

# City of St. Albert Youth Housing Needs Assessment

February 2024



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## Land Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that City of St. Albert is on Treaty 6 Territory, traditional lands of First Nations and Métis peoples. As treaty People, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, we share the responsibility for stewardship of this beautiful land





## Introduction + Context

St. Albert is a city of 68,232 residents located at the northwest boundary of Edmonton. The community is characterized by its idyllic location along the Sturgeon River, extensive parks and pathways, desirable residential neighbourhoods, and a strong sense of community pride, belonging, connectedness, and safety.<sup>1</sup> High incomes, high homeownership rates, and other social indicators routinely place St. Albert as an affluent community within the region. As a generalized population, St. Albert residents enjoy a very high quality of life.

While comparative data illustrates a stable and prosperous community (see [Appendix H – Comparative Community Data](#), page 53), local information and anecdotal experiences indicate that mental health issues, domestic violence, suicide, poverty, and housing insecurity are on the rise. St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village reports annual increases in the need for nutritional and social support services. The local RCMP, Sturgeon Community Hospital and local schools report significant increases in mental health and substance use-related incidents and attempted suicides. These shifts have become more apparent to professionals and the public in recent years and are increasingly a source of community concern.<sup>2</sup> Daylighting these issues within the broader context of an affluent community can be challenging but is a necessary step in gaining support for solutions.

City of St. Albert is deeply invested in supporting the social wellbeing of the community and responding to changing needs. The City’s Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) provides direct services in social planning and supports and collaborates closely with multiple agencies and community organizations who provide core and complimentary social services. Social services available within St. Albert range widely from fun neighbourhood connection initiatives like free libraries and block parties, to seniors and recreational programming, to social workers that connect residents in urgent need with food, counselling, and referrals.



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1. Urban Systems. (2023). *Community Social Needs Assessment: Community Social Profile*.  
2. Ibid.





In June 2023, City of St. Albert engaged CitySpaces Consulting and Covenant House Vancouver (CitySpaces team) to undertake a Youth Transitional Housing Feasibility Study to confirm the need, analyze development and operational model options, and outline specific actions for advancing a youth transitional housing project. The Feasibility Study scope is divided into two phases:

**Phase 1**  
**Youth Transitional Housing Needs Assessment**

confirming and detailing the need for youth transitional housing in St. Albert and gathering contextual information

**Phase 2**  
**Feasibility Study + Strategic Action Plan**

detailed analysis of possible development configurations and operational models resulting in an action plan for advancing a feasible project

This work is a continuation of the effort initiated by the City through its 2018 Mayor’s Task Force to End Homelessness to address increasing homelessness in the community. In its 2020 Final Report<sup>3</sup>, the Task Force identified “a significant gap in services and resources in St. Albert ... for youth” (p. 12) and prioritized the development of a business case for youth transitional housing as one of its three recommendations<sup>4</sup>. This recommendation was grounded in consultation and research undertaken by

3. City of St. Albert. (2020). *Mayor’s Task Force to End Homelessness Final Report*.

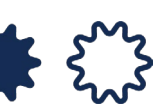
4. Other recommendations include creating a social housing staff position and empowering the Task Force to continue its leadership role in homelessness prevention. City of St. Albert. (2020). *Mayor’s Task Force to End Homelessness Final Report*.





the Task Force to identify how the City could most effectively leverage its role as a coordinating entity to reduce homelessness at the community-level. Youth were specifically identified as a vulnerable group with “the highest needs and fewest resources.” Noting that early interventions to halt youth homelessness increase the likeliness of restoring family connections and preventing chronic homelessness, the Task Force focused-in on transitional housing for youth as the intervention the City of St. Albert should advance based on the profile and needs of local youth.

The Needs Assessment is the culmination of additional research and consultation completed by the CitySpaces team in partnership with City representatives between June and December 2023. The team sought to confirm and then refine the Task Force findings related to youth housing and establish existing conditions, opportunities, and constraints to help inform the creation of youth transitional housing options to be further explored in Phase 2. The team was most interested in understanding the specific needs of St. Albert’s vulnerable youth, when and how they access services, what happens when they are approaching or in crisis, what supports already exist, and what gaps are creating a breakdown in support. This Assessment documents the findings of this work, details specific gaps in supports and service, and provides recommendations for moving forward to create a more complete system of support for vulnerable youth.





## Methods

Establishing the need for youth transitional housing is not a straightforward or definitive exercise. Without other safe and accessible housing options, youth may remain housed in unsafe situations or find temporary housing in the form of couch surfing with extended family, friends, or acquaintances, or leave the community to find housing and supports in Edmonton. Youth homelessness is often described as “**hidden homelessness**” since the need is not necessarily visible or easily measured. Traditional methods for measuring homelessness such as outdoor Point-in-Time surveys cannot accurately account for these young people. Reviewing how many vulnerable youths are accessing existing supports is another method for understanding need but is only relevant if comparable supports already exist. In the City St. Albert, there are no existing after-hour, crisis, or housing supports for youth to evaluate or from which to draw.

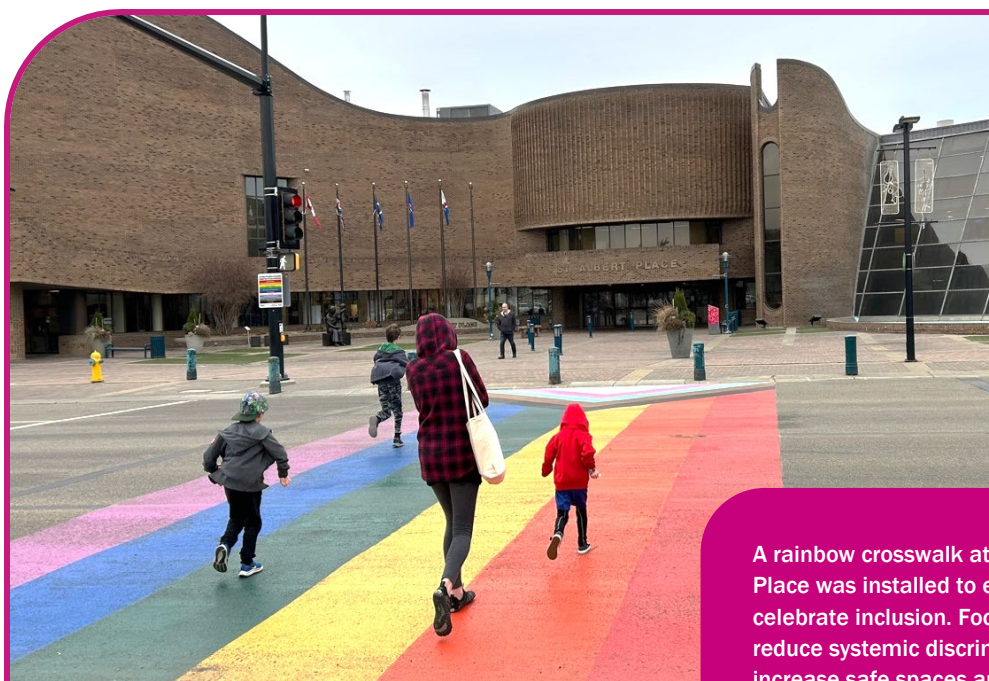
In the absence of quantitative data on youth behaviour, best practice for establishing need is to seek qualitative input directly from youth experiencing and/or at-risk of experiencing homelessness, people working closely with these youth, and subject matter experts. The following methods were employed between June and December 2023 to understand the existing services and gaps in housing supports for vulnerable youth in St. Albert:

- **Research** was undertaken to understand and incorporate information from relevant reports, studies, and articles related to youth homelessness within St. Albert and the Edmonton region. Most importantly, the CitySpaces team reviewed the reports created by St. Albert Mayor’s Task Force to End Homelessness and Edmonton-based Youth Agency Collaboration, and numerous publications from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and A Way Home Canada. A Reference List of these materials is provided in [Appendix I – Reference List](#) on page 55.
- **Key Informant interviews** were conducted with 24 professionals working in youth services, and the health and housing sector in City of St. Albert and adjacent communities. A list of participating organizations and summary of the interviews is provided in [Appendix C – Key Informant Interviews](#) on page 27.
- **Youth Focus Groups** were facilitated by trauma-informed youth professionals from Covenant House Vancouver and hosted by Outloud and Outreach School to learn directly from youth about their own experiences, needs, and recommended solutions. A summary of the input received from the focus groups is provided in [Appendix D – Focus Groups](#) on page 34.
- **Site Visits** to existing youth-servicing facilities in St. Albert, youth housing facilities in the Edmonton region, and meetings with frontline housing resources were completed to understand the types of services offered regionally and if any of the models could / should be adapted (see [Appendix F – Models in Practice: Preventing Youth Homelessness](#) on page 43) in St. Albert. A list of facilities visited is provided in [Appendix E – Site Visits](#) on page 40. Many of the host organizations also

generously shared capital and operational budgets along with waitlist and turn-away figures (no identifying information was included).

- **Youth Transitional Housing Advisory Committee** was formed by City team members and met once to review the Feasibility Study work plan and advise on the consultation approach. The membership list is provided in **Appendix J – Youth Transitional Housing Advisory Committee** on page 57.

Regular and specific meetings and a city tour with City team members provided further project background, community context, and opportunities to reflect on and integrate input received through the methods described above. The key themes and related gaps identified in this Needs Assessment have been distilled from literature review, interviews, focus groups, site visits, and other meetings and



A rainbow crosswalk at St. Albert Place was installed to express and celebrate inclusion. Focused efforts to reduce systemic discrimination and increase safe spaces and programs for 2SLGBTQIAP+ and BIPOC youth are necessary to reduce youth suicide and homelessness in St. Albert.

cross-referenced with data when available. Based on this information, there is a clear need for youth transitional housing in St. Albert as well as the related and interdependent supports for youth in crisis and an integrated youth services hub.







## Existing Gaps + Recommended Solutions

Although this Assessment is scoped within a Feasibility Study specific to *youth transitional housing*, it is important to locate housing supports within the continuum of prevention. Through the assessment work the CitySpaces team identified ‘upstream, midstream, and downstream’ gaps (see [Appendix B – Youth Homelessness Prevention Continuum](#), page 25) in youth homelessness prevention that can and should be addressed at the community level (Table 3, page 52). This was accomplished by drawing on the information obtained through community-specific research and consultation (see [Appendices C, D and E](#)), and applying a best practice framework for youth homelessness prevention to understand existing and missing supports. Table 3 is provided in [Appendix G – Local Gaps in Youth Homelessness Prevention](#) on page 51. The goal is for the St. Albert community to employ best practices to prevent youth from becoming homeless in the first place and reduce the experience of homelessness for youth who become housing insecure. **While providing youth transitional housing will fill one gap, as a standalone strategy it is unlikely to reduce the number of youth in need of “downstream” supports if significant “upstream” and “midstream” gaps remain.**

City of St. Albert and its many partner organizations, such as the local schools, St. Albert Family Resource Centre, and St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village, have created a coordinated system of services for local families that is effective at supporting those with access. Parents, children and youth – who can and will walk through the doors of Outreach High School, the City and other local organizations – can connect with many social services and professionals to help them navigate complicated systems and processes like income assistance, child services, and subsidized housing. **Currently, no comparable system is in-place to support vulnerable youth or implement the continuum of prevention necessary to stop youth from becoming homeless and reduce the experiences of youth that become homeless or experience housing precarity.**

On the following pages there are detailed summaries on each significant local gap identified through research and consultation conducted for this Assessment; each gap is described with recommended solutions outlined.



## GAP 1: Local Housing Support

### GAP 1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Explore feasibility of developing transitional housing in St. Albert that is scaled to be permitted within existing residential districts and presents a low-risk initial investment
- Explore models that incorporate both longer-term transitional housing and 1 – 3 crisis or short-term beds.
- Embrace shelter diversion strategies, trauma-informed practice and harm reduction as foundational principles. Support training in these practices for all project partners.

There are few youth-specific housing supports in the City of St. Albert beyond foster care placements facilitated through Children and Family Services for youth under 18 years of age. Youth housing supports include temporary housing such as **crisis beds** (see Gap 3 Recommendations, page 12) that may be accessed for a few nights or weeks, **transitional housing** where a youth may live for months or years, and other housing programs that support youth who are ready to live independently. While the ambition of youth homelessness prevention is ending youth homelessness altogether, it is important to have local youth housing supports available when needed. Youth housing supports include temporary housing such as **crisis beds** (see Gap 3 Recommendations, page 12) that may be accessed for a few nights or weeks, **transitional housing** where a youth may live for months or years, and other housing programs that support youth who are ready to live independently. Without local housing supports, youth experiencing homelessness or housing precarity must choose to either live in unsafe or unstable situations or relocate to Edmonton to access housing at times of crisis or critical junctures such as aging-out of foster care.

Extensive research on youth homelessness supports the Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) model of care in which housing is recognized as the fundamental element to helping youth stabilize and access other supports such as addiction and mental health services. For the HF4Y model to be effectively employed,



there must be local low-barrier youth housing options available without pre-conditions such as sobriety or participation in school or employment.<sup>5</sup>

Only a few HF4Y youth housing options currently exist in the Edmonton region, and all programs report serving youth from St. Albert. Edmonton-based Youth Empowerment and Support Services reports that it housed 16 youth from St. Albert between 2022–2023. The housing supports at Youth Empowerment and Support Services consistently operate at capacity which is common for youth housing supports throughout Alberta.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH HOUSING SUPPORTS IN ST. ALBERT**

This Assessment incorporated a preliminary review of the development and operational capacity for transitional housing in St. Albert. While this review will be further developed in Phase 2, understanding community capacity in terms of development, funding, and operations is key in providing initial recommendations and refining the project scope. To this end, the CitySpaces team reviewed land use, community planning, and real estate considerations, met with existing funders and operators of youth housing, and undertook a scan of potential partners. Findings from this preliminary review support the recommendations of this Assessment and provide the following directions for Phase 2:

**Form + Scale**

- St. Albert’s land use regulations allow for staffed housing with up to six youth beds in many existing residential districts that are characterized by detached, ground-oriented housing. Utilizing detached homes within appropriate districts does not require redistricting or public hearings, reducing potential development risks associated with redistricting.
- Establishing youth housing using traditional housing forms would allow an existing home to be purchased or rented, reducing capital costs and risks associated with purpose-built or larger youth housing facilities. This is a good approach for piloting youth housing and to better understand the specific need before scaling-up.
- The scale of traditional detached housing is consistent with housing operated by many supportive housing operators interviewed for this Assessment. The familiarity of form and scale increases the potential of attracting an experienced operator to St. Albert for a youth housing initiative.
- There are many other reasons this scale and form is often preferred for youth housing including the potential for greater social integration within existing neighbourhoods and stronger connections and relationship building within a smaller group and home-like setting.

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5. Gaetz, S., Walter, H. and Story, C. (2021). *THIS is Housing First for Youth. Part 1 – Program Model Guide*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.





## Location

- **Transportation and access are significant barriers to St. Albert youth being able access services and social connections. It is important that youth housing supports are located close to transit with evening and weekend service (to places youth want and need to travel including schools, employment centres, and support services) and/or within walking distance of these locations.**
- **Co-locating or ensuring proximity of youth housing and youth services is best practice to minimize barriers to supports for youth experiencing homelessness or housing precarity. Future youth housing supports should be planned in-step with a future youth services centre.**
- **Youth housing located in an existing residential neighbourhood can provide a calmer and family home-like experience than youth housing located in more commercial locations; this can also reduce stigma and help normalize group care within the community.**

## Potential Partners

- **Part of the feasibility scope is to determine if there are organizations interested and capable of leading the development and operations of youth housing in St. Albert. Identifying potential partners early in the process is recommended so these parties can help craft a housing model within their organizational capacity.**
- **Youth Empowerment and Support Services offered to share information and mentor the St. Albert community within the Youth Agency Collaboration framework. Youth Empowerment and Support Services has substantial experience in youth housing and services and, soon, as the first organization to pilot a YAC Youth Service Centre. Although Youth Empowerment and Support Services is reducing its focus on “downstream” housing supports, the offer of assistance represents potential for learning, peer review, and collaboration (see [Appendix E](#), page 40 for a short description of Youth Empowerment and Support Services).**



## GAP 2: Local Shelter Diversion Strategies

### GAP 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide training and support to existing youth-serving organizations in shelter diversion strategies and practices;
- Create an Integrated Youth Services Centre as a centralized entry into the support services including shelter diversion strategies;
- Create 1 – 3 youth crisis beds, which could be collocated with a new youth transitional housing program in St. Albert.

The overwhelming majority of more than 20 interviews and focus group participants explained that youth often leave the community and travel to Edmonton for emergency housing, and that many of those youth never return to St. Albert. The experience of youth seeking temporary housing support in shelters located in urban centres and being exposed to increased risks is well-documented across Canada.<sup>6</sup> This situation represents a significant opportunity to connect youth and families with resources in St. Albert to keep youth within the community where they have more natural supports and connection.

Shelter diversion strategies seek to reduce the number of youth staying in shelters by providing information and systems navigation, enhancing natural supports and family reunification, and offering referrals for mental health and substance use support. The goal is to help youth return home if it is safe to do so or find alternate housing quickly. In some cases, emergency housing may be required but it is provided within the framework of reducing the need and keeping youth in their community.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Gaetz, Stephen et al. (2016). *Without a Home: The National Youth Homeless Survey*.

7. Gaetz, Stephen et al. (2020). *Youth Reconnect Program Guide: An Early Intervention Approach to Preventing Youth Homelessness*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press and A Way Home Canada.

## GAP 3: Equitable Access to Youth-focused Services

### GAP 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Connect local youth-serving organizations with Youth Agency Collaboration (YAC) and support efforts to establish an Integrated Youth Service Centre in St. Albert within the YAC model;
- Support local professional training to increase professional capacity for development of an Integrated Youth Service Centre; and
- Identify possible locations, funding, and lead champion for an Integrated Youth Service Centre.

Currently there is no centralized place youth can visit in St. Albert to connect with mental health, substance use, physical health, legal, and/or housing supports. As outlined earlier in this Assessment, there are also very few standalone services in St. Albert designed for youth with housing precarity or available in-person outside of business hours. Equitable access means that supports, systems, and entitlements are:

- **Available** when youth need them, including nights and weekends;
- **Accessible** to all youth, including youth with substance dependence and mental health needs and without requiring parental consent;
- **Affordable**, including the cost of travel and follow-up; and
- **Appropriate** for youth and supported by professionals trained in trauma-informed, youth-centred practices.<sup>8</sup>

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8. Gaetz, Stephen et al. (2020). *Youth Reconnect Program Guide: An Early Intervention Approach to Preventing Youth Homelessness*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press and A Way Home Canada.

## GAP 4: Social Inclusion

### GAP 4 RECOMMENDATION

- Expand youth-focused programs and spaces, including evening and weekend options and safe programs and spaces for 2SLGBTQIAP+ and BIPOC youth through expanded support for existing programs such as Outloud St. Albert and new programs in locations where youth are underserved.

The qualitative research conducted for this Assessment identified that families and youth experiencing financial hardship, family conflict, housing precarity, abuse, violence, and other trauma often feel isolated, ashamed, and unseen in St. Albert. Providing more affordable housing options and support services to families, and normalizing mixed-income neighbourhoods, is an “upstream” approach to preventing family breakdowns and youth housing precarity.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, initiatives to better include residents between age 13 and 24, especially 2SLGBTQIAP+ and BIPOC youth, in existing and expanded community activities and spaces will enhance early prevention.<sup>10</sup> St. Albert youth and professionals working with youth expressed support for more activities, facilities, and services designed for youth such as late-night transit service, evening and weekend activities for youth that do not require parent participation, and creating programs and spaces that are safe, especially for 2SLGBTQIAP+ and BIPOC youth.

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9. Gaetz, Stephen et al. (2020). *Youth Reconnect Program Guide: An Early Intervention Approach to Preventing Youth Homelessness*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press and A Way Home Canada.

10. Ibid.

## GAP 5: Adult Crisis Housing

### GAP 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support Community local organizations to identify funding and training to develop and operate adult crisis housing in St. Albert.
- Support the provision of beds specifically designated and supported for young adults within future proposals for adult crisis housing.

Research for this Assessment revealed a pressing community need for adult crisis housing. Though this is not youth-specific, broader community housing stabilization and supports are intrinsically connected to the health and wellbeing of youth. Adult crisis housing can also be designed to include beds and supports specific to young adults between age 18 and 24.

There is currently no adult crisis housing in the City of St. Albert. Nearby crisis housing in Edmonton and Morinville operates at capacity. Like youth, adults experiencing homelessness must either remain homeless, stay in unsafe conditions, or access housing supports outside the community. St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village routinely coordinates for locals in need of emergency housing to stay in motels on an ad hoc basis.







# APPENDIX A

## Youth Homelessness Definitions + Concepts





## Youth Homelessness Definitions + Concepts

The concepts and definitions below are found in current youth homelessness prevention research and practice, and provide a basis of understanding of this Assessment.

### Youth

Youth is commonly defined as **adolescents and young adults aged 13 to 24**; this range straddles the age of majority (18 years old) when individuals are legal adults. This range also encompasses very different stages of cognitive and social development. The length of these stages can vary substantially by individual.<sup>11</sup>

Many “youth” housing services and supports are only accessible to youth under 18, while some extend into early adulthood or are purpose-designed only for young adults over 18. In Alberta, Children and Family Services (CFS) is responsible for ensuring youth under 18 have safe housing if they are unable to live with family; despite this, many youth under 18 experience urgent or ongoing housing needs that are unmet. Since there is no crisis or transitional housing for youth in St. Albert, even youth connected with CFS must leave the community to access these kinds of housing.

### Youth Homelessness

The Canadian Observatory on Homeless (COH) published the Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness in 2016 to provide a specific definition for youth homelessness that recognizes how the youth experience differs from that of other people experiencing homelessness: *“Youth homelessness refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence.”*<sup>12</sup>

Youth homelessness is distinct from other types of homelessness in several specific ways:

- Youth leave homes defined by relationships (both social and economic) in which they were typically dependent upon adult caregivers;
- Youth may not have yet acquired personal, social, and/or life skills that make independent living possible or appropriate;
- Many youth are in the throes of physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development;
- Youth tend to seek, access, and respond to services and supports differently than mature adults with experience living independently (for example, the developmental stage and life experiences

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11. Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. (2012, Updated 2017). *Canadian Definition Of Homelessness*. [homelesshub.ca/homelesshub.ca](http://homelesshub.ca/homelesshub.ca)

12. Ibid.



(such as networking) can significantly influence youth's understanding on how to seek help effectively); and

- Youth often avoid the homeless-serving system out of fear of authorities.

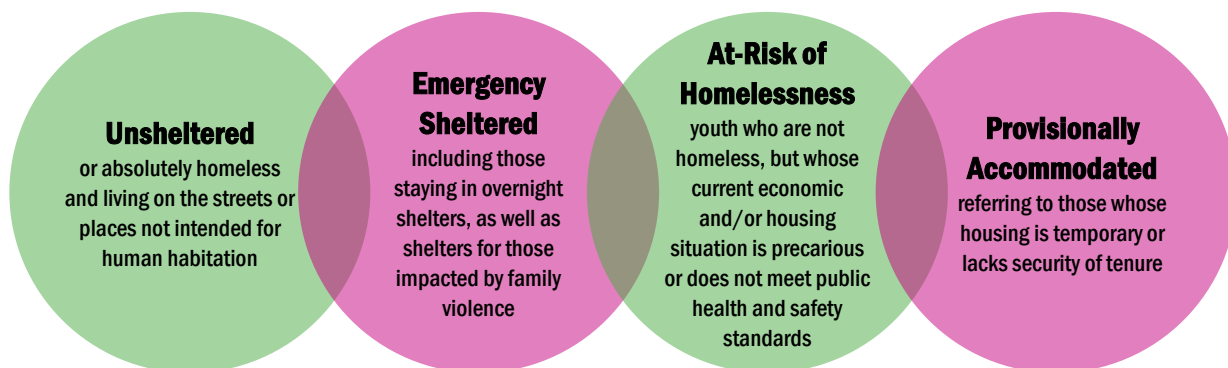
The age at which one is legally considered a child or adult is not consistent across service and policy areas, which can result in barriers to accessing services and supports, and continuity of care. The Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness further underscores the uniqueness of youth homelessness and the case for youth-centered solutions:

*“For young people, becoming homeless does not just mean a loss of stable housing, but rather leaving a home in which they are embedded in relations of dependence. Thus, they experience an interruption and potential rupture of natural supports and social relations with parents and caregivers, family members, friends, neighbours and community. It means an interruption of adolescence, and undermines the opportunity to transition into adulthood in a safe and planned way. For all of these reasons and more, youth-based strategies and interventions addressing the needs of young people between 13-24 must also be distinct from those developed for adults who experience homelessness.”*

*Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness (2016)*

## Typology of Youth Homelessness<sup>13</sup>

There are 4 commonly accepted types of youth homelessness. Figure 1: Types of Youth Homelessness



13. Ibid.



While there is general agreement that most St. Albert homeless youth fall within the **At-Risk of Homelessness** and **Provisionally Accommodated** definitions, at the time this Assessment was undertaken there were **St. Albert youth actively experiencing all four types of homelessness**, including young adults camped on the outskirts of the community in cold weather, school-age youth looking for emergency shelter for the night, and youth living in crisis and transitional housing in Edmonton<sup>14</sup>. In fact, two of the 14 beds available at Youth Empowerment and Support Services (YESS) in southeast Edmonton were occupied by St. Albert youth as of November 2023.

## Duty to Assist

Refers to the statutory obligation to help youth at-risk and also ensure adults in the lives of youth are able to provide supports or guidance to youth to help avoid homelessness. Local government has a specific role in providing a community-level strategy and coordinating role to prevent youth homelessness.<sup>15</sup>

## Family and Natural Supports

Family and Natural Supports (FNS) are people youth identify as family, friends and trusted community members, including meaningful adults in their lives who can help support them through conflict and change. Young people connected with FNS that align with “place-based” supports such as schools are less likely to leave their community in search of supports and risk experiencing chronic homelessness, additional trauma, and exploitation. “A FNS approach is based on the understanding that young people cannot – and should not have to – rely solely on professional supports to provide a sense of belonging and social inclusion.”<sup>16</sup>

## Harm Reduction

Policies, programs, and practices aimed at enabling individuals with trauma, substance use, legal and mental health issues access to supports while reducing risks. A harm reduction approach is essential to supporting youth with complex needs.

## Hidden Homelessness

Refers to persons who live temporarily with others without the guarantee of continued residency or immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing. Anecdotal information suggests that homeless

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14. Real experiences of youth homelessness in St. Albert were shared with CitySpaces in key informant interviews and during in-person meetings and site visits in November 2023. The examples cited here were provided by a school representative, St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village, and Youth Empowerment and Support Services.

15. Gaetz, S., Schwan, K., Redman, M., French, D., & Dej, E. (2018). *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*. A. Buchnea (Ed.). Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

16. Borato, M., Gaetz, S., and McMillan, L. (2020). *Family and Natural Supports: A Program Framework*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.











youth in St. Albert predominantly stay with extended family, friends, or acquaintances under ad hoc and temporary conditions; these kinds of circumstances can be unstable and unsafe.<sup>17</sup>

## Housing First for Youth

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is a recovery-oriented approach to ending youth homelessness centered on the needs of adolescents and young adults. A widely employed model, it seeks to quickly move youth experiencing homelessness into safe housing without pre-conditions around substance use, enrolment in school, etc. The model is based on extensive research that demonstrates the provision of safe housing increases an individual’s ability to access and engage in other social services such as basic medical and nutritional support, addiction treatment, and trauma counselling.<sup>18</sup>

St. Albert is one of the few cities in Alberta with a population over 60,000 residents that does not have local HF4Y supports. Of the six cities with populations between 60,000 and 100,000, only Airdrie and St. Albert are without any youth crisis housing.

**Table 1: Youth Specific Housing in Alberta Cities with 60,000 – 100,000 residents**

City	Population (2021)	Youth Crisis and/or Transitional Housing
AirdrieAirdrie	74,100	
Grande PrairieGrande Prairie	64,141	
LethbridgeLethbridge	98,406	
Medicine Hat	63,271	
Red DeerRed Deer	100,844	
St. AlbertSt. Albert	68,232	

## BIPOC

An acronym for Black Peoples, Indigenous Peoples, and Peoples of Colour; intended to represent racialized people who are not Caucasian. An alternate ordering of IBPOC is increasingly used in Canada to recognize the presence of Indigenous Peoples in a place prior to occupation by non-Indigenous Peoples.<sup>19</sup>

17. CitySpaces Consulting. (2023) Research and engagement completed for Youth Transitional Housing Needs Assessment.

18. Gaetz, S., Walter, H. and Story, C. (2021). *THIS is Housing First for Youth. Part 1 – Program Model Guide*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

19. Simon Fraser University. (2023). *Glossary of inclusive and anti-racist writing terms*. lib.sfu.calib.sfu.ca



## Integrated Youth Services and Youth Support Centres

An integrated youth services approach is a service delivery model in which youth can go, without a referral, to one location and where service providers (including physicians, nurses, counsellors, peer support workers, and many others) collaborate to provide the care needed. Instead of having to re-tell their story to providers each time they access a new service, youth are provided a seamless continuation of services across all organizations.<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes referred to as a “youth hub”, a youth support centre is a place that provides integrated youth services in a harm reduction and trauma-informed manner. The intent is to provide a local point of access for health services, housing supports, and other social services close to where youth already have natural supports and connections. This model is different from the existing situation in St. Albert where vulnerable youth must travel to multiple organizations to access different types of services, usually Edmonton, where they have no natural supports and are exposed to additional risks such as substance use, human trafficking, and exploitation.

## 2SLGBTQIAP+

Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and others who do not identify with binary concepts of sex, gender, and identity. There are disproportionate numbers of 2SLGBTQIAP+ youth experiencing or at-risk of experiencing homelessness throughout Canada; qualitative input indicates this is the case in St. Albert and the greater Edmonton region. 2SLGBTQIAP+ youth are also more likely to be disconnected from their families, coping with mental health conditions, and at greater risk of suicide. Research shows that 2SLGBTQIAP+ youth encounter systemic and



Outloud St. Albert provides mental health and social connection supports to local 2SLGBTQIAP+ youth. Outloud's offices and bi-weekly drop-in space is co-located with St. Albert Family Resource Centre and Big Brothers Big Sisters of St. Albert.

20. Settapani et al. (2019). *Key attributes of integrated community-based youth service hubs for mental health: a scoping review*. International Journal of Mental Health Systems. [ijmhs.biomedcentral.com/ijmhs.biomedcentral.com](http://ijmhs.biomedcentral.com/ijmhs.biomedcentral.com)



social discrimination that can present additional and significant barriers to accessing services.<sup>21</sup>

Any youth homelessness prevention or intervention initiatives must specifically consider the needs of 2SLGBTQIAP+ youth and ensure a safe and non-discriminatory approach for these youth.

## Shelter Diversion

Shelter diversion strategies reduce the number of youths staying in shelters by helping youth return home, if it is safe to do so, or find alternate housing quickly. Strategies include providing information and systems navigation, enhancing natural supports and family reunification, and offering referrals for other support. Shelter diversion can also include temporary or respite housing within the framework of reducing the need and keeping youth in their communities.<sup>22</sup>

Some communities are employing new models of temporary housing such as community-based Host Homes for youth who need a place to live while family issues are worked out or alternate housing is found. Rapid Rehousing is another shelter diversion strategy that seeks to quickly identify housing for those who can live independently, by providing rent, move-in assistance and long-term case management.

## Trauma-informed Practice

Trauma-informed Practice (TIP) is a strengths-based framework grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma. Some examples of trauma youth may encounter include homelessness, and/or sexual, physical, or verbal abuse within their home or external relationships. TIP seeks to support youth without introducing additional harm by following a set of guiding principles:

- Safety;
- Trustworthiness and transparency;
- Choice and empowerment;
- Collaboration and mutuality;
- Respect for diversity and cultural, historical and gender issues; and
- Peer support.

## Youth Transitional Housing

Youth transitional housing is intended for relatively temporary stays, ranging from 30 days to three years, as an intermediate step between emergency crisis shelter and permanent housing. It is more

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21. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (2022). *2SLGBTQIA+ Housing Needs and Challenges*. cmhc-schl.gc.ca/cmhc-schl.gc.ca

22. Gaetz, S., Schwan, K., Redman, M., French, D., & Dej, E. (2018). *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*. A. Buchnea (Ed.). Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

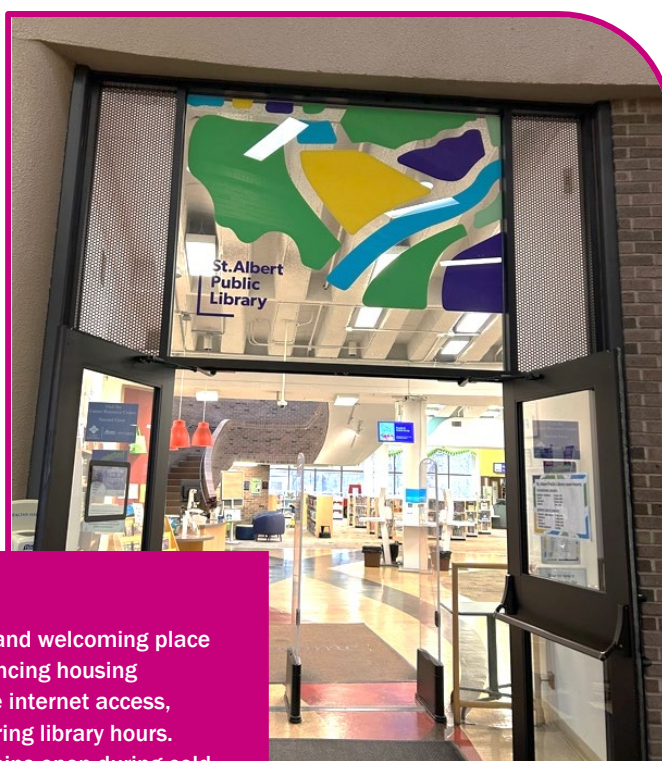




long-term, service-intensive, and private than emergency shelters, yet remains time-limited. This type of housing is meant to provide a safe and supportive resourced environment where youth can overcome trauma, begin to address the issues that led to homelessness and rebuild their support network, learn life skills, and participate in structured activities including school and employment.

## Youth Crisis + Shelter Housing

Immediate and temporary places for youth to stay when experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. Youth crisis or shelter housing plays an important role in the support system for vulnerable youth by providing a “safety net” to serve as a short-term solution to homelessness. Youth crisis or shelter housing is staffed and often employs a harm reduction model and low barrier admission requirements. The intent is for emergency housing to be accessed for one night at a time, although some youth will access these resources for consecutive nights, especially if other housing options are unavailable.



St. Albert Public Library is a safe and welcoming place for youth, including youth experiencing housing precarity. The library provides free internet access, washrooms, and a place to be during library hours. The lobby outside the library remains open during cold weather events for several hours after the library closes, providing an informal indoor public space for youth during especially cold evenings.

## Youth Services in St. Albert

There are 8,025 youth in St. Albert as of the 2021 Census, comprising 11.8% of the population. Most school age youth live with their families and attend school. This population is easier to track and engage







through their regular participation in the school system and other structured programs. It is difficult to learn about the behaviours and needs of youth under 18 not engaged in school and youth between 18 and 25.

**Table 2: Youth Demographics in St. Albert, Edmonton, and Alberta**

Source: Statistics Canada. (2023). 2021 Housing and Demographic Datasets

Area	City of St. Albert	Edmonton (Metro)	Alberta
Age 15–24 (% of Total Population)	8,025 (11.8%)	168,380 (11.9%)	498,505 (12.7%)
Age 15-19 (% of Total Population)	4,335 (6.4%)	80,195 (5.7%)	249,765 (6.9%)
Age 20-24 (% of Total Population)	3,690 (5.4%)	88,185 (6.2%)	248,740 (5.8%)

The City supports youth through partnerships with community groups and schools, and direct programming offered at city facilities such as the St. Albert Library and Servus Credit Union Place Recreation Centre. Most youth services offered can be characterized as recreation and education opportunities, as well as family supports primarily directed at parents and children under 12<sup>23</sup>.

No in-person supports are available for youth and their families in St. Albert after-hours beyond core emergency services such as the RCMP and Sturgeon Community Hospital. Some youth resources and mental health supports, most notably Kickstand, are accessible online. For youth seeking crisis and housing supports, however, the options are few: remain in potentially unsafe situations or go to Edmonton or other places in hopes of finding support. Consultation conducted during this assessment revealed that:

- Youth social and housing services outside St. Albert are limited, especially housing supports for youth engaged in substance use and other high-risk activities, and
- There is a perception among service providers and the youth who participated in focus groups that most local youth do not want to go to Edmonton or other places, preferring to stay where they have family and natural supports, and many youth who seek housing supports in other communities do not return to St. Albert.

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23. Information on youth and family services in St. Albert was obtained through key informant interviews and review of City and local social services organizations' websites.





Service providers that work with youth in St. Albert are strongly aware of the need for outreach and after-hours services for youth beyond online resources. Organizations including Outloud St. Albert, St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village, and St. Albert Library often provide ad hoc supports outside their official mandates and budgets. These organizations and others have long advocated for a local integrated youth support centre to allow youth to access services and supports when needed. Lack of funding and an agreed-upon model and champion were identified by interviewees as reasons for this effort not advancing.

St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village, currently co-located with City offices., offers an array of supports to individuals and families in St. Albert and has long-championed more youth-specific services and housing options. Youth are welcome at St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village. Showers, food, computer access, and social workers are available during regular business hours.



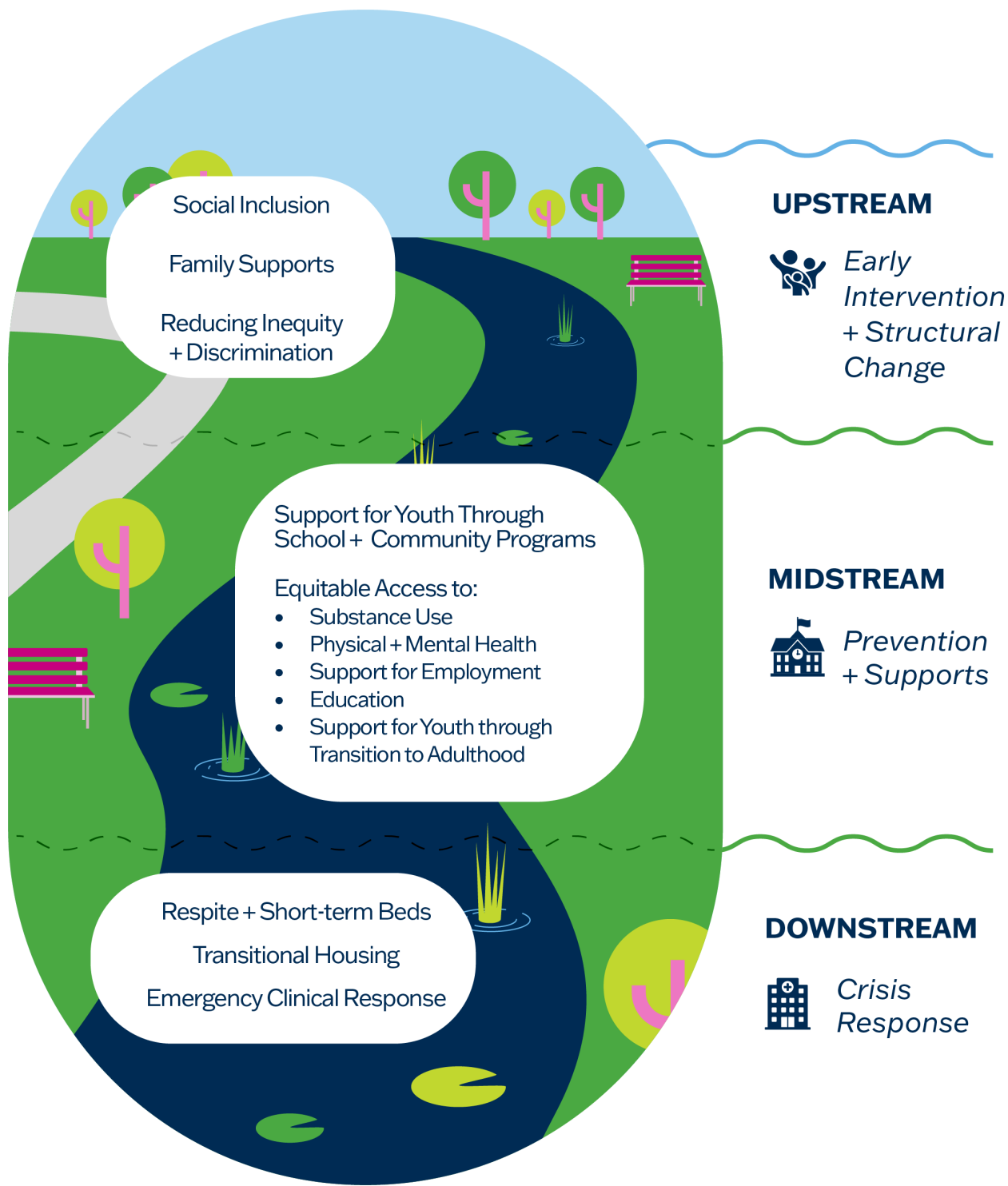


# APPENDIX B

## Youth Homelessness Prevention Continuum



Figure 2: Youth Homelessness Prevention Continuum





# APPENDIX C

## Key Informant Interviews





## Overview

Between August and November 2023, The CitySpaces team, including subconsultants from Covenant House Vancouver, conducted 21 interviews with professionals working in youth services and housing services in the City of St. Albert and adjacent communities. Interviews involved one or more representative from the following organizations:

- Alberta Health Services
- Boys + Girls Club/Big Brother + Big Sisters
- Chimo Youth Retreat Centre
- City of St. Albert:
  - Family + Community Services
  - Government + Indigenous Relations
  - Planning + Development
- Community Village and Food Bank
- The Family Resource Centre
- Homeward Trust
- Jessica Martel Memorial Foundation
- John Howard Society
- Metis Housing
- Outloud
- St. Albert Public Library
- St. Albert Public School Board
- St. Albert RCMP
- Sturgeon Hospital
- YESS

## Findings

Interviews were conducted on a “two-on-one” basis, with a representative from the City of St. Albert participating in each interview. The data compiled for each interview was closely reviewed and analyzed for themes and directions relevant to the Youth Transitional Housing Feasibility Study. The results of this review are summarized on the following page.





## STRENGTHS IN YOUTH SERVICES IN ST. ALBERT

- **Safe Community Perception:** St. Albert is considered a safe community and a good place to be by those who live and work there, and people in adjacent communities.
- **Youth Preferences:** Youth, especially younger teens, usually want to live within the St. Albert community. Many interviewees provided their perception that youth want to reside within the community because it is safer compared to other places and youth have social connections.
- **Collaborative Relationships:** Collaboration is alive and well in St. Albert, as exemplified by the integrated working relationships between the City, local non-profit organizations, and other agencies such as the schools. This collaboration results in numerous efficiencies in service delivery, is highly valued and a source of pride within these organizations.
- **Daytime and School-Based Supports:** St. Albert has daytime and school-based family and youth supports such as counselling and mental health services, nutritional support, and referral systems.
- **Bright Lights for Youth:** Outreach High School, Outloud, the Community Village and Food Bank, and the Library were specifically and repeatedly mentioned as bright lights for youth seeking support and safe spaces.
- **Social opportunities:** Social opportunities and peer support are available casually and through Outloud, the schools, and on online forums. Outloud specifically serves 2SLGBTQIAP+ youth but welcomes all youth to their drop-in programs, which are well-attended.
- **Public transit** is free for youth under 18 in St. Albert and includes a “dial-a-bus” service.
- **Interest in Integrated Youth Services:** Many local agencies and groups share a goal of supporting local youth better than the community does today. Many local agencies are interested in an integrated youth services model, but the specifics have yet to be clarified and agreed upon, including how housing needs should be addressed. One interviewee described this current status as “a phase of exploration.”

## GAPS IN YOUTH SERVICES IN ST. ALBERT

- **Specific Supports:** Significant gaps exist in youth services in St. Albert. Some of these gaps are specific supports, such as detox and residential treatment, and crisis and transitional housing. Other gaps are related to availability and methods of service delivery. Most youth services in St. Albert are only available during business hours, depend on youth getting themselves to a specific location, and often require parent/caregiver involvement. Afterhours, weekend, and outreach services are almost entirely missing, and confidential services are limited. It is understood that most at-risk youth are not being connected with the services they need because of barriers inherent in the current service delivery methods.





- **Service Availability and Delivery:** While some youth hang out at fast food locations, the library, and the mall (less frequently), there are not many youth-specific spaces in St. Albert where at-risk youth feel welcome. Outloud is an exception but does not have many drop-in hours. Many youth are finding friends, safe spaces, and services online rather than in-person.
- **Kick Stand** is an online youth mental health portal that local agencies often refer youth to. This is an example of an online service filling a need that is not well offered through a local provider.
- **Professional Training:** More training is needed for professionals, including teachers and government employees, working with at-risk youth – especially in relation to mental health, trauma, addiction, and housing issues. Some organizations interviewed emphasized that they provide their staff with trauma-informed training but acknowledged the challenge of applying a unique and client-centered approach to each situation.
- **Transportation Barriers:** Transportation within the City can be a barrier for youth accessing services. While the public transit system in St. Albert is free for youth under 18, the routes and service times limit its usefulness in serving youth without reliable car transportation.
- **Consent and Address Requirements:** Access to youth services often requires parental consent and/or an address. At-risk youth often cannot obtain consent or do not want their caregivers involved, and they may not have or want to provide an address. Reluctance and/or inability to obtain parental consent is likely most widespread among 2SLGBTQIAP+ youth and youth who experience abuse.
- **Cultural Safety:** There are very limited youth services structured specifically for youth who identify as BIPOC (Indigenous, Black and People of Colour) although there are some efforts to provide more culturally-informed Indigenous services through the schools.

## STRUGGLING YOUTH AND FAMILIES IN ST. ALBERT

- **Community Perceptions:** A prevailing sentiment in St. Albert is that the community is distanced from the social and health issues often associated with poorer areas of Edmonton, but there are in fact many local families experiencing crisis.
- **Increasing Struggles:** The number of struggling families and youth in St. Albert is increasing and needs to be better addressed through supports. This is also true within the wider region. Service providers anticipate caseloads to increase year over year.
- **Emerging Concerns:** Youth sexual abuse, mental health, substance use, suicide and suicide ideation concerns are increasing overall in the school community and within the general population. Some interviewees mentioned that in the context of the criminal justice system and/or involvement in substance use, there is a significant correlation with mental health and substance-related issues.







- **Challenges in Affluent Communities:** Struggling in an affluent community like St. Albert often comes with stigma, shame, and a sense of invisibility and erasure as individuals and families try to “blend-in” without adequate support.
- **Anticipation of Pushback:** Local professionals expect community pushback or “NIMBYism” to youth housing projects in St. Albert. Opponents will likely be specifically concerned about drug use, crime and nuisance and more generally resistant to change in their neighbourhood. This pushback should be anticipated and pro-actively addressed.

## YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOUSING INSTABILITY IN ST. ALBERT

- **Estimates of Youth Housing Instability:** There are mixed estimates from local youth services professionals on the number of youth who may be precariously housed or experiencing homelessness currently in the City of St. Albert. Estimates provided range from less than a dozen to over 30 individuals. The disparity in the estimates likely reflects which services providers youth experiencing housing instability are most engaged with. The schools and Outloud appear to have the highest engagement.
- **Challenges Faced by Precariously Housed Youth:** Precariously housed youth are likely to also be dealing with trauma, abuse, substance use and/or mental health issues. Sometimes it is because of these other issues that they are asked, forced, or choose to leave their living situation.
- **Engagement with Support Services:** Many of the underage youth experiencing housing instability in St. Albert are already connecting with Children Services and/or known by the RCMP, but not all. At-risk youth ages 17 to 25, in particular, may not be engaged with or tracked by any youth service agency.
- **Temporary Housing Arrangements:** Youth experiencing homelessness in St. Albert are likely to “couch-surf,” staying on a temporary basis with extended family, the family of friends, or young adults with their own housing. This is generally considered to be unstable and potentially unsafe or dangerous housing. It is also challenging to know how many youth may be housed in this manner.
- **Seasonal Challenges:** Some youth may camp along the river trail in the warm months but must move inside in the colder months.
- **Temporary Hotel Housing:** Some youth are temporarily housed in hotels as a stop-gap measure, especially when they are at risk of domestic violence. The goal is usually to help them find housing with friends or family instead of sending them to crisis housing in Edmonton.
- **Challenges with Referral to Edmonton:** The lack of crisis and transitional housing, along with gaps in after-hours and outreach youth services, is resulting in youth staying in unsafe or unstable situations or going to Edmonton for housing and services – both on their own and





through referral from services in St. Albert. Youth who go to Edmonton are often exposed to more high-risk situations. Some return quickly, others never come back. For these reasons, youth services professionals dislike referring youth to Edmonton, and have identified the need for better youth housing and services within St. Albert.

- **Market Housing Challenges:** Market housing is expensive and limited in St. Albert, with few options other than detached homes. This makes finding rental housing for young adults, even with government supports, more challenging than within Edmonton where there is more variety in housing types and rents.

## ENGAGING AT-RISK YOUTH

- **Meeting Youth Where They Are At:** It is best to meet youth where they are at/where they want to be instead of expecting them to travel. The schools, Outloud and the library were identified repeatedly as places where youth are already comfortable. The Community Village and Food Bank was also mentioned with less frequency.
- **Success with School Engagement:** Other youth service providers have had success engaging youth through the schools in St. Albert. It is much harder to know how to engage youth who are not attending school.
- **Outloud's Role in Engagement:** Outloud's online groups and in-person drop-in hours are well attended and could be good ways to engage youth. Not all of these youth are at-risk or precariously housed but many are.
- **Recognition through Incentives:** It is best to provide food and gift cards to youth who participate in engagement activities to value the time and contributions of youth.
- **Engagement with Indigenous-led Services:** The more appropriate way to learn more about indigenous interests at this stage of the Feasibility Study project is by engaging with indigenous-led youth services and housing providers.

## THE BROADER CONTEXT

- Providing services for youth under 18 is a different legal and funding landscape than serving youth 19 – 25 in Alberta. Youth ages 17 and 18 often fall through funding and program gaps. This age group seems to want more independence but does not necessarily have the life skills and supports they need to hold a job and secure housing, especially if they are dealing with additional challenges.
- Funding for supportive housing (especially operations) is challenging in Alberta, and extra challenging outside of Edmonton.
- YESS is widely seen as a leader in providing crisis services and housing to youth experiencing housing instability. Staff are reluctant to send youth to Edmonton.





The Youth Agency Collaboration (YAC) is vital work that seeks to shift service-delivery to be youth-centered rather than urban-centered. The YAC model would allow youth to **receive services they need within the community they choose**. The YAC is a potential opportunity for St. Albert to join a regional and integrated approach effort, tailored to the needs of local youth.





# APPENDIX D

## Focus Groups



## Focus Group Engagement Summary

On November 21, 2023, CitySpaces subconsultants from Covenant House Vancouver met with two groups of youth at Outloud, a 2SLGBTQIAP+ support agency, and Outreach High School, an alternate education site.

The group at Outreach School had six participants between 16-18 years old and the group at Outloud included 20 participants between ages 13-24.

Facilitators asked a series of questions in a group setting. Notes compiled for each of these group sessions were closely reviewed and analyzed for themes and directions relevant to the Youth Transitional Housing Feasibility Study. The results of this review are summarized below.

### STRENGTHS IN YOUTH SERVICES

The youth mentioned several services that are available for St Albert youth including:

- **Local Agencies and Support:**
  - Art groups
  - City-run Clubhouses can be rented for activities.
  - Dial a bus app and bus will come to you
  - Food bank
  - Free transit for those under 18 years - safe and sanitary (service is limited though)
  - Library is open until 9 and some youth stay in the provincial building which is warm until 11pm.
  - Outloud St. Albert 2SLGBTQIAP+ support agency
  - Recreation camps (would like art and more free rec things)
  - River's Edge Counselling (youth mental health/specialist)
  - School Counsellors
- **Child Protective Services**
  - Transition to Adulthood Program - transition from foster care, helps with housing and jobs.
- **Edmonton-based Services**
  - Youth Empowerment and Support Services (YESS), Edmonton
  - BGS Career Ventures, Edmonton – education and career support (you must be independent living)
  - Zebra Centre (child health care centre).
- **Hotlines & Apps:**
  - Kid's Help Line



- Briteline (mental health and wellness helpline dedicated to supporting people in Edmonton's 2SLGBTQIA+ community)
- Trans Lifeline (national peer support phone service run by trans people for our trans and questioning peers)
- App called Harmless for suicidal thought or harming
- I Am Sober app.

## GAPS AND CHALLENGES IN YOUTH SERVICES

The youth mentioned several gaps in services including:

- Lack of gender affirming care for young people. There is a gender program at the University of Alberta but participants mentioned it's not very helpful for youth under 16. There is only one doctor in St. Albert that will refer youth to the U of A transgender care which has a 2-year waitlist.

"Child Protective Services doesn't go beyond the basics and don't care to get you out of a bad situation if you have a roof over your head and food. They care less for teenagers."

Focus Group Participant

- Counselling System
  - Participants indicated feeling unsupported by counselling system as after limited sessions they cost money and youth can't afford to continue. Counsellors often vary and it's difficult to establish a trusting relationship.
  - It's difficult to access school counsellors as they can't keep up with demand. The school has 113 referrals in the system this school year between two counsellors.
  - Crisis support for suicidal ideation is difficult. Youth don't feel safe to mention it because it has to be reported to police or family and they don't want that. Some experience feeling that teachers don't believe them.

"There are some supports for youth but I wish there were more flexible times for services."

Focus Group Participant



- **Policing Services**
  - Participants indicated a mistrust and lack of support from police but indicated that police will take them home if needed.
- **Funding for Post-Secondary Education**
  - Most youth don't know how to pay for post-secondary school other than working.
  - Some mentioned the Foundational Learning (Youth agreement) offered through Children and Family Services until age 20. If you keep your grades up there is assistance with scholarships and grants.
- **Transit**
  - While some participants appreciated the transit services, others were not happy with the level of service or the limited evening service.

“There is one bus on the route, so if you miss it you are out of luck.”

Focus Group Participant

- Dial-a-bus isn't on the spot, one you have has to book ahead.
- Some witness transphobia on the bus (drivers/passengers) in St. Albert and Edmonton.
- Some witness violence on the bus system in Edmonton.
- Parents don't want youth going into Edmonton because of the danger. Youth often share this concern and also find the bus ride very long.
- Youth indicated that many are very bored outside of school and that St Albert Centre is boring.

## STRUGGLING YOUTH

The youth identified several issues that they struggle with including:

- Substance use - alcohol marijuana, cocaine, vaping, and smoking. They notice that kids younger and younger are doing drugs (as young as 12).
- Youth use outside at Lion's Park by skate park or Seven Hill unless a friend's house is available. The abandoned Trap House is used by teens as young as 12-year-olds.
- There are fights, hate motivated homophobic violence and crime and intimate partner violence (youth in bad relationships) in St. Albert.



- Youth are not aware of sex trafficking, but they are aware of older pedophiles or people who look for youth for child porn/fetish.
- Participants indicated they were unhappy with the hospital. The wait times are long. They don't feel they take them seriously if they are overdosing. They don't get connected to other services.

## YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOUSING INSTABILITY

Most of the youth know a few people currently or recently unhoused or precariously housed. They sleep:

- At the transit centre (used to have heat), CIBC vestibule, or couch hop.
- Stay with friends or relatives

Child Protective Services offers some support through the Office of Child Advocacy, Northern Alberta Child Services. Youth can call and they do an intake. If high-risk they might send someone to the home to investigate. Participants shared that this takes a long time and they don't feel they care. Participants mentioned other services including:

- Family violence info line (Edmonton).
- Hope Mission in Edmonton (shelter is not-inclusive though),
- SAFE (business hours).
- Youth empowerment and support services.

## TYPE OF YOUTH HOUSING IN ST. ALBERT

The youth identified the type of housing needed in St Albert:

- A mix of shelter beds and longer stay beds. One suggested that they should have requirements such as no drug use and fill in an application.
- Edmonton is too far, and their shelters are hard to get to.
- Participants identified their dream space would include:
  - 24/7 rehab
  - Accessible to people with disabilities,
  - Cash support for youth that must live on their own
  - Counsellor available
  - Designated smoke spot
  - Empathetic and caring staff
  - Gender neutral/ inclusive – even if you are in transition
  - Industrial art and carpentry
  - Medical care
  - Pet friendly
  - Private rooms or apartment (or with sibling or friend) with communal area
  - Recreational stuff (gym), non-phone things.
  - Safe neighbourhood, best away from places where people are using.
  - Safe testing or drugs, harm reduction.
  - Support for mental and emotional abuse not just physical abuse





- Job and housing support
- Life skills: cooking, budgeting, investing taxes, help getting driver's license, how to save money, set up a bank account, laundry and cleaning.
- Tent for stoners

## OTHER COMMENTS

The youth offered further comments:

- They love St. Albert because it is safe. They like the library and Outloud.
- Additional resources are needed for youth especially for crisis response.
- Better transportation needed– frequency, run longer.
- Youth commented that because of phones they aren't learning to have healthy relationships. It's hard to make friends and do things that don't involve their phones (like go for a walk or play games). They feel like kids in the 80s/90s had it better before technology and they learned how to interact with people.

## OUTLOUD STAFF COMMENTS

Staff offered the following comments:

- The RCMP doesn't do anything to protect 2SLGBTQIA+ people and violence and hate is escalating.
- High suicide attempts for youth.
- Overdose deaths are underreported because it looks bad on St. Albert and numbers are lumped into Edmonton.
- Indigenous communities are underserved, a lot of racism in St. Albert.
- Trafficking is a real thing. They know of 3-4 kids in their program who are talking to adults online.
- Staff have experienced tagging of their cars and there are people seeking out youth in St. Albert and Edmonton for gangs or trafficking, prostitution. More concern for trans youth.
- Need a youth ombudsperson.
- Need an elder available for indigenous youth.
- Outloud is funded mostly by municipal funding (3 full-time, 2 part-time staff and all feel burnt-out)
- Concern about changes in conservative government for policies that will force kids to be outed to parents in school if they want to change their name/pronouns. Kids are very worried about this.





# APPENDIX E

## Site Visits





## Site Visits to Existing Service Providers

### EDMONTON JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY

#### The LOFT

The LOFT is a 6-bed short-term voluntary supported living environment for males ages 16-24 experiencing or at-risk of homelessness and committed to sobriety.

#### Donnelly House

Donnelly House is an 8-bed 3-month transitional housing program for males and females 16 years of age and over experiencing homelessness, including individuals exiting the medical system.

### JESSICA MARTEL MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

#### Jessie's House

Jessie's House is a 35-bed emergency shelter located in a residential neighbourhood outside Edmonton, offering short-term housing and trauma-informed services for families and individuals of any age or gender fleeing abuse. Individuals from Sturgeon Region and St Albert are given priority admission.

#### Eilleen's Place

Eilleen's Place is second stage (or "transitional") housing for people who stayed at Jessie's House (above) but require support for a longer period before living independently. The program is located in a duplex home in a residential neighbourhood outside Edmonton. Residents have their own room with shared cooking and communal areas and receive support from trained staff as they work toward their goals.

### ST. ALBERT FOOD BANK AND COMMUNITY VILLAGE

St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village partners with over 20 local organizations to provide supports and programs to local individuals and families in need, including nutritional support and access to registered social workers who are available during business hours to help people navigate complex situations and systems.

### OUTLOUD ST. ALBERT

Outloud St. Albert is available to the 2SLGBTQIAP+ community, offering supports and services in a safe, inclusive space for youth to connect with each other and allies, away from the intense bullying and high suicide rates still prevalent in their community.

### ST. ALBERT PUBLIC LIBRARY – ST. ALBERT PLACE BRANCH

The main library branch, located within St. Albert's civic centre adjacent to downtown, welcomes youth experiencing homelessness as a warm and safe space during daytime hours when the library is open to the public. Library staff help youth connect with other services if the youth ask for assistance. The lobby





outside the library is open in the evenings and has seating. Youth sometimes use this space in an ad hoc manner after library close.

### **YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND SUPPORT SERVICES (YESS)**

Youth Empowerment and Support Services is the largest centralized provider of youth emergency services in the Edmonton region. The organization provides immediate and low-barrier 24/7 shelter and temporary supportive housing for youth ages 15-21, and daytime programs and resources with individualized wrap-around supports for young people ages 15-24.





# APPENDIX F

## Models in Practice: Preventing Youth Homelessness





## Models for Reducing + Preventing Youth Homelessness

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) and A Way Home Canada (AWHC) are recognized authorities and leaders on youth homelessness prevention and reduction. Both organizations' extensive evidence-based guidance on policy and practice is employed by numerous communities, government bodies, and respected youth-servicing organizations across Canada. COH and AWAHC guidance supports a shift away from the longstanding practice of focusing on crisis response to resourcing youth-centred prevention.

The first ever National Youth Homelessness Survey found that **40% of young people who have experienced homelessness had their first experience of leaving home before they were 16 years old.**<sup>24</sup> For young people in these circumstances there are few if any supports available to help them avoid the perilous consequences of becoming homeless. **Best practice is to increase investment in youth-centered prevention strategies** that are reflective of the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social needs of developing adolescents.

The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness outlines the prevention approach through the description of six strategy areas:

**Figure 3: Six Strategies towards the Prevention of Youth Homelessness.**<sup>25</sup>

Structural Prevention	Systems Prevention	Early Intervention	Eviction Prevention	Housing Stability	Duty to Assist
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevention Legislation + Policy</li> <li>• Poverty Reduction</li> <li>• More Affordable Housing for Families + Youth</li> <li>• Greater Social Inclusion</li> <li>• Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports for Youth Transitioning from Public Institutions + Systems</li> <li>• Equitable Access to Systems, Supports, + Entitlements</li> <li>• Improving Youths' Experiences + Outcomes in Public Systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance Natural Supports</li> <li>• School-based Intervention</li> <li>• Shelter Diversion</li> <li>• Housing-led Supports</li> <li>• Preventing Exploitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen Tenant Protection</li> <li>• Housing Support + Advice and Advocacy for Families and Youth</li> <li>• Targeted Intervention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Supports</li> <li>• Supports for Health + Wellbeing</li> <li>• Access to Income + Education</li> <li>• Enhance Social Inclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration + Coordination Among Agencies, Communities, + Government</li> <li>• Investment</li> <li>• Policy Alignment</li> <li>• Leadership</li> </ul>

24. Stephen Gaetz, Bill O'Grady, Sean Kidd & Kaitlin Schwan. (2016). *Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

25. Gaetz, S., Schwan, K., Redman, M., French, D., & Dej, E. (2018). *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*. A. Buchnea (Ed.). Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.





Research on youth homelessness points to the same recommendation again and again: early intervention approaches to prevention – working upstream to provide young people with supports directly within communities – to reduce the flow of young people into homelessness.<sup>26</sup>

## Models in Practice

### **KOHOMISH HOUSE, BENT ARROW TRADITIONAL HEALING SOCIETY, EDMONTON ALBERTA**

**Bent Arrow** is dedicated to supporting the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being of Indigenous children, youth, and families in Edmonton and surrounding areas. It provides culturally responsive programming that promotes healing, resiliency, and cultural connectedness. One of these services is Kokomish House that assists youth transition into independent living. “Kokomish” means “grandmother” in Ojibwe. Kokomish House provides service to youth aged 12–18 with status under Children’s Services. The home can lodge long-term, short-term, and emergency care placement. It is licensed to accommodate six residents: four females and two males. The program uses a harm reduction approach and trauma informed framework practices that promote a culture of safety, empowerment, and healing.

Residents are expected to attend school, have fulltime employment, or be in an alternative day program. Staff and daytime programmers assist in funding appropriate programming to meet individual needs such as:

- Education: Explore ways for youth to connect to a program within the community;
- Employment: Explore programs that teach employment and life skills for young people;
- Health Clinic: Connect youth to public health services who need access to health information;
- Addiction & Mental Health: Connect youth to community clinics and crisis services; and
- Practice Ceremony / Cultural Supports.

While the staff of Kokomish House are the main supports, the goal is to connect youth with the resources that already exist so that residents can get maximum benefits during their transition.

Kokomish operates under the teaching of traditional Indigenous peoples and the hope is to introduce or reconnect the young people with their culture and traditions. The home provides:

- An onsite Cultural Connector;
- Access to Elders;

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26. Gaetz, Stephen., Morton, Erika., Borato, Meryl., Story, Chad. (2020). *Youth Reconnect Program Guide: An Early Intervention Approach to Preventing Youth Homelessness*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press and A Way Home Canada.





- Referrals for Indigenous youth workers;
- A cultural room and smudging corner;
- In house teachings and practice of traditional protocols; and
- Community access to participate in Cultural events and Ceremony.

### **SUNRISE YOUTH SHELTER, GRAND PRAIRIE, ALBERTA**

Sunrise House provides emergency shelter to youth ages 12-17 who have become or are at risk of becoming homeless. They provide a safe and supportive environment encouraging healthy decision making and to strengthen coping skills. Sunrise House is open 24 hours/day, 7 days/week – while in shelter youth are provided with food, clothing, and personal care items. The goals are to:

- To provide emergency and/or, when appropriate, transitional shelter for homeless youth
- To connect homeless youth with the necessary programs and services that will support a successful return to their home or to finding safe, suitable living accommodation
- To connect homeless youth to programs and services that will strengthen coping skills making them more resistant to crisis
- To support youth and their families to develop more constructive and positive relationships through referral to mediation and other community services
- To collaborate with community agencies and associations and actively participate in community efforts to improve the condition of families and youth

The first floor of the facility includes an integrated youth hub for Community Youth, 12 to 24 years old and 24 emergency beds. The second floor has 11 transitional housing units.

### **YOUTH AGENCY COLLABORATION, EDMONTON, ALBERTA**

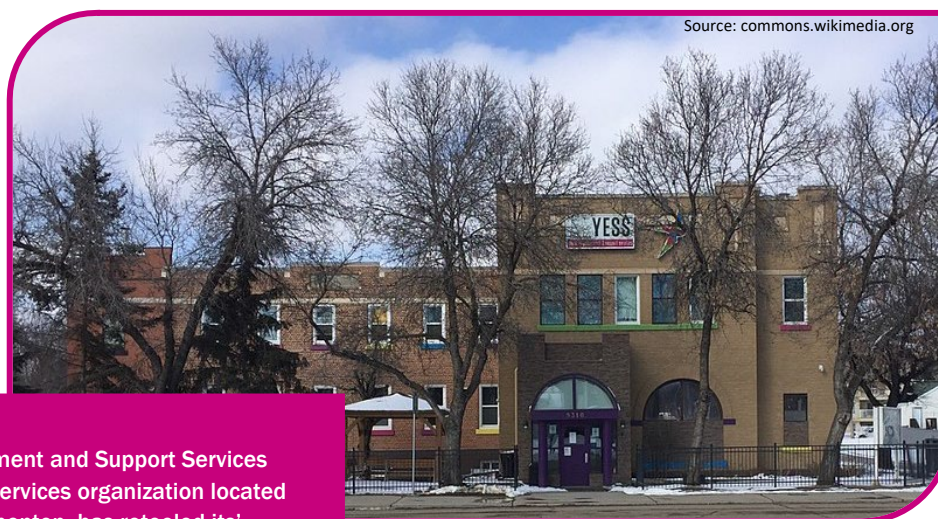
The Youth Agency Collaboration (YAC) is an initiative driven by Youth Empowerment and Social Services (YESS) to shift the system of service delivery to better support vulnerable youth. Since 2018, YAC has grown to involve over 20 agencies including multicultural groups, Indigenous organizations, youth housing providers, newcomer/ immigrant groups, and 2SLGBTQIAP+ organizations. The 2020 YAC Final Report outlined failings of the existing system in which organizations were siloed and youth suffered harm from the lack of trauma-informed and coordinated services. Instead, YAC advocates for an integrated but de-centralized system with a focus on prevention and early intervention supports. This integrated service model brings together multiple supports and services with seamless case







management across organizations, so youth find help for many needs – substance use, mental health, physical health, housing, family reunification, etcetera – in one location.<sup>27</sup>



Source: commons.wikimedia.org

Youth Empowerment and Support Services (YESS), a youth services organization located in southeast Edmonton, has retooled its' services to pilot the first Youth Support Service Centre in the region under the Youth Agency Collaboration model. The reconfiguration included reducing the amount of temporary housing YESS provides and focusing on prevention.

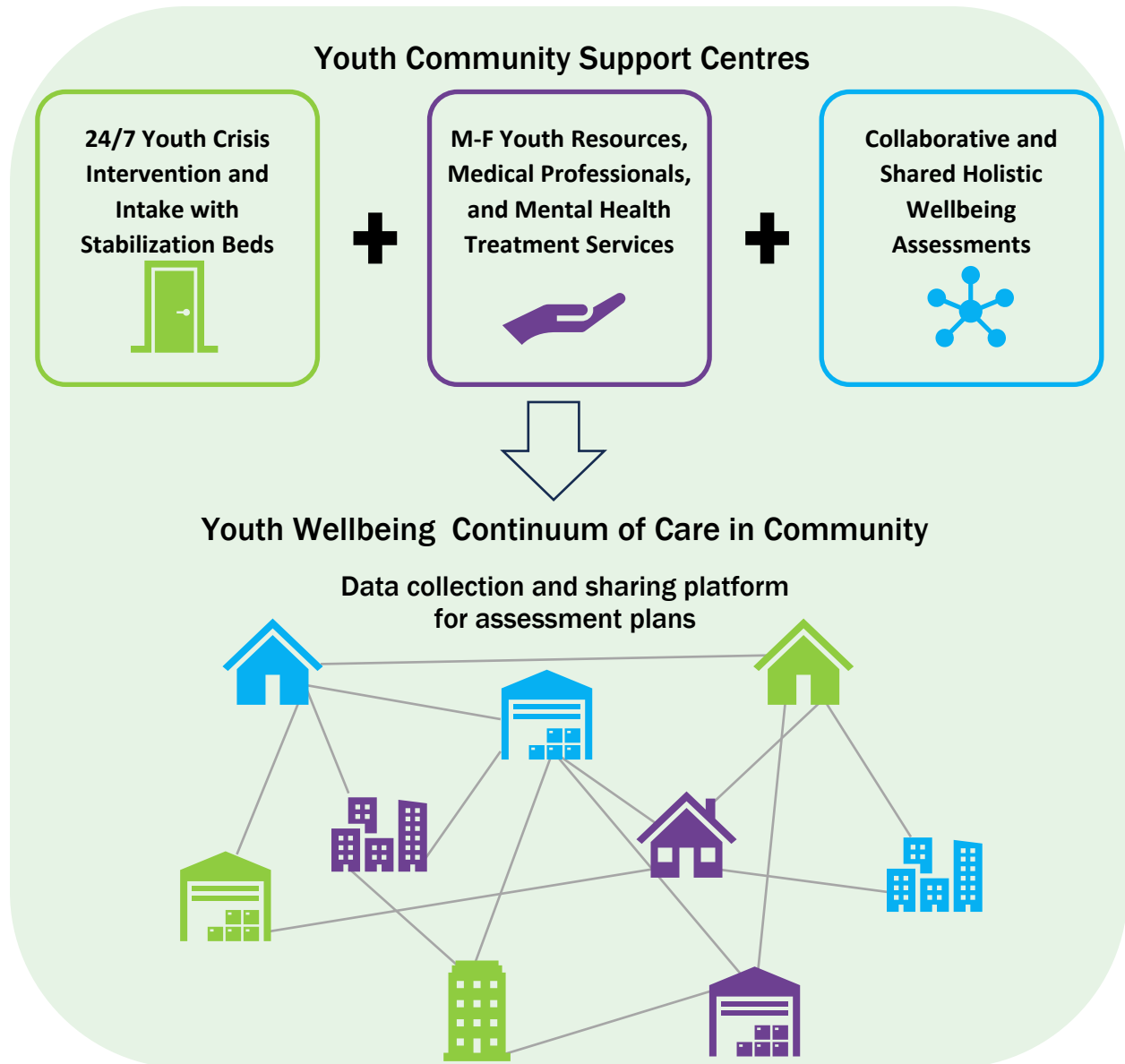
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27. Centre Hope. (2020). *Youth Agency Collaboration Final Report*. mapsab.camapsab.ca



**Figure 4: An Innovative Implementation: Youth Community Support Centres**

Source: Youth Empowerment and Support Services



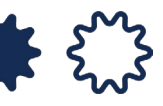
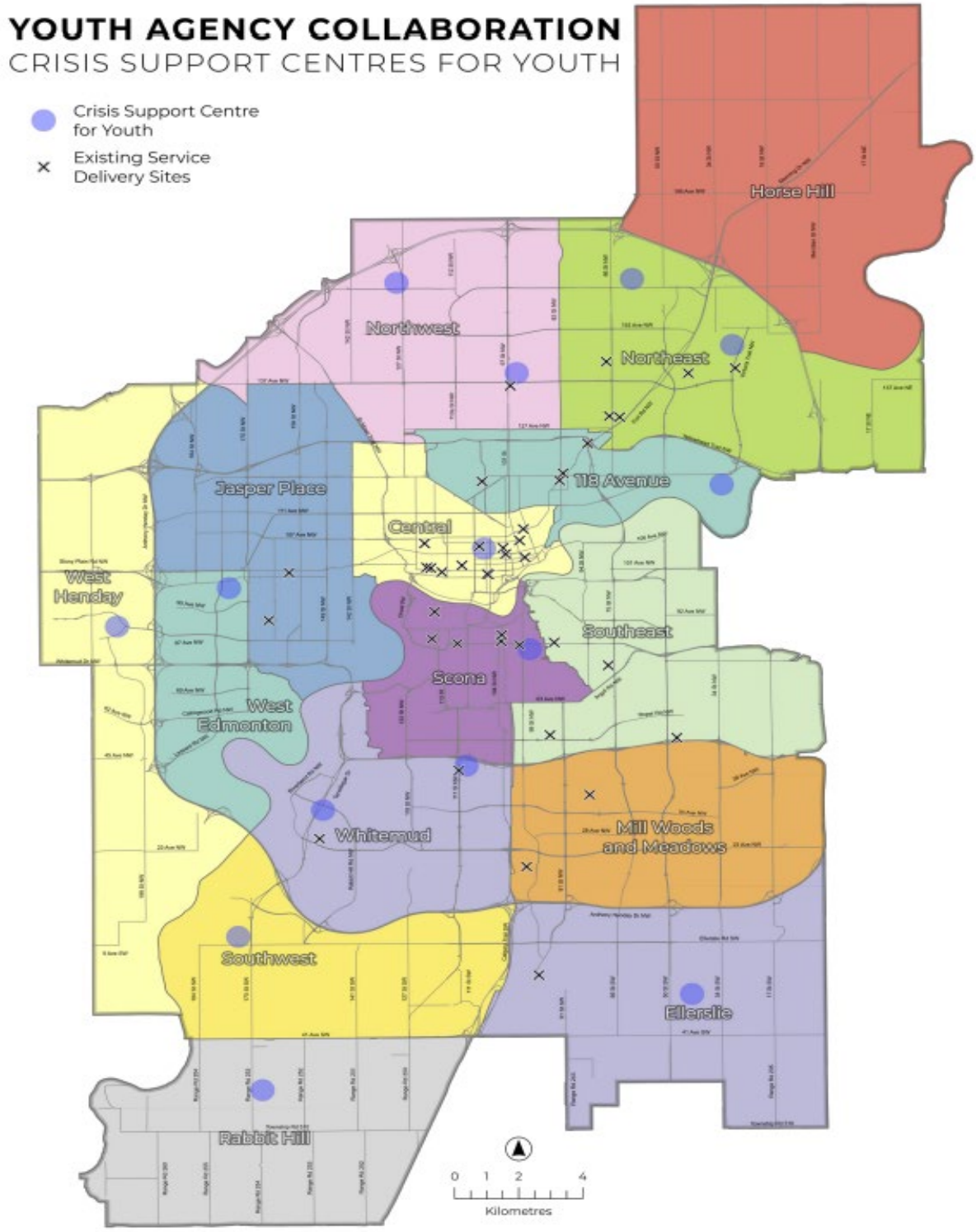
One of Youth Agency Collaboration’s goals is to establish a decentralized network of 24/7 youth support centers across greater Edmonton. YESS is piloting the first youth support centre to test the effectiveness of this approach and provide a precedent for other centres. Concurrently, Youth Agency Collaboration is actively building a governance structure to define roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes for the broader regional approach. **Figure 5: Edmonton Area Crisis Support Centres for Youth** (next page) identifies a conceptual location for youth support centres, including in the northwest area of Edmonton near St. Albert.





**Figure 5: Edmonton Area Crisis Support Centres for Youth**

Source: Youth Agency Collaboration Progress Report, August 2022.





## COVENANT HOUSE VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Covenant House Vancouver (CHV) is a trauma-informed agency serving youth ages 16-24 from the B.C. Lower Mainland, with 3 locations in Vancouver. Covenant House strives to meet youth where they are at and is rooted in an awareness that youth seeking support may have been impacted by various forms of trauma and that trauma can be both a cause and a product of homelessness. CHV offers a continuum of services that incorporate evidence-informed theories and practices to ensure whole person care — mind, body, and spirit. Services and programs range from outreach to drop-in programs to short- and long-term housing and support services, like counselling, that enable youth to successfully transition to independence. The CHV team works with youth individually to develop a case plan that is tailored to their specific needs and goals.

The Crisis Program at CHV has 60 short-term beds, the Foundations program has seven beds for youth working on their substance abuse challenges, while the long-term housing program, Rights of Passage, includes 44 studio suites in a separate building for more independent youth. Along with safe, supported housing, young people receive food, clothing, safe supply, and hygiene supplies as needed. There is also an onsite medical clinic. Youth can also receive employment and education supports, access to Registered Clinical Counsellors and Social Workers, spiritual care, mentorship, art therapy, and help in transitioning to independence when they are ready.

## FOUNDRY, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Foundry is a British Columbia model for integrated youth services that co-locates health and social services for youth through a network of centers and e-health services across the province. Foundry's mandate is to support young people ages 12-24 by bringing together core services and supports under one roof. Foundry offers in-person and online services for youth to access services for substance use and mental health, learn life skills and self-care, support education and employment, see a family doctor, find a place to live, or get support to overcome a stressful or complicated situation. These services are culturally safe, youth-friendly and meet the needs of young people. Each Foundry location is operated by a lead agency that brings together local partners, service providers, young people, and caregivers.<sup>28</sup>

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28. Foundry BC. *What are Integrated Youth Services anyway?* [foundrybc.ca/foundrybc.ca](http://foundrybc.ca/foundrybc.ca)





# APPENDIX G

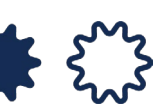
## Local Gaps in Youth Homelessness Prevention





**Table 3: Local Gaps in Youth Homelessness Prevention**

Local Action	Status	Specific Strategies
<b>UPSTREAM</b> Structural Change + Early Intervention		
Reducing Equity + Discrimination	More Needed	- Create a youth-specific policy framework to reduce structural discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, and perceived socio-economic in St. Albert.
Promote Social Inclusion	Gap	- Increase youth-friendly spaces and transit operations, including safe spaces for 2SLGBTQIAP+ and BIPOC youth. - Increase affordable family housing
Family Supports	More Needed	- Increase financial and social supports to families and youth
<b>MIDSTREAM</b> Prevention + Supports		
School Supports	More Needed	- Increase mental health and substance use supports, and access for neurodiversity and diverse abilities - Create Family and Natural Supports program - Create peer support and mentorship programs - Facilitate timely access to early interventions
Equitable Access	Gap	- Create an Integrated Youth Services Centre in St Albert
<b>DOWNSTREAM</b> Crisis Response		
Crisis Beds	Gap	- Create 1–3 youth crisis beds in conjunction with transitional housing
Transitional Housing	Gap	- Create transitional housing of up to 6-beds within a residential setting
Emergency Clinical Response	Gap	- Include urgent clinical support within an Integrated Youth Services Centre in St. Albert - Improve youth access to emergency services at Sturgeon Community Hospital





# APPENDIX H

## Comparative Community Data





**Table 4: Demographic and Housing in St. Albert, Morinville, Edmonton, and Alberta**

Sources: Statistics Canada. (2023). 2021 Housing and Demographic Datasets, and Multiple Listing Service, 2023 dataset.

	City of St. Albert	Town of Morinville	Edmonton (Metro)	Alberta
Population (2021)	68,232	10,385	1,418,120	4,262,635
Average Age	41.8	36.4	38.8	39
Median Total Income (2020)	\$54,400	\$52,800	\$45,600	\$44,800
Average Total Income (2020)	\$68,800	\$60,800	\$59,400	\$60,850
Median Sales Price, Detached Home (2023)	\$493,250	\$390,000	\$440,000	-
% Homeowner Households	82.9%	83.4%	68.7%	70.95%
% Renter Households	17.1%	16.7%	31.1%	28.5%
% Households with Children	59%	62.1%	61.9%	60.3%
Postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree	61%	50%	56.8%	55.7%







# APPENDIX I

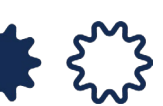
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# APPENDIX J

## Transitional Housing Advisory Committee





## Transitional Housing Advisory Committee

Member	Organization
Corporal Morgan Kyle	St. Albert Royal Canadian Mounted Police
Joanne Blachford	St. Albert Public Schools
Kelsey Robbins	Outloud St. Albert
Krimsen Sumners	St. Albert Public Schools
Margo Long	Youth Empowerment & Support Services
Stephanie Foremsky	St. Albert Public Library
Suzan Krecsy	St. Albert Food Bank and Community Village



