

“Bricks & Mortar and Much, Much More”
A Made in Lanark County Solution to Addressing Youth Homelessness

Final Report

On March 29th and 30th 2006 the Transitions Action Coalition hosted a forum entitled “Bricks & Mortar and Much, Much More” – A Made in Lanark County Solution to Addressing Youth Homelessness. The forum was sponsored by the Provincial Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at CHEO, The National Crime Prevention Strategy of Public Safety and Emergency preparedness Canada, The Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Open Doors for Lanark Children and Youth, Motion Creative Printing, The Town of Carleton Place and The Carleton Heritage Inn.

The purpose of the event was to bring together a diverse group of key stakeholders including service providers, municipal leaders, youth and other interested parties to help create a “made in Lanark County” solution to address youth homelessness. The first day of the event provided an examination of identified “promising approaches” from across the country as presented by the following speakers: Debbie Evans of John Howard Society – WrapAround Program, Charlottetown, Sheldon Pollett of Choices for Youth, St. John’s, Clovis Grant of Eva’s Phoenix, Toronto and Len Usiskin of Quint Development, Saskatoon. During the second day of the forum the facilitators, Larry Arpaia and Luc Legault of RANA Process lead the participants through an ‘Open Spaces’ format in which the participants took the lead in developing a model of intervention for homeless youth.

In attendance at the two day forum were seventy-eight (78) participants who represented a variety of professional and non-professional sectors of the community. Of significant importance was the meaningful participation provided by the youth in attendance who made up approximately eight percent (8%) of the total. Other areas of the community that were represented included education, social services, mental health, housing, law enforcement, protective services, faith groups, municipal leaders as well as representation from the National Secretariat on Homelessness. This widespread representation proved to be extremely beneficial as the varying backgrounds and experiences prompted the development of innovative approaches both conceptually and in practical terms. Through these innovative approaches the group established the makings of a model for development as well as a clear action plan on how it is to be accomplished. Of paramount consensus among the forum participants, was the recognition for a multi-systemic solution that extends beyond the “bricks & mortar” to a continuum of supports that will foster independence of the youth. Specifically, the participants identified the following as the main areas for development:

- Housing (emergency and transitional)
- Supports (emotional and financial)
- Programs (skill development/enhancement)

In order to propel these areas into the developmental phase the group also created the following set of tasks:

- To establish a protocol for identifying existing emergency beds in the county as well as a process for creating additional beds
- To identify and engage all non-profit agencies and obtain a commitment by all to move forward with the initiative
- To organize a “youth voice” in the county and facilitate youth involvement at each stage of development
- To develop an outreach component
- To engage faith based organizations
- To work more effectively with local politicians/municipal leaders
- To develop a business plan that will prove the “made in Lanark County” model of development as effective and sustainable

Overall the “Bricks & Mortar” forum proved to be valuable to the Transitions Action Coalition and the initiative as a whole. Since the forum Transitions has been working hard to maintain the momentum and interest from the community. Building on the outcomes of the forum the Transitions coalition has created a long term model of intervention as well as an immediate short term plan of action. In addition, a mission statement and a set of values and principles was developed in order to provide credence and support to the long term model.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Transitions Action Coalition will create opportunities for Lanark County homeless youth and youth at risk of homelessness to achieve long term self sufficiency. This will be accomplished through a continuum of supports including safe and secure shelter, skills training and new opportunities that will maximize the potential of each youth in order to help them obtain stable, permanent housing and to live independently.

PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

- Engage youth from the ground up at all stages of development, implementation and evaluation of the program
- Create a county wide youth service
- Offer holistic, multi-service, collaborative services under one virtual roof
- Strive to reach the highest social, environmental, economic and cultural standards of accountability (quadruple bottom line)
- Foster and build partnerships across sectors
- Reduce the negative effects and risk factors associated with homelessness

OBJECTIVES

- Provide accessible, non-judgemental and non-conditional access to emergency housing
- Provide transitional housing
- Provide food and necessities of life support, counseling, skills development, recreational, educational and work training programs
- Develop not for profit social enterprises to support Transitions

- initiatives and
- To provide volunteer and employment opportunities

SHORT TERM ACTION

1. To compile an accurate and complete registry of emergency beds available within the county

Steps required:

- Consult with Housing Help and Ontario Works
- Determine a lead individual/agency for contact
- Establish a clear and concise plan of action/protocol for contacting the lead agency
- Ensure all relevant agencies are aware of and understand the protocol

2. To complete a registry of all “friendly” landlords within the county who are willing to house youth

Steps required:

- Consult with housing help to determine current situation
- Establish a system for researching and recruiting new landlords
- Establish a clear and concise plan of action/protocol for securing housing that all relevant individuals/agencies are aware of

3. An examination of the current supports available to homeless or at risk youth

Steps required:

- Contact all relevant non-profit and social service agencies and inquire as to their programs and protocol for assisting clients with housing concerns
- Create a resource book with program descriptions for all housing related services
- Ensure that the resource book is made available to all relevant agencies

4. An examination of what we need and possible areas to explore

Steps required:

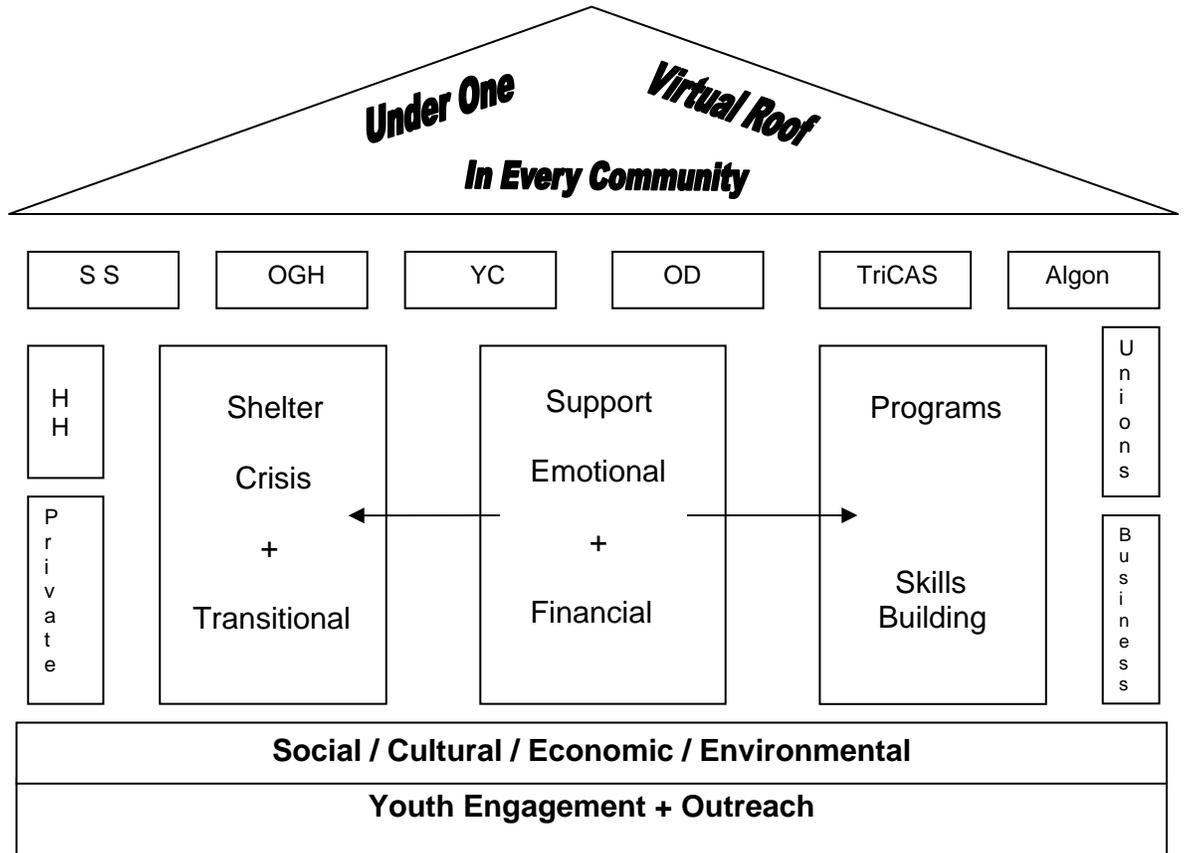
- Review above resources and determine the areas where improvement or new development is required
- Determine a consistent method for accessing services across the county

LONG TERM MODEL

Below is a diagram of Transitions model of intervention for addressing youth homelessness in Lanark County. The main components will be comprised of the three elements identified at the forum; housing (emergency and transitional), supports (emotional and financial) and programs (skills development/enhancement). The “bricks” strengthening the components of the model are the key players from the community who will provide the necessary supports to the youth at each stage of the continuum such as social services, housing, mental health, addiction, job skills, education, etc. Although the components exist within a continuum of supports, Transitions

recognizes, that depending on the level of need youth may oscillate from one component to the other several times before achieving self sufficiency.

The program will be built on the identified need as demonstrated through youth engagement and the programs outreach component. As well, it is to be accountable to the community by striving to the highest environmental, economical, social and cultural standards. All of which is to occur under one “virtual roof” in order to reflect the geographical landscape of Lanark County.



For more information regarding the work of the Transitions Action Coalition please feel free to contact Nicki Collins at ncollins@opendoors.on.ca, Terry Brennan at terry@cmho.org, or Chris Poulter at cpoulter@opendoors.on.ca.