

Preventing Youth Homelessness

Heidi Walter - A Way Home Canada

Program Design & Training Consultant

FEANTSA 2024 Conference
Vienna, Austria



canadian
observatory on
homelessness



MAKING
THE SHIFT
youth homelessness
demonstration lab

OUTCOMES AREAS



1. Housing stability

Young people have:

- ✓ Obtained housing
- ✓ Maintained housing
- ✓ Enhanced knowledge and skills regarding housing and independent living
- ✓ Reduced stays in emergency shelters

2. Health and well-being

Young people have:

- ✓ Enhanced access to services and supports
- ✓ Improved health
- ✓ Food security
- ✓ Improved mental health
- ✓ Reduced harms related to substance use
- ✓ Enhanced personal safety
- ✓ Improved self-esteem
- ✓ Healthier sexual health practices
- ✓ Enhanced resilience

3. Education and employment

Young people have:

- ✓ Established goals for education and employment
- ✓ Enhanced participation in education
- ✓ Enhanced educational achievement
- ✓ Enhanced participation in training
- ✓ Enhanced labour force participation
- ✓ Improved financial security

4. Complementary supports

Young people have:

- ✓ Established personal goals
- ✓ Improved life skills
- ✓ Increased access to necessary non-medical services
- ✓ Addressed legal and justice issues

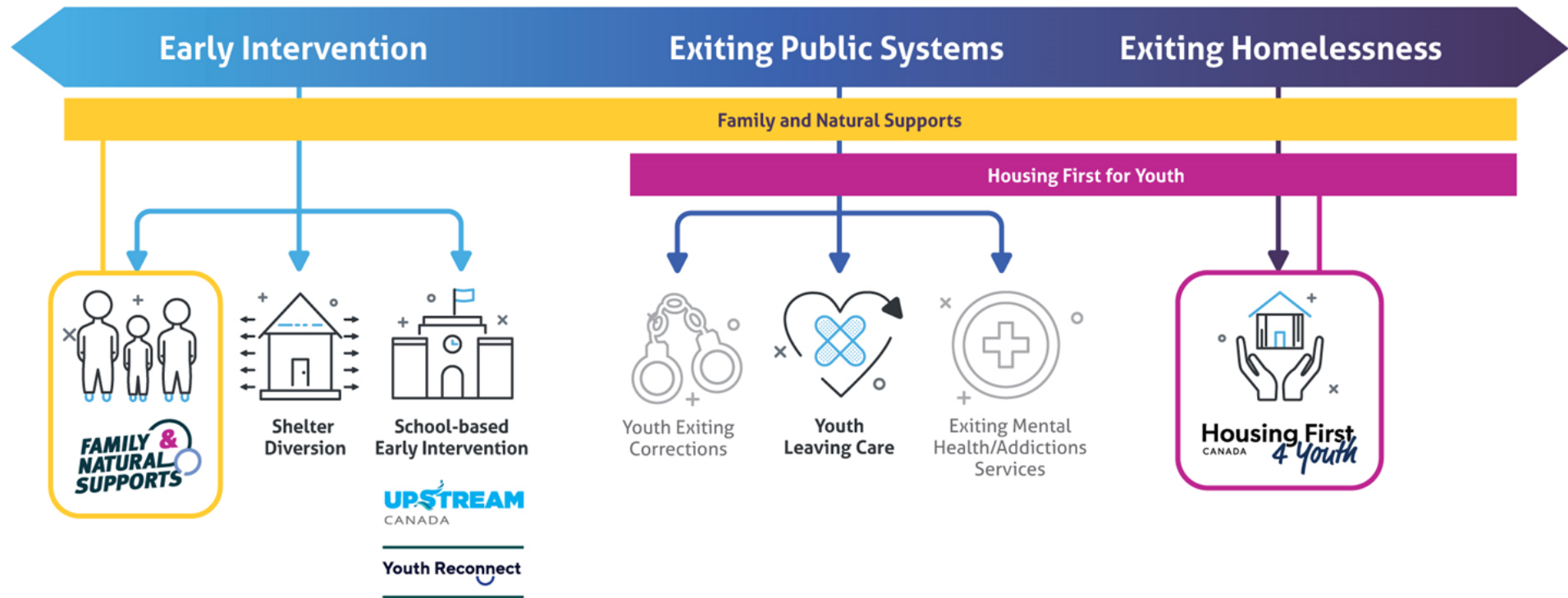
5. Social inclusion

Young people have:

- ✓ Built and/or reconnected to natural supports
- ✓ Enhanced family connections
- ✓ Enhanced connections to communities of young person's choice
- ✓ Increased access to necessary non-medical services
- ✓ Addressed legal and justice issues
- ✓ Strengthened cultural engagement and participation
- ✓ Engaged and participated in meaningful activities

Preventing Youth Homelessness

What you can do in *your* community



Social Inclusion

- Building natural supports
- Enhancing family/chosen family connections
- Enhanced connections to community of young persons choice
- Strengthening cultural engagement and participation
- Engage in meaningful activities

The Goal of the FNS Approach

**Is to prevent youth from
experiencing homelessness**

Age of first experience with homelessness

40.1%

were younger than 16 when they first experienced homelessness

THOSE WHO LEAVE HOME AT AN EARLY AGE ARE MORE LIKELY TO:

- Experience multiple episodes of homelessness
- Be involved with child protection services
- Be tested for ADHD
- Experience bullying
- Be victims of crime, including sexual assault
- Have greater mental health and addictions symptoms
- Experience poorer quality of life
- Attempt suicide
- Become chronically homeless

Family and Natural Supports are the # 1 Protective Factor

Shifting to an FNS Approach

STATUS QUO APPROACH

Our first instinct is to meet every need with a professional support.

We attend to basic physical needs first (food, shelter, clothing), and consider relational/socio-emotional needs later.

We protect youth by limiting their exposure to those who could hurt them.

We focus solely on the youth – their needs, their perspective, their goals.

NATURAL SUPPORTS APPROACH

We actively seek out and draw on resources and assets within the youth's support network.

We treat the need for connection with the same urgency as physical needs (and we DON'T assume that we can meet that need ourselves).

We recognize the limits of our power and know that youth will often maintain a connection with people that we do not consider positive or healthy. Instead of forbidding contact, we build youth capacity to set boundaries and keep themselves safe.

We work with youth in the context of their natural supports, seeking to strengthen the capacity of those within the network to support the needs and goals of the youth.

5 Core Principles of the FNS Model

- 1. Connection First**
- 2. Youth and Family at the Centre**
- 3. Autonomy and Accountability Go Hand in Hand**
- 4. Skill-Building that Leads to Growth**
- 5. Individualized, Flexible, Non-judgmental Practice**

1. Connection First

- **Relationships** are as essential as physical needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing

- **What does this look like?**
 - We support the generation behind the youth
 - Ask and listen for opportunities!
 - This does NOT start and stop at intake ... it is constant

*HOW ARE YOU
DOING THIS NOW?*



2. Youth and Family at the Centre

- FNS is a youth-focused intervention that supports the whole family (as defined by the young person)

- What does this look like?
 - Engage
 - Capacity
 - **Seek out and be consistent**
 - Day to Day involvement

HOW ARE YOU
DOING THIS NOW?



3. Autonomy and Accountability Go Hand in Hand

- FNS respects the autonomy of young people, their families and their natural supports.

- What does this look like?

- Repetitive practice
- We are not the expert
 - reaching out to FNS
- Honoring youth choice

HOW ARE YOU
DOING THIS NOW?



4. Skill-Building that Leads to Growth

- Build skills to develop positive relationships and encourage emotional growth.

- What does this look like?

- Relationships take time
- Coach Approach!
- Self awareness, self-management
- Showing healthy relationships

HOW ARE YOU
DOING THIS NOW?



5. Individualized, Flexible, Non-judgmental Practice

- FNS takes a holistic view of the individual within the context of family dynamics and systems of power.

- What does this look like?

- Respect
- Dignity
- Compassion

HOW ARE YOU
DOING THIS NOW?



Protection VS. Connection

What does safety look like?
And whose definition are we
using?

- Parent/Caring Adult
- Child/Youth
- Agency/System



The Harm Reduction Approach

What is a Harm Reduction Approach when supporting youth and families?



Why enhance Family & Natural Supports?

77% said they would like to improve contact and relationships with family

Young people who reported positive relationships with friends were much more likely to report high levels of self-esteem. Likewise, those who are in regular contact with family members (more than once a month) and who value family connections also demonstrate higher levels of self-esteem. (Gaetz et al. 2016)

The FNS Approach should be used Everywhere in Every Program

- Schools
- Shelters / Drop In Centers
- Hospitals
- Legal Offices
- Mental health organizations
- Parent support groups
- Community tables/networks that focus on young people
- Youth hubs
- Any place young people and families seek support

To Find Out More

hwalter@awayhome.ca

www.homelesshub.ca

Thank you – in different languages

