

To begin the development of a community action plan, we explored three areas in each focus group: Systems/services: including education, training, disabilities, aging out of care, justice system, health; Structural: including racism, lack of housing, costs and affordability of housing, employment and; Individual, personal relational, family.

LIMITATIONS

As this was the first time Thompson has had youth count developed in a colloborative way. Lessons learned to improve the work of future youth counts was revealed:
- Strengthening the promotion and recruitment of the youth count to engage agencies and the public in completeting the survey.

- Increasing efforts to include as many youth as possible to become involved in the design of the survey as well as in the data collection.
- Develop strategies that strengthen the commitment and participation of local agencies to apply the survey with the youth that they work with.
- Assuring the quality and integrity of the data by planning the count in a way that surveyes are completed with the help of volunteers or staff.
- Coordinating with School District and School Board to include youth who are attending school who are experiencing housing instability or homelessness.

CONCLUSION / POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a strong need to support youth and families in Thompson, Manitoba when addressing homelessness and housing instability. Perhaps some of the most valuable feedback received from these youth participants are the changes that they would like to see in Thompson to support youth and their families. The focus of this project has been to include the voices of youth in any discussion about homelessness and housing instability. Providing housing for youth was the first priority, then the creation of a youth centre and shelter, then job training for youth. These are all very concrete examples of ways to support youth.

For more information on this project and to access the final paper visit:
http://uakn.org/research-project/youth-homelessness-in-northern-mb/

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The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, the UAKN, is a community driven research network focused on the Urban Aboriginal population in Canada. The UAKN establishes a national, interdisciplinary network involving universities, community, and government partners for research, scholarship and knowledge mobilization. For more information visit: www.uakn.org

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