EXPLORING SCHOOLING AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT THROUGH THE EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESS YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

This research demonstrates that homelessness significantly impacts a young person's academic engagement and attainment. Education is a topic that remains at the core of many debates regarding young people, and is central to our understanding of what can lead to better employment and economic opportunities and overall well-being. However, youth who experience homelessness face extreme forms of social exclusion. Many come to the streets having to forego formal education. A high percentage of youth who become homeless are forced to leave school, and the complexities of homelessness disrupt their educational experiences.

It is unclear how the education system in Canada – a key statutory institution in young people's lives – and the youth homelessness sector respond to the disengagement of these youth from school. In our common approaches to supporting homeless youth, Canadian aid agencies respond by providing emergency services, such as shelter, food, counselling, and other supports. Unfortunately, education is often *not* prioritized; rather, reactive emergency services adopt a neoliberal orientation towards young people to help them become independent, focusing on training them for the job market. The focus shifts to paid work and therefore self-sufficiency; as a result, education is considered a part of the young person's past rather than their future.

This dissertation includes analysis and research findings that are directly informed by surveys and interviews with 40 homeless youth from York Region, in Ontario, Canada. Their narratives reveal that it is nearly impossible to remain in school while homeless due to housing and familial instability, mental health challenges, and challenges in school. Social exclusion theory and a critique of neoliberalism highlights why young people get stuck in a cycle of poverty and homelessness, and a psychoanalytic lens considers how listening to stories of suffering may awaken the self-reflexivity needed to evoke a more active response. Alongside the

voices of youth and other scholars doing this important work, I insist that the education system, the homelessness sector, and community-based services prioritize educational attainment for homeless youth; this may allow them to remain in school, move forward with their lives, and prevent them from winding up on the streets.

Keywords: Youth; Adolescence; Youth Homelessness; Social Justice; Human Rights; Education; Schooling; Social Exclusion; Neoliberalism; Psychoanalysis; Reflexivity; Qualitative Research; Quantitative Research; Mixed Methods; Social Advocacy, Activism; Knowledge Mobilization; Knowledge Dissemination; Collective Impact; Community Engagement

DEDICATIONS

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Chapter 1: Understanding Youth Homelessness

To learn what it is like to be young and homeless and to find solutions that will prevent our youth from winding up on the streets, we must advocate and protest; but sometimes we must speak less to listen more, and be willing to unlearn *everything* we think we know about homelessness.

Encounters with Homelessness

I first taught students at risk for becoming homeless while I was in training for my Bachelor of Education degree.[1] These students were hungry and tired, and came to the school breakfast club each morning wearing the same clothes they did the day before. They often snuck food from the food drive bins, and these same students could be seen hanging around until the last teachers left the school, waiting for someone to pick them up. Later, as a Teaching Assistant at York University, several of my office hours were spent listening to students share their experiences of what it is like to be young and poor, and how that had limited their opportunities and hurt their performance in school.

Many students I taught were at elevated risk of becoming homeless. Some managed by revolving through shelters, couch surfing (for short durations) with family and friends, or otherwise trying to manage their lives a few days at a time. Facing incredible barriers, these students were unable to complete assignments on time, if at all, due to the precariousness of their lives. It concerned me how many students are being failed both academically and socially by

[1] In 2008, my practicum placements during the B.Ed. were situated in schools located across York Region and Toronto. At that time, I do not remember being given any formal training about how teachers should account for, and support, students who may be at risk for homelessness or who are currently homeless in our classrooms.

"mainstream" schooling contexts, due to multilayered and complex processes of social exclusion that limit youth's access to opportunities.[2] These experiences impacted me profoundly, and I never stopped thinking about what happens to young students with no place to call home. I was inspired to think about how education could help reduce and perhaps prevent youth homelessness, as it became apparent to me that the educational needs of young people who are homeless are significantly overlooked.

I argue in this dissertation that education is a critical issue that should be addressed as an integral part of our understanding of youth homelessness and youth homelessness prevention.[3] My dissertation is intended to raise awareness about the complexities of youth homelessness and push back against institutional and structural factors that powerfully contribute to homelessness, fail young people, and subject them to oppression (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Doing this work comprehensively requires us to acknowledge and address the historical and ongoing racism, inequity, and colonialism at the root of the experiences of homelessness for many Indigenous youth and their families in Canada (Schwan et al., 2018; Stewart, 2018) as well as the anti-Black racism and racism against other racialized groups that is so pervasive in Canadian society. Solutions for youth should always aim to be age and culturally appropriate, and grounded in a commitment to anti-racism, anti-oppression, trauma informed care, and empathy (Abramovich & Shelton, 2017; Noble et al., 2014). Support for Indigenous youth must also be informed by Indigenous cultures, worldviews, and relationships (Thistle, 2017).

This chapter describes the rationale and significance of my study and its central research questions. I also examine Canada's response to homelessness, youth homelessness, and

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[2] Social exclusion will be further examined in Chapter 3 and thereafter, and used as an explanatory framework throughout the dissertation to explain the pathways that lead youth to become homeless.
[3] Youth homelessness prevention will be discussed further in this chapter, and detailed in Chapters 2, 3 and 7.

prevention, and review some existing literature. Promising domestic and international examples of preventative approaches and solutions to youth homelessness will also be highlighted. My hope is to provide accessible ideas and language that can be read and understood by audiences across multiple disciplines and research and educational contexts. Importantly, this dissertation is directly informed by survey responses, interviews, and conversations with young people who have experienced homelessness. My research builds on the work of countless scholars who have devoted intense efforts towards exploring the complexities of being young and homeless.

Rationale for the Study

It is an unfortunate and troubling fact that youth homelessness is a national crisis across Canada, and of significant concern (Abramovich & Shelton, 2017; Evenson & Barr, 2009; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Hulchanski et al., 2009). Throughout the year, "there are between 35,000-40,000 young people who experience homelessness," and on any given night, the population of homeless and under-housed youth in Canada is between 6,000–7,000 – despite us being a wealthy, developed nation (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016, p. 6). This number does not account for those youth who are absolutely homeless, meaning that they sleep outdoors or in places unsuitable for human habitation (ex. rooftops, in cars and underneath bridges), or those who are temporarily couch surfing with friends with nowhere else to live (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). As such, these statistics do not even truly represent all youth without stable homes in Canada.

For young people, loss of home is often sudden, unexpected, and traumatic. This is an important consideration - having a home meets one of the most basic needs – and a human right: shelter. A home is "a place where one can eat, rest, sleep, and recover from illness or injury" (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013, p. 243). Homelessness is a violation of youths' human rights (Farha,

2016[4]). Without a stable home, it would be difficult for any one of us to maintain adequate sleep, nutrition, overall health, safety, and connections to mainstream society (Gaetz et al., 2013; Karabanow, 2004). Becoming homeless is a major life event that involves a great deal of loss for young people, including the loss of community, friends, belongings, support systems, and school access (Noble et al., 2014; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016) and youth face substantial physical, mental, and educational impacts (Kidd et al., 2018; Schwan et al., 2017).

All of these factors strongly influence a young person's dignity and healthy transition to adulthood, as well as engagement in school and educational attainment (Cohen & Wardrip, 2011; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Liljedahl et al., 2013). In fact, strong research shows that it has been very difficult to meet the educational needs of the growing population of homeless youth in North America (Gaetz et al., 2013, 2018; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Liljedahl et al., 2013; Noble et al., 2014). This is concerning, because educational attainment is directly linked to important outcomes later in life, such as employment, and to health and well-being as youth transition to adulthood (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). What is more, in Canada, Indigenous, Black and other racialized youth; newcomer, refugee, and LGBTQ2S+ youth; and young women face added and ongoing experiences of discrimination and exclusion (Abramovich & Shelton, 2017; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Becoming homeless compounds deep existing inequities and creates new ones; such unjust treatment further impacts educational achievement and attainment.

School plays a central role in young people's lives, and generally occupies most of their time during the day. Unfortunately, in the wake of homelessness, education becomes an afterthought, part of the past, even though all youth were in school at some point (Gaetz, 2014).

[4] Leilani Farha was the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing. She advocates for the right to housing, and for people worldwide to view housing as a human right, not a commodity.

Youth face overwhelming barriers to staying in school due to the chaotic nature of homelessness and the social exclusion faced as a result (Cohen & Wardrip, 2011; Decter, 2007; Dhillon, 2011; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Gaetz et al., 2018; Liljedahl et al., 2013); many eventually forego formal education because of these challenges. Even when in school, these youth face ostracism and other difficult experiences in the classroom, and there is a high correlation between homelessness and premature withdrawal from school (Gaetz and O'Grady, 2013). At times, educational challenges evident when the young person was still at home contribute to leaving school early, and in other cases the transition to homelessness leads to withdrawal from school (Decter, 2007; Gaetz, 2014; Murphy, 2011). Despite these negative experiences, no evidence suggests that the cause of departure from school is a lack of desire, rather than an outcome of instability in a student's home life. There continues to be insufficient research on the educational experiences of homeless youth, and it is unclear from the literature whether educational systems or youth homelessness service providers (e.g., shelters and drop-ins) have strategies, systems, and structures in place to address the issue of academic engagement and achievement for youth who are at risk of homelessness, or for those already homeless.

Significance of the Study

My doctoral research examines the complex relationship between social exclusion, educational engagement, and youth homelessness. My study inquired into the experiences of education and schooling from the perspective of young people themselves, in order to hear their stories, perspectives and thoughts. This research is a significant addition to emerging literature in the field of youth homelessness and the field of Education and contributes a unique perspective on how exclusionary processes and neoliberal orientations within education systems and the

youth homelessness sector prevent homeless youth from participating in formal education in the same way as their housed peers. I use psychoanalytic theory to further analyze this problem, as listening to the difficult stories that youth share may help us understand the social alienation of, and our lack of response to, youth who are homeless. My hope is that this self-reflexivity may evoke a more ethical response towards their needs, and to collectively ending homelessness. Deeper examination of how a young person's experience of being homeless has impacted their educational experiences may help us see how better to support youth in accessing and engaging in education in new ways, and inform how we intervene to prevent these problems in the first place. The research presented here will be useful for understanding how school (dis)engagement and attainment are systematically produced, exploring educational reform possibilities with the aim of better meeting the needs of young people who are at risk of being or are homeless.

While the experience of being homeless brings forth a similar set of complex issues for adults and youth alike – a lack of housing and supports, and system failures – age *does* matter when understanding and responding to youth homelessness (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Schwan et al., 2018). As such, it is important to develop an understanding that is specific to youth. I draw from the Canadian definition of youth homelessness, whereby "**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"[5] (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016, p.1). I also use the term "homeless youth" frequently; following Kidd

[5] Note: Although I use the Canadian definition of youth homelessness, which refers to youth between the ages of 13 and 24, in this study I expand the age range of youth somewhat, as some participants were 25 and 26 years old. These individuals were residing in a *youth* focused shelter and therefore were afforded the opportunity to participate.

(2013), this term is inclusive of those young people living out of doors or lack adequate stable housing and shelter.[6]

My Research Questions

Some very important questions frame this work:

1) What are the experiences of being young and homeless in York Region?
2) What are the educational experiences of young people who are homeless?
3) In what ways has homelessness impacted young people's academic engagement and school achievement, prior to their becoming homeless and once they are homeless?
4) What are the educational needs of young people who are homeless, and how can the education system better respond to these needs?
5) How can institutional responses and supports prioritize education and schooling as part of a central strategy to prevent, support, and respond to young people who are homeless?
6) What can we learn about youth homelessness prevention from the voices of youth?

My research study used mixed methodology. I administered surveys and engaged in individual face-to-face interviews with 40 young people who were homeless in York Region, including youth who were still in mainstream schooling or alternative education and youth who had left school prematurely and had not returned. While quantitative and qualitative methods do have limitations, I believe that using both approaches together allowed me to enhance my understanding of homeless youths' perspectives and experiences, and the circumstances in which these insights are situated (Mason, 2002; O'Brien et al., 2014). Respectful analysis of the

[6] At times, throughout this dissertation, I use the terms "youth", "adolescence,", "youth who are homeless", "young people" and "young people who are homeless", "young homeless people" and "homeless youth," interchangeably.

knowledge embedded within the narratives shared by homeless youth has the potential to provide a window into the complexities that these youth face, socially, economically, and educationally.

When discussing education and schooling, this project refers to the formal education system, interchangeably referred to as mainstream schooling. However, through listening to the narratives of youth while working through this research, I came to understand that education can come in many different forms. For example, education can also refer in practice to “what youth learn through their experiences of living on the streets, couch surfing, or in shelters; being young and homeless and able to “make ends meet”” should be, and is within the context of this study, valued as educational as well (Noble et al., 2014, p. 61). The perspectives of youth can also contribute to policy and professional development in schools, so that teachers and administration can gain a better understanding of the needs of at risk of, or already homeless, youth.

Context: York Region’s Hidden Homelessness Crisis

The geographical location of this study is York Region,[7] which is generally perceived as a region where homelessness does not exist. There are approximately 1.2 million people living in York Region, and it is one of Canada’s most diverse and fastest growing communities (York Region, 2019). Suburbs like those in York Region are supposedly safe havens from the urban problems of poverty, crime, and failing schools (Durana, 2018; Lo et al., 2015; Noble et al, 2014; Preston et al., 2009; Walks et al., 2016), and homelessness is often thought of as a “big city” problem more likely to occur in places such as downtown Toronto or Vancouver. To address the complexity of homelessness, the “geography and political structure of York Region are

[7] York Region (Also referred to as The Municipality of York) stretches north from Toronto to Lake Simcoe, and is made up of nine local municipalities (Noble et al., 2014). A map of York Region can be found in the Appendix.

important to understand as this shapes the social and economic context in which homelessness and extreme poverty are experienced" (Noble et al., 2014, p. 24).

Housing is *very* expensive in York Region; according to the 2016 York Region census, the district's income information presents the region as an affluent suburb[8] (Statistics Canada, 2016). In York Region – where I grew up, and live – homelessness is often hidden, perceived as a problem that only exists in the downtown core. While it may seem that homelessness is a reality for only a small portion of people living here, this is not an accurate depiction of the problem, especially because some groups who are struggling with housing and homelessness are underrepresented and are not visible (Preston et al., 2009, 2010; York Region's 2018 Homeless Count, 2019). Recent data indicate that a significant number of "individuals and families are struggling to make ends meet" (York Region's 2018 Homeless Count, 2019, p. 30) – for various reasons, but the widening gap between household income and cost of living is most common (Making Ends Meet in York Region, 2011; Noble et al., 2014; Preston et al., 2009; Lo et al., 2015). Vitally for this study, a current homelessness count of York Region uncovered that a very high percentage of respondents identified as youth (York Region's 2018 Homeless Count, 2019).

This research therefore explores the different factors that drive youth to become homeless in urban, suburban, and rural areas. For many young people and their families in York Region, homelessness is a significant and multi-dimensional problem, and many people are forced to leave the community because they are not getting the supports they require (Noble et al., 2014). Progressive and notable steps are being taken across York Region to develop more coordinated and integrated systems responses designed to support families and youth to stay in their

[8] The 2016 census data gathered across York Region shows income distribution. While census data is valuable and important in terms of the role it plays in research, we also need to remain cautious of the problems associated with census data in terms of who is included and excluded, bias and discrimination.

communities and stay in school (Noble et al, 2014), and a number of service providers in the region are doing great work[9]. This became even more evident to me as my research unfolded – but more needs to be done, and we *can* do better. This study aims to work alongside and advance the growing awareness of the problem of youth homelessness in York Region.

Promising International Examples

Some important international examples can illustrate how the education system can work effectively with different levels of government, youth homelessness support organizations, and community in order to provide better educational outcomes and effective approaches, in both policy and practice, to ending and preventing youth homelessness. Since the 1970s, the United States federal government has significantly invested in targeted funding for national programs to address youth homelessness (Gaetz & Redman, 2016), but the focus has generally *not* been on prevention. More specific to youth homelessness and education, the Education for Homeless Children and Youth program, authorized under a federal law, Title VII-B of the *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (1988)*, aims to provide youth experiencing homelessness "equal access to the same free, appropriate public education available to other children" (Gaetz & Redman, 2016, p. 4). Still, this is not a comprehensive and equitable approach, as it is available only "for children in homeless families and not for unattached youth" (p. 4).

An exemplary preventative solution can be found in Washington State. Homelessness increased there since 2013, due to unaffordable housing alongside a host of other factors, so in

[9] Recent contracts with shelters across York Region stipulate that individuals cannot be discharged into homelessness. This is a very positive, progressive, and supportive development (Noble et al., 2014). However, while collecting data, I was also made aware that shelters across York Region are operating at capacity and many youth I interviewed had recurring shelter stays. What this suggests is that too many youth in York Region are relying on emergency services and becoming stuck in a revolving cycle of poverty and homelessness (Noble et al., 2014).

2015 the Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection (HYPP) Act was passed. Under this act, Washington state created the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs, in an effort to reduce and prevent homelessness for youth and young adults by addressing a few key areas – stable housing, family reconciliation, permanent connections, education and employment, and social and emotional well-being (WA Coalition for Homeless Youth Advocacy, 2015).

Beyond this, the literature shows that Australia and the United Kingdom are leaders when it comes to youth homelessness prevention. In both countries, schools and agents collaborate to create strategies to address youth homelessness by adapting school-based homelessness prevention and interventions to better support homeless youth in their academic pursuits (Winland et al., 2011; Winland, 2013). In these countries, schools are active in providing early intervention strategies – including family mediation, school-based orientation, and supportive housing – that focus on strategies to address youth homelessness through the education system (Mackenzie, 2018; Quilgars et al., 2008; Steen & Mackenzie, 2017; Winland, 2013).

In Australia and the UK, effective and integrated systems-level approaches with consistent communication between government departments and community agencies have helped youth, their families, and the communities in which they live through "counseling, mediation, and practical living supports" (Winland, 2013, p. 27). Importantly, the focus is on prevention, with interventions delivered through collaboration with service providers and schools. These proactive initiatives have decreased barriers to school access and facilitated the academic integration of youth at risk of homelessness (Winland, 2013, p. 27). Regrettably, in Canada, there has been no strong policy response in this area by any order of government. The response to youth homelessness in Canada could arguably be dramatically improved if there was a stronger focus on the implementation homelessness prevention interventions for young people

for young people and in particular approaches that involve engagement with the education system, as Australia and the UK do.[10] This dissertation returns regularly to Canada's response to youth homelessness and the details of Australia and the UK's prevention models, to understand what factors can make homelessness prevention possible.

There are some progressive efforts to support homeless youth in Canada, however. For example, one of the most notable and effective models to address the complex challenges of youth homelessness in Canada is Housing First for Youth (for full details on HF4Y, please see https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/COH-AWH-HF4Y.pdf), a program intervention that moves youth out of homelessness quickly and without preconditions. A range of housing options and supports are included so that youth can "maintain housing, learn life skills, have positive relationships with peers and adults, and re-engage with school and employment." This preventative approach aims to reduce the risk of young people ever becoming homeless again (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016, p. 13). However, such models, centred on prevention, are very few and can only be found in small pockets through the work of community-based organizations across the country (Schwan et al., 2018).

It is essential to learn from other countries that have been implementing prevention efforts and how such approaches can be meaningfully adopted in the Canadian context, especially in relation to school-based early intervention and supports (Gaetz et al., 2018). In Canada, provincial and territorial governments need to show interest in addressing youth homelessness and work towards enacting progressive programming; this would enable us to have more government-initiated educational programs for homeless youth that are comparable to the prevention initiatives in the UK and Australia.

[10] Personal Communication with Dr. Stephen Gaetz, July 2020.

Canada's Response to Youth Homelessness

Historically, the approach to youth homelessness in Canada mainly consisted of a reliance on emergency services and crisis response (Winland, 2013). While Canada has had a National Housing Strategy since 1999, which actively supports communities across the country to address homelessness, a strategic focus on youth homelessness has not been evident since the early phases of the program (Gaetz & Redman, 2016). It is particularly unfortunate that the Canadian approach to youth homelessness and the infrastructure we currently have in place to respond to it typically do not support young people who wish to return to, or stay in, school (Gaetz et al., 2013). Instead, the majority of services and programs available for homeless youth across Canada are shelters, drop-ins, employment programs, and health services. These are typically community-dependent and operated by NGOs, rather than permanent government-run initiated services, and it is troubling that some communities do not provide any services or supports for youth at all (Winland, 2013) pointing to issues of accessibility and funding.[11]

Although examples from Australia and the UK prove that creating a broader strategic response that integrates prevention, emergency responses, and supports is a more effective model, "our aid agencies and emergency response programs are not integrated into a broader strategic response that works to keep people off the streets in the first place, or to intervene quickly to either get them back home or to obtain the supports they need to live independently" (Winland, 2013, p. 25). Most often than not, Canadian aid agencies and street youth services respond to emergency needs for youth by training them for the job market to earn an income,

[11] Often, we hear about Canadian programs that are targeted for "at risk" youth and address certain age groups. An example of this can be food programs and breakfast clubs in elementary schools, such as the Breakfast Club of Canada. While these programs aim to be pro-active in trying to prevent economic and food insecurity, as well as homelessness, they seem to change as children age. An important consideration for this project then is that the Ontario education system may respond differently by age in how it attempts to prevent and address homelessness.

moving them towards independence and economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible, without a focus on the educational advancement required.

With a focus on limited-term practical supports, youth are expected to rapidly develop the capacity for adult skills and responsibilities (e.g., finding a home, earning an income, learning to budget, paying taxes), yet pursuing education is treated as secondary by far to job training initiatives, usually for low-pay, low-skilled jobs with limited opportunities for advancement (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Klodawsky et al., 2006). While employment can provide youth with work experience and valuable job skills, it may limit their educational attainment and lifelong career and income potential by increasing the likelihood of their dropping out of high school or post-secondary education. When homeless youth seek emergency services, they receive an emphasis on independence, self-sufficiency, and reactive short-term supports (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). This is not a proactive or preventative approach to youth homelessness, for several reasons: for instance, available services and resources are not always adequate, leaving young people to experience challenges in education participation and achievement, and even the solutions that are available are not always sustainable or long-term. As mentioned, strong research links educational attainment with important outcomes later in life, such as employment and health. Therefore, youth who drop out of high school face considerable disadvantages in the labour market and may face exposure to a life of poverty (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016), something that we must work hard to prevent.

Even though Canada is lagging behind other countries in terms of youth homelessness prevention, it is important to acknowledge the changes that *have* taken place over the last several years with regards to youth homelessness. Ground-up efforts in Canada, through the collaborative efforts of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) (see

https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-us/about-the-coh) and A Way Home Canada (AWH) (see https://awayhome.ca/), who co-lead Making the Shift – Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab (MTS) (see http://makingtheshiftinc.ca/). These organizations have played a leading role in homelessness prevention, and youth homelessness in particular. In this space of social innovation, grounded in a human rights approach, initiatives aimed at transforming how we respond to youth homelessness can shift and change through coalitions that are deeply committed to research and knowledge mobilization.

This collaboration is doing very important work in the area of school-based youth homelessness prevention (Gaetz et al., 2020; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020),[12] a key area where my research hopes to contribute. Their work has as a major goal the development of a shared language and knowledge base to help understand how youth homelessness can best be prevented. The researchers and advocates who are part of these coalitions offer a definition and typology of youth homelessness prevention that I draw on throughout this dissertation, when I think and talk about prevention. This definition is taken directly from *The Roadmap to Prevention,* by Gaetz et al. (2018), a key resource that outlines what steps are necessary to make the shift to prevention:

> **Youth homelessness prevention** refers to policies, practices, and interventions that either (1) reduce the likelihood that a young person will experience homelessness, or (2) provide youth experiencing homelessness with the necessary supports to stabilize their housing, improve their wellbeing, connect with community, and avoid re-entry into homelessness. Youth homelessness prevention thus necessitates the **immediate** provision of housing and supports for youth experiencing homelessness, or the immediate protection of housing, with supports, for youth at risk of homelessness. Youth homelessness prevention must be applied using a rights-based approach and address the unique needs of developing adolescents and young adults (p. 20).

It is important to emphasize that, in the Canadian context, implementing preventative responses cannot happen without holding government institutions and systems accountable to respect the

[12] Personal communication with Dr. Stephen Gaetz in December 2020.

human rights, leadership, and worldviews of Indigenous communities (Gaetz et al., 2018). Doing so entails moving far beyond our settler colonial understandings of Indigenous homelessness as only a lack of housing issue, but understanding that Indigenous homelessness is also about "being without relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages, and identities" (Thistle, 2017, p.6). Therefore, prevention efforts and responses for Indigenous youth require not only housing, but also connection and unity to culture, land and people, and opportunities for healing (Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 125; Thistle 2017).

Recently, Canada launched a new homelessness strategy, called Reaching Home. This is a community-based program aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness (Government of Canada, 2019). There are also emergency services across Canada that aim to provide services and supports to youth with help them continue their education and particularly to their high school diploma or GED high school equivalency certification. One example is Covenant House in Toronto, a shelter that offers an on-site high school in partnership with the Toronto Catholic District School Board (Covenant House Toronto, 2020). Another is Broadway Youth Services in Vancouver, which also offers a range of educational services for youth to obtain their high school diploma or GED (Broadway Youth Resource Centre, 2020). Specifically relevant to this project, 360 Kids in York Region provides an alternative education classroom called *IGrad* in partnership with the York Region District School Board, which affords homeless youth the opportunity to earn high school credits and to work towards completion of their high school diploma if they choose to do so (360 Kids, 2020). The details of this program will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 through accounts from youth who have taken part in the program.

While these programs can be valuable, it is unreasonable and unrealistic to expect service providers to be solely responsible for supporting at-risk and homeless youth to stay in school.

Schools should play a more central role; given that all youth were in school at some point, it makes better sense to view "schools as the obvious place to focus on youth homelessness prevention" (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016, p. 117). Although there has been a development in the number of excellent community-based programs across the country, it is safe to say that the education system in Canada – the key statutory institution in most young people's lives – typically does not play a proactive role in working with young people and families to prevent youth homelessness. In contrast, Australia and the UK include family mediation in their prevention models and strategies, because supporting young people to reconnect with their families is essential and has proven to yield effective and positive outcomes – even youth who have spent months and years on the streets often attempt to reunite with the families they left (Winland, 2013). When working with homeless youth, our response should not only include guiding them towards independence and self-sufficiency, or precarious employment just to earn an income; we should also support young people towards a safe and healthful transition to adulthood and well-being (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Gaetz et al., 2018). Doing this requires us to support youth to continue with their education, if they desire to do so.

The examples of the UK and Australia, where the responses to youth homelessness are more preventive, more developed, and strategic, can provide valuable lessons for Canada. In both countries, all levels of government are engaged in the process of creating legislation, strategic plans, and funding frameworks to address homelessness, and particularly youth homelessness (Steen & Mackenzie, 2017; Quilgars et al., 2008). Both countries engage the non-profit and private sectors in their approaches, and have progressively developed systems aimed at reducing and eventually eliminating homelessness. These countries have been dealing with homelessness as a major problem for a much longer time than Canada has (Gaetz, 2014; Winland

et al., 2011), and a review of policy and research literature shows that they currently have the most sophisticated responses to youth homelessness among developed countries.

Advocates and scholars have presented various approaches to youth homelessness, some of which involve a major indictment of existing services. While I am not suggesting we eliminate the homelessness sector or emergency services in Canada – because youth who are currently homeless and those who cannot return home safely, like the youth in my study, need support services to help them find housing and regain stability – I agree with scholars who call us to shift our focus to preventing youth from becoming homeless, and supporting those who are currently homeless to exit homelessness quickly, safely, and in a planned way that is more long-term, rather than reactive and short-lived (Gaetz & Redman, 2016). In this dissertation, like other scholars do, I advocate for school-based early interventions that focus on prevention as a way to reduce and eliminate youth homelessness, and I believe such approaches are vital if we truly want to prevent youth homelessness in Canada. If our current responses to support young people are not working, then we have to put our energy and efforts towards a new way forward.

Chapter Summaries

In this introductory chapter, I have discussed the purpose and focus of my study and provided readers with the essential research questions that frame this research. As this project is informed by the perspectives and experiences of youth who are homeless across York Region, I have also provided some information about the local context in which the research took place and the methods I used. Building on the work of other influential scholars in the field, this chapter has also introduced literature about youth homelessness, social exclusion, and educational disengagement, as well as promising domestic and international examples, and has

shown how and why prevention is key to this discussion. These examinations set the stage for a more comprehensive look at the existing literature on this topic, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2. All of the chapters are meant to be read with attention to how this research can be used to make practical and positive changes in the lives of young people who are homeless. I hope that readers will aim to respect the knowledge and wisdom embedded in the narratives shared by youth regarding the challenging circumstance of being young and homeless in Canada, and the impacts that this unfortunate and overwhelming adversity can have on a young person's life and on their education and schooling, which can have major lifelong impacts.

Chapter 2: A Review of The Literature

Chapter 2 will present relevant literature that focuses on understanding what it means to be young and homeless, and common pathways that lead to becoming homelessness. This chapter will examine literature about social stigma and exclusion and student engagement and dropping out as they relate to mainstream education in North America. I focus on the prevention of youth homelessness and literature related to resilience, assets, and protective factors through a discussion on school-based early interventions. Chapter 2 builds on the work of a multitude of scholars who have investigated the lives of young people who experience homelessness, contributing a critical and thoughtful analysis of the literature.

Chapter 3: Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

This chapter will outline social exclusion, a critique of neoliberalism and psychoanalysis as the primary conceptual and theoretical frameworks used throughout the study. A focal point of this chapter will be how young homeless people must navigate multiple sites of exclusion,

including the education system and their home and family structures. Unpacking social exclusion as an explanatory framework is important, as it informs the methods and ways in which the data is analyzed, providing a conceptual lens through which to read the data chapters. This chapter will also explore, through a psychoanalytic lens, issues of the self, guilt, suffering and our collective responsibility towards social justice, and how listening to the voices of suffering may enable researchers and educators to enhance self-reflexivity towards more action-oriented work.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Method

In order to explore and understand the lives of young people who become homeless, I combined mixed methods, including qualitative (interview) and quantitative (survey) approaches. Chapter 4 will provide a detailed overview of the method and methodologies I used in my study. In this chapter, I will specifically explain my research design, setting and sample, and data collection and data analysis. I will also discuss ethical considerations and the research constraints and limitations that arose when doing this work. This methods chapter will also include my own experiences of navigating the shelter system, the experience of recruiting participants for the study, and the unexpected interactions that took place, not only with interviewees but also with staff members and youth who did not participate.

Data Collection, Data Analysis, and Research Findings

The two data chapters, Chapters 5 and 6, will present the findings of the surveys and interviews I conducted with youth, including analysis of the research and the implications of these findings for addressing preventative solutions to youth homelessness. These chapters will focus heavily on the voices of youth and their perspectives regarding their experiences of

homelessness. Reading these chapters will require the most care, consideration, and compassion, as each youth's voice will be shared in the rawest form possible. Each section will present major themes that arose from interview transcripts, showcased, and interpreted through a thematic analysis. The results are separated into the following themes, as a result of their complex linkages to the context of youth homelessness: Family and home life, and the shelter system as alternative to home, and then health and mental health, and later my specialized focus on education and schooling in relation to the lives of young people who become homeless.

Chapter 5: Home and Replacement Home

This first data chapter will reveal the difficult family lives that often lead youth down pathways of leaving home and being forced out. In Chapter 5, the complexities of youths home and family lives will provide us with a deeper understanding of the situation of youth homelessness in terms of how the complexities of home and family lives can impact a young person's educational engagement and attainment. The chapter will then explore youths' experience of leaving home and entering the shelter system as an alternative to accommodation to living at home. The narratives of homeless youth navigating the shelter system will begin to provide insight into the systemic and structural issues and how they hinder and impede education and schooling even further, especially because schooling is often *not* prioritized in most shelters.

Chapter 6: Wider Systemic Issues and Education

Chapter 6 will continue to examine the wider systemic issues that exist for homeless youth through a discussion of the complicated health challenges youth face, especially when their most essential needs are not met. The second section of the chapter will highlight how

homelessness impacts academic engagement and achievement, with a focus on the role of schools and teachers. As previous chapters indicate, youth at risk of homelessness are already at risk of dropping out, and the interviews with youth in this section will reveal that the harsh realities of homelessness have not allowed many to continue in formal education. This is due to social and systemic barriers that exist outside of school, but also because of evident barriers they face in the education system. While all youth I interviewed had previously been in school, the experience of homelessness coupled with educational barriers and inadequate supports made it impossible for them to continue, despite strong desires and aspirations towards education.

Chapter 7: Discussion

The chapter will provide a summary and discussion of the findings of this research study and tie together some of the most valuable insights gained from doing this work. In the second section of this discussion chapter, I also re-visit the conversation about, and recommendations regarding prevention coming from the youth themselves. The narrative accounts of youth participants will be presented alongside the practical, progressive, and preventative lens of various scholars and coalitions who are putting forth unique and unconventional ground up efforts towards youth homelessness prevention in Canada. The emphasis is on early intervention and cross sector collaboration between the education system, the homelessness sector and other services offered in the community as the most promising way to move forward.

Chapter 8: Concluding Thoughts

The conclusion will include additional thoughts on youth homelessness and potential avenues for further research – one example might be to explore in more depth how Indigenous,

Black, other racialized groups, newcomer, refugee, LGBTQ2S+, disabled, or female youth experience homelessness differently, and the complex educational barriers that exist for each group – and how preventative efforts can be tailored as a result. In addition to presenting future possibilities for research and potential solutions, I will also include some of my own final thoughts on how this research project presents an opportunity to contribute both to academic research and to policy development on youth homelessness in the context of education.

Chapter 2: A Review of The Literature

Seminal scholars in the field of youth homelessness have made significant contributions that have enhanced our collective understanding of the problem. Research about the educational experiences of homeless youth in Canada remains modest – an emerging area where I hope to contribute. This chapter reviews a range of literature focusing on conceptualizations of vulnerable, at-risk, and homeless youth. It emphasizes the importance of defining youth homelessness, outlines the pathways that lead youth to becoming, and remaining homeless, and shows why a shift towards a human rights lens on this topic is essential.

I then explore literature about youth homelessness and mainstream education – a conversation that may help us better understand why young people experiencing homelessness often disengage from school and are forced to drop out – and how and why schools and teachers can prevent this from happening. Existing studies suggest that youth face challenging and disrupted academic trajectories due to social stigma, social exclusion, and economic and other forms of marginalization. In the face of these complexities, emerging research highlights the importance of school-based early interventions and fostering youth resilience in order to prevent youth from becoming homeless in the first place (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Gaetz et al., 2018).

This literature review will summarize the research of multiple scholars, and their work will be used and analyzed to contribute to novel ways of thinking about, responding to, and supporting homeless youth through innovative and preventative educational and community-based solutions and collaborations.

Being Young and Homeless

Beginning in the 1980s, modern mass homelessness emerged in Canada as a result of social and structural changes related to major disinvestment in affordable housing, declining social safety nets, and shifts in the labour market (Hulchanski, 2009; Webb & Gazso, 2017), with likely increases in youth homelessness as well. According to *The State of Homelessness* report (Gaetz, Dej et al., 2016), at least 235,000 Canadians experience homelessness in a year, and approximately 20% of these are youth – a number and proportion that continues to be a significant concern across Canada (Dhillon, 2011; Gaetz et al., 2018; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Kidd et al., 2018a; Novac et al., 2002). To address this problem in its full extent, we must first better understand what it means to be young and homeless.

How we think about youth homelessness impacts and shapes the ways in which we consider the problem and, as a result, the way we address the situation (Gaetz et al., 2013). From much of the literature that explores the complexities of youth homelessness in relation to education, is it apparent that our understandings of those who are young and homeless are built upon preconceived notions and assumptions. Generally, youth homelessness is associated with a lack of housing and supports (Kidd, 2013), but ambiguity around defining and understanding youth homelessness is reflected across the literature, requiring us to be more specific.

In his critical review of youth homelessness and mental health, Kidd (2013) states: "It has proven extremely challenging to accurately describe the young people whose unstable and impoverished living circumstances have left them spending large amounts of time homeless and otherwise disengaged from the ways and places of living that are associated with mainstream values and norms" (p. 217). This challenge arises because our understandings of homeless youth have been shaped over time through socialization, personal experiences, and secondary sources

(Gaetz et al., 2013). For example, in the 1980s the term "runaway" was often used, but has since "fallen out of favour," perhaps due to increased research showing that many of these young people did not "run-away" but were in fact thrown out (Kidd, 2013, p. 217) or forced to flee. In the Canadian definition of youth homelessness mentioned briefly in the introduction, alongside the specifics of age, economic deprivation and a lack of secure housing, youth homelessness "is a complex social issue" and a "denial of basic human rights" that exists because "we as a society have failed to provide young people and their families with the necessary and adequate supports that will enable them to move forward with their lives in a safe and planned way" (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016, p.1).

In bringing together key findings from Canadian research on homelessness and youth homelessness, Hulchanski et al. (2009) and Gaetz et al., (2013) also speak to the ways in which the term "homelessness" has been defined and used by researchers, the media, politicians, and service providers. They remind us that there is a need for caution when using words such as "homeless" and "homelessness," simply because these terms often oversimplify the complexities of the social situations, social exclusions, and stigmas associated with being homeless and can wind up being detrimental to youth who are forced to embody such terms. Fundamental questions include: Why is there the term, homelessness, and what does it mean?[13] What does it conceal? What are we researching (Diversi & Finley, 2010; Hulchanski et al., 2009, p. 1) and why? These essential questions for public policy, educators, and researchers accent the need for a language that is both complex and fluid in challenging existing assumptions.

[13] In developed countries, the word "homelessness" was used more commonly in the early-mid 1980s when referring to the problem of de-housing, which was mainly about the rising number of people in these wealthy countries who had once been housed but no longer were. Canada had started to experience de-housing processes and by the 1980s, Canada clearly had a social problem that was and is called homelessness. Today, the set of social problems we now associate with the word homelessness are different than the past (Hulchanski, 2009, p. 6).

Toft (2014) extends this discussion through his critical discourse analysis of city-level policies in a major urban center in the US. Exploring the linguistic production of homelessness and homeless persons, he explains that such processes attach meaning to people, places, and social categories. Historically, he and others suggest, becoming homeless has been defined as a deviant behaviour, outside of the 'norm' for youth - resulting in individuals being judged, stigmatized, and categorized, and frequently associated with dirtiness, drugs, and danger (Toft, 2014), framing homelessness as an individual choice and a deviant subjectivity. Clarke's (2008) article continues this discussion, as his exploration of the marginalization and criminalization of precarious youth suggests that the nineteenth century invention of adolescence socially constructed youth as social problems, threats, a focus of fear and anxiety, unstable, and potentially dangerous people who we should doubt, question and govern (Clarke, 2008; Giroux, 2013; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Visano, 2016). Youth are seen as having deliberately positioned themselves outside of the norms of society and perceived as problems that need to be contained and cured (Baron, 2013; Clarke, 2008; Kidd, 2007; Visano, 2016).

Similarly, Toolis & Hammack (2015) found that negative societal perceptions about homeless youth often situate them in undesirable subordinate positions. Their narrative inquiry and analysis of 11 in-depth life story interviews with homeless youth in the United States revealed how youth engage with (and resist) dominant and stigmatizing discourses about homelessness that devalue them. In fact, several recent studies informed by youth with lived experience also counteracted this common yet false narrative, by pointing to youths' lack of choice in becoming homeless and their wishes to not be defined or stereotyped by homelessness experiences, even more so because their experiences are negatively chaotic, precarious, and difficult to manage and navigate (Gaetz et al., 2013; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Kidd et al.,

2018a; Noble et al., 2014). The reality is that youth who are at risk of becoming or currently homeless face multiple barriers, and their individual choices are in fact limited.

Reviewing findings from the *What Would it Take?* study by Schwan, Gaetz, et al. (2018) is necessary to further our understandings about what it means to be young and homeless. During 2017 and 2018, 100 homeless youth across Canada were consulted with to learn about their lived experience, day-to-day realities, and their perspectives on preventing youth homelessness. The concerns of youth were very clear, that in order for real change to take shape, a major shift is required in Canadian society's values and beliefs regarding homeless youth (Schwan et al., 2018a). As in other studies, several youth who participated expressed that the perpetuation of homelessness in Canada is strongly linked to the public often blaming youth for their poverty, viewing homelessness as a personal choice, and blindly believing inaccurate stereotypes (e.g., homeless people are lazy). These negative societal beliefs and values about poverty, the welfare state, and homelessness have detrimental impacts on young people lives.

Studies with homeless youth point to the reality that circumstances of homelessness are a direct result of social exclusion and stigma related to systemic inequities, discrimination, and violence in academic and workplace locales. As "homeless" youth experience interacting forms of oppression and discrimination, the problem becomes even more complex when we consider the diversity amongst this population, in terms of young females versus young males ("on the streets") and their diverse needs and the overrepresentation of LGBTQ2S+ youth, Indigenous youth and Black youth (Abramovich, 2013, 2018; Baskin, 2007, 2013; Brown et al., 2007; Cochran et al., 2002; Gattis, 2009; Hasford et al., 2018). For every homeless youth, there is a different homelessness experience. Minorities by virtue of sexual preferences, gender, and ethno-racial background face discrimination and challenges that differ from other youth (Gaetz et al.,

2013; Gaetz, O'Grady et al. 2016; Kidd et al., 2018b). Alongside material deprivations, many youth experience developmental struggles and additional hardship including a lack of resources, protective factors, education, and social supports, making the often-chaotic phase of adolescence even more difficult due to the complexities of being young and homeless (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2016; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016), which, if thought of rationally, is not something any young person would desire or willingly choose.

Research consistently points towards homeless youth being a highly stigmatized group (Gaetz et al., 2013; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Kidd et al., 2018a; Toolis & Hammack, 2015; Schwan, Gaetz, et al., 2018). Dominant discourses about homelessness position individuals as 'less than human', eliciting public fear and disgust (Toolis & Hammack, 2015). As a result, we need to be sure that we are not inadvertently contributing to negative stereotyping. Our false perceptions impact the way we treat youth and their access to resources in our society. Not only this, but focusing on a series of deviant stereotypes which emphasize the rhetoric of responsibility and choice ignores and dismisses all the structural and systemic inequalities and constraints that create and maintain youth homelessness (Cohen & Wardrip, 2011; Karabanow, 2004; Watson & Cuervo, 2017) making us complicit in othering youth and the perpetuation of the problem.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, there are strong linkages between homelessness, stigma, social exclusion, depression, and suicidality that have been previously found amongst other groups of adolescents who face higher levels of stigma and discrimination (e.g., racialized and LGBTQ2S+ youth) which has been related to social isolation and a devalued sense of self (Abramovich, 2013; Kidd, 2007, 2009ab). Relative to the general population, these youth are more frequently victimized on the streets as well (Abramovich, 2013; Gaetz, O'Grady et al.,

2016). In Kidd's (2007, 2009a) study about the experiences of homeless youth in relation to the burden of social stigma, he found that many youth experience abusive and disrupted childhoods, which begins a powerful and pervasive process of stigmatization where children are identified and labelled as different from a very young age. Such experiences constricted their opportunities, social and otherwise, due to the narrow beliefs and actions of others; opportunities related to housing, schooling and employment are all impacted. Consistent with other research, Kidd's (2009a) study shows that "the perception of discrimination based upon negative stereotypes", as well as the experience of stigma was, for homeless youth, "related to feelings of worthlessness, loneliness and social alienation", feelings of being trapped and suicidal ideations and attempts (p. 3).

Negative attitudes towards homeless youth are also associated with a higher degree of social distancing, less support for public assistance and higher support for anti-homeless policies (Kidd, 2007; Liljedahl et al, 2013; Noble et al., 2014). Given how such strong societal perceptions have permeated our society, it is significant that intensive research by Noble et al (2014) shows that determining whether a youth is homeless, or not, is not as straightforward, because youth may not always be visible on the street or in shelters. Through interviews with 60 homeless youth from the suburbs in York Region, the authors make clear that youth commonly 'couch surf' back and forth between homes of various friends, neighbours or relatives or live in crowded, unaffordable, or unsuitable housing (Noble et al., 2014) – all of which is directly related to my research as well. While common of youth from York Region, where hidden homelessness is more prevalent amongst certain youth populations, this also means that homeless services and supports are less likely to reach youth who fall within the 'hidden homeless' (Noble et al, 2014). Such ideologies victimize and socially displace and alienate youth

more so, which can lead to reduced life chances (Kidd, 2007, 2009a; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Kidd et al., 2018a; Robinson, 2018; Toolis & Hammack, 2015).

For all of these reasons and more, research that includes the perspectives of youth with lived experience are vital as much of the literature concerning conceptualizations of homeless youth are heavily focused on societal constructions, rather than how youth identify themselves (O'Grady et al., 2020). Contrary to how society perceives youth who are homeless, in their paper about youth homelessness and self-identity, O'Grady et al. (2020) analyzed findings of self-reported survey data of 1103 youth across Canada, finding that a high percentage of youth who are homeless do not even define themselves as homeless, most likely due to associated stigma and attempts to manage this stigmatized identity (O'Grady et al., 2020; Toolis & Hammack, 2015). Their research reveals that while it is important to define youth homelessness systematically and objectively, that to only rely on such definitions is short sighted because then self-definitions of youth homelessness are overlooked (O'Grady et al., 2020; Walter, 2017).

Considering what past research reveals, we are very fortunate there are rigorous Canadian based studies that are directly informed by young people who have the lived experienced of homelessness, which are changing the way we think about homelessness and can shape a new way forward. Recent scholarship that draws from the Canadian definition of youth homelessness urges us to view this issue through a human rights lens and requires that any work related to youth homelessness necessitates a human rights approach, otherwise solutions to youth homelessness will not be effective or meaningful (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016, 2018; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). We need to shift our perceptions so that we can base our understandings on youths' lived realities and move towards solutions to support them, rather than relying on the

popular public myths and false assumptions that have become so heavily ingrained in our society.

Pathways Into Homelessness

Although a rich body of knowledge about the causes of youth homelessness has grown and developed over the last decade, the experience of becoming homeless is unique for each young person, and therefore describing the causes of youth homelessness can still be challenging. To enhance and clarify our current understandings of youth homelessness in Canada, I think it is essential to focus on the comprehensive findings of *Without a Home*, the largest national study on youth homelessness ever conducted in Canada on Canadian youths' *experiences* of homelessness (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). This study included a sample 1,103 respondents from 47 different communities across 10 provinces and territories, which demonstrated the diversity amongst this population. According to the research, the various reasons young people become homeless are seldom linear or comprised of a single event but include many interrelated factors and occur over an extended period. This research study, alongside other strong research, identifies youth homelessness as compounded by three primary causes: individual and relational factors, as well as structural and systemic failures (Noble et al., 2014; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016, 2018; Gaetz & Dej, 2017; Schwan, French, et al., 2018).

Individual and relational factors are the personal situations that can cause young people to become homelessness. Typically beginning at a very young age, such factors include unstable living conditions, complicated family lives fraught with physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, parental neglect, interpersonal or intimate partner violence, and mental health and addiction issues – of youth or their family members (Gaetz et al., 2014; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016;

Karabanow, 2004,; Karabanow & Naylor, 2013; Mallet et al., 2005; Noble et al., 2014; Paradise & Cauce, 2002; Springer et al., 2006; Winland, 2013). Additional causes of family instability may include "divorce, separation, introduction of stepparents and stepchildren, or shifting living arrangements" (e.g., moving houses or changing cities), resulting in numerous changes and transitions for youth and their families (Karabanow & Naylor, 2013, p. 41).

Identity-based conflicts and discrimination, such as coming out as LGBTQ2S+, can also put youth at higher risk. For example, current research also shows that transgender, gender nonbinary, LGBTQ2S+, Indigenous, Black, and other racialized youth are more likely to leave home at an earlier age and report parental conflict and childhood physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse as driving factors to their homelessness, including higher rates of multiple and repeated episodes of homelessness (Abramovich, 2013, 2018; Abramovich & Shelton, 2017; Choi et al., 2015; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Keuroghlian et al., 2014; Kidd et al., 2018a; Shelton et al., 2017). Evidently, many of the pathways leading to homelessness are a direct result of youth fleeing extremely hostile home environments. Structural and systemic factors often shape the conditions under which individual and relational crises occur and have profound effects on a young person's overall well-being and contribute to increased risk of homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2018). Disengagement with school and involvement in crime can also be linked to leaving home prematurely. Exploring the complex relationship between these factors can help us understand why youth become homeless, why some youth are more vulnerable to homelessness, and where and when to intervene regarding prevention efforts (Malenfant et al., 2020).

Institutional or systemic failures refer to systems and programs that discharge youth into homelessness even though they may lack access to housing and other essential supports to maintain housing after their exit; ultimately the system fails them. This includes child protection,

group homes and foster care placements, mental health and juvenile justice systems – often described by youth as uncaring, abusive and unstable environments (Dworsky & Courtney, 2009; Gaetz & Dej, 2017; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Goldstein, 2011; Nichols, 2013; Schwan, French et al., 2018). I would argue that it also includes the education system. Letting young people transition out of public systems without care and consideration of where they'll live or an adequate plan for safe and permanent housing is a result of inadequate public policy and service delivery, and is not effective in meeting youths' needs; rather, it increases risk of becoming homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2013, 2018; Karabanow, 2004; Nichols, 2013, 2014).

Structural factors "include economic, systemic, and societal issues that affect outcomes and opportunities for young people and their families" (Gaetz & Dej, 2017, p.18), such as lack of affordable housing, violence, underemployment, discrimination, and inadequate education (Gaetz et al., 2018). Discrimination in the form of racism, homophobia, transphobia, and bullying are also societal and structural barriers that may not allow youth to stay in their families or communities. If youth are Indigenous, members of racialized communities, newcomers, or refugees, risks for homelessness are higher (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Ongoing racism and colonialism are at the core of experiences of poverty, housing precarity, and homelessness for many Indigenous youth and their families (Stewart, 2018; Thistle, 2017). Structural and systemic barriers and failures heavily shape availability and access to opportunities (Gaetz et al., 2018). As an example, structural changes in the economy can result in fewer full-time, living-wage jobs being available for young people (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Hasford et al., 2018).

Commonly held assumptions about the causes of youth homelessness imply that youth are rebellious runaways, in search of independence and freedom (Gaetz et al., 2013). But the research tells us that most youth flee from extremely abusive home environments and experience

increased hardship before they become homeless and greater adversity on the streets (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Often, young people who remain homeless for extended periods of time are also exposed to early sexual activity, exploitation, addictions, and safety issues (Kidd, 2013; Milburn et al. 2009; Saewyc et al., 2013). These youth actually face multiple barriers to independence, including inability to access support services, housing, employment, and education (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016), all of which hinder the fostering of independence.

The causes and pathways into homelessness are important to our understanding of youth homelessness and education because the experience of being homeless creates specific barriers to students' educational engagement and attainment. Inquiring into the diversity of youth who find themselves without housing is also important, as intersecting identities shape the reasons youth become homeless (Abramovich & Shelton, 2017) and their experiences of education. Research regarding pathways shows that youth who become homeless have often experienced loss and potential trauma and are managing a variety of complex tasks, which include obtaining shelter, income, and food, decision making, and developing healthy relationships. The research demonstrates that the issue of youth homelessness and the reasons that lead young people to become homeless are complex. Supporting young people's educational engagement and attainment and preventing young people from becoming homeless requires an understanding of causes and conditions (Gaetz et al., 2018) – serious problems that requires immediate attention.

Youth Homelessness and Education – Why School Matters

Educators, policy makers, and researchers have been concerned for decades with the social and political aspects surrounding public education, academic engagement, educational access, and dropping out (Bowlby & McMullen, 2005; Dhillon, 2011; Fine, 1990, 1991;

Rumberger, 2011; Smyth & Hattam, 2004), but most of the existing literature about youth homelessness in relation to educational experience provides a partial image. From various studies we can gather that the reality of homelessness severely impedes academic engagement and achievement and is often related to reduced life opportunities across multiple realms of social life related to education, employment, healthcare, and housing (Cohen & Wardrip, 2011; Gaetz, 2014; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Liljedahl et al., 2013; Rafferty et al., 2004; Winland et al., 2011; Kidd & Shahar, 2008; Kidd, 2004).

In North America, maintaining continuous high school attendance is standard for adolescence, an expectation reflected in legislation. Specifically, in Canada, "it is required that young people are enrolled in high school until the age of 16 in all provinces except New Brunswick and Ontario, which mandate high school enrolment until the age of 18" (Hyman et al., 2011, p. 254). However, research with youth who are homeless reveals how difficult it is to stay engaged – and to maintain this standard "normative" attendance and participation in school – when confronting the struggles of being young and homeless (Malenfant et al., 2020; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). This results in the false public perception that youth who become disengaged or drop out earlier than the mandated age must not value school or want to be there – but there is really no evidence to suggest that this is true.[14]

Extended and chronic homelessness can also result in youth becoming entrenched in street life, with severe impacts on health, increased exposure to victimization and exploitation,

[14] We tend to forget that the education system is one of our last "universal" social programs. Children are universally entitled to an education. They have rights to an education. However, when a young person is homeless, this universal right is pulled away and not rigidly enforced. This connects with the concept of truancy, which I will speak about in Chapters 4 and 5, because youth are punished for skipping. However, when youth are homeless, these ways of enforcing a youth's take-up of their rights, their acting on their rights, is lost.

trauma and addictions, and disengagement from education and employment (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). This is concerning, given that the value of a good education is universally considered central to well-being in adulthood; yet homeless youth are not afforded the resources needed to stay in school (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Obtaining a high school diploma is globally recognized as a means for young people to avoid poverty and gain access to paid occupation; without it, youth are at a considerable disadvantage in the labour market and may face exposure to a life of poverty, homelessness, and systemic and social exclusion (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013; Järkestig et al., 2016).

In a study in Ottawa and Toronto, it was reported that between 63% and 90% of homeless youth had not graduated from high school, despite being of age to have done so (Liljedahl et al., 2013, p. 270). The complexities of becoming homeless disrupt efforts for a young person to continue their education, despite desires to continue with their schooling. Strong research findings from Gaetz and O'Grady et al. (2016) similarly showed that a far-reaching consequence for homeless youth is increased risk of high school dropout. The overall dropout rate in Canada is currently below 9% and has declined steadily since the 1950s, but for homeless youth the rate is 53.2%, and in Gaetz and O'Grady et al.'s study (2016), out of those who dropped out, 73.9% reported strong desires to return to school (p. 11). These troubling results should make us question why the dropout rate is so incredibly high for homeless youth – and how their educational attainment can be prioritized, especially given their strong desires to return.

Obtaining and maintaining education is hard when homeless, and the same is true of obtaining and maintaining employment. Currently, our society "encourages a pervasive culture of education where formal credentials are given social value and status and are recognized in the labour market" (Baker, 2011, p. 10; Liljedahl et al., 2013. P. 270). In their study of social

exclusion and employment training, Gaetz and O'Grady (2013) explored whether employment training programs have the potential to help reduce and end youth homelessness. Their past research in Toronto with street-involved youth also tells us that young people who are homeless are likely to have left school at a younger age compared to most housed youth (Gaetz et al., 1999). Rising participation rates in school and decreased drop-out rates are also related to economic changes, such as the demands of the labour market and the increased cost of housing. Employers are now expecting more from their employees in terms of education, especially with regards to high school and post-secondary education (Karabanow et al., 2010; Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013).

Consistent with this and other research is Noble et al. (2014), where young homeless people in York Region were asked about their experiences of school. A high percentage of youth (72%) reported failure to complete high school, and 21% had completed only grade 9 or lower. Current research by Gaetz and O'Grady et al. (2016) confirms the same findings on a national level; the authors found that 65% of youth who participated reported not having completed high school and 8% had less than a grade 9 education. Despite these results, almost half (46.8%) of those who had not completed high school were currently attending school or taking their High School Equivalency Certificate (GED), despite being homeless (p. 74). Relevant and important conclusions can also be drawn through the authors' usage of NEET data, which can be defined and classified as a "measure that determines the percentage of young people who are ***not*** enrolled in employment, education or training" – but young people who fall within this measure also face considerably higher rates of social exclusion and vulnerability (p. 75).

What is more, when Gaetz and O'Grady et al. (2016) reviewed a 2012 study by Statistics Canada, they found that over the past decade, the percentage of youth age 15–29 that fall within

NEET has been relatively low, ranging between 12% and 14%, which is a relatively low rate among the G7 countries and Canada is amongst the G7 countries (p. 75).[15] Using this measure to assess employment, education, and training amongst study youth, the researchers found a shocking 50.5% of youth who fit within the NEET category – four times higher than the national average (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016, p. 75). Since Canada is one of the G7 countries, it is unethical and unacceptable that people are homeless, that homeless youth continue to be overrepresented in terms of school dropout, and that this is happening even though we know that educational obtainment correlates to greater opportunities into adulthood.

These research findings are worrying and point towards the need for a better understanding of how the factors that lead to homelessness also produce disengagement from school, and how the actual experience of homelessness makes school engagement very difficult. Without a fair chance at education, can the employability of homeless youth be enhanced, given that many have not finished school and so lack key resources required to obtain and maintain employment? At the time of Gaetz and O'Grady et al.'s (2016) national study, the unemployment rate amongst youth in the general population in Canada was 13.3%; amongst study participants, three-quarters (75.7%) were unemployed, and only 19.7% currently had jobs.

In addition, due to the economic changes described above, "it is now common for young people to live at home well past their teen years, and to continue to rely on their parents for financial, material, and emotional supports, but homeless youth are frequently left to do it all on their own". Without parental guidance, support, and supervision, there is intense pressure on a young person living on their own and trying to make ends meet (Chau & Gawliuk, 2009;

[15] G7 is a term used to describe a group of seven countries that have the largest and most advanced economies in the world and are the most industrialized nations worldwide: http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/g7-countries/

Liljedahl et al., 2013, p. 270; Paradise & Cauce, 2002). The social exclusion they face as a result of their experience with homelessness significantly impacts their engagement in school and at work. Therefore, I would argue, homeless youth are not given a fair and equal opportunity to engage in education and schooling, as they have no choice but to focus on the basic necessities required to stay alive.

Furthermore, Gaetz (2014) notes, homelessness creates barriers to opportunities for "young people to participate in many of the institutions that are designed to help them navigate transitions to adulthood, such as access to housing and employment, which may be restricted for teens under a certain age and in some jurisdictions such as Ontario, there are various barriers to accessing social assistance" (p. 22). Often, such barriers leave narrow choices for young people and force them to participate in the informal economy, which mostly includes illegal and quasi-legal activities such as drug dealing and the sex trade (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013; Karabanow et al., 2010). Such barriers can undermine the employability of youth and hinder their ability to remain in school. Being able to complete high school (or not) has a major impact on participation in the labour force, health, well-being, interactions with the justice system, and the need and use of government benefits. It is unacceptable that such a high number of homeless youth cycle in and out of homelessness, school, and work (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016).

Since youth homelessness is also often characterized by histories of childhood abuse, fleeing from – or being kicked out of – households where they have been dependent upon adult caregivers (Gaetz et al., 2014), alongside a lack of adequate housing, these youth confront ruptured relations with family, and potentially the loss of friends, other supportive adults, and community. Homelessness can "mean premature withdrawal from school and an early rush towards independence at a time when these youth may be suffering from the trauma of these

losses" (Gaetz et al., 2013, p. 3). This can put youth at risk of economic disadvantage throughout the course of their working years, and their lifetime (Hyman et al., 2011).

Reliable research results of the Labour Force Survey revealed that quality of life improves in relation to increased education. Completing high school greatly enhances access to continuing post-secondary educational opportunities, all of which are associated with greater employment (Statistics Canada, 2007; Hyman et al., 2011, p. 254). When students are not afforded the opportunity to graduate from high school, they experience on average higher rates of unemployment and incarceration and lower overall lifetime earnings and life expectancy, compared to those who earn their high school diploma (Bowers et al., 2013). Additionally, youth homelessness is strongly linked to problems in adulthood, such as increased involvement in the justice system, employment issues, and social exclusion (Paradise & Cauce, 2002). Also, "lack of high school education is a key social factor that sustains the disengagement of youth from mainstream society" (Hyman et al., 2011, p. 2) By not providing homeless youth with adequate opportunities to obtain an education, advocates argue that we are condemning young people to a life of poverty, instability, and episodes of, or entrenchment in a lifetime of chronic homelessness (Gaetz, 2008; Gaetz et al., 2013; Liljedahl et al., 2013; Macdonald & Marsh, 2005).

It is important to note that "the process of disengagement from school does not look the same for each person" (Noble et al., 2014, p. 63). For some, the process of disengagement began before they left home, while for others the experience of becoming homeless led them to drop out. Common factors include abusive and chaotic family and home environments and exposure to poor mental health issues and substance use and abuse, instability, poverty, injustice, welfare dependency, and crime (Abramovich, 2013; Baron, 2013; Clarke, 2008; Gaetz, O'Grady et al.,

2016; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Kidd, 2006; Kidd & Shahar, 2008; Kidd et al., 2018a; Nichols, 2013; Noble et al., 2014; Rumberger, 2011; Toolis & Hammack, 2015). A study by Rafferty et al. (2004) examined academic achievement and engagement related to outcomes for young people and their families, who had been homeless, and after they had been re-housed, and compared the results to adolescents in poor families who never experienced homelessness.

Their findings revealed no differences between both groups with regards to cognitive ability related to reading, math, reasoning, and spelling (Rafferty et al., 2004). Also, while most studies show that homeless youth fare worse than poor children who are housed in terms of health, mental health, and educational outcomes, both groups in their study highly valued school and reported high educational goals, with strong desires to pursue education beyond high school (p. 192). Sadly, however, the realities for homeless youth sharply contrasted the reality of housed students. For example, many of the homeless students in the study had dropped out of school prior to their scheduled graduation date. This finding shows that homeless youth do not have the same stability in terms of financial, material, and emotional supports as their housed peers; and so, despite strong desires and goals to pursue education, homeless youth report fewer plans for post-secondary education compared to their never homeless peers (Rafferty et al., 2004).

Educational attainment is also hard because homelessness forces young people to move multiple times, and many spiral in and out of emergency services. As a result, a lot of youth have to constantly enroll in and out of different schools (Abramovich, 2013; Cohen & Wardrip, 2011; Decter, 2007; Liljedahl, et al., 2013; Murphy, 2011; Rafferty, 1995). Having higher mobility presents a significant barrier to academic participation and achievement. Barriers also include the “transient nature of homelessness itself, which can lead to disrupted school experiences and lost classroom time due to moving, enrolling in and adjusting to a new school” (Liljedahl et al., 2013,

p. 270; Murphy, 2011). Every time a young person has to change schools, it takes an estimated four to six months for students to re-adjust and recover academically (Murphy, 2011). Many homeless youth may change their locations daily; they may be living with family or friends or in shelters and some might even be living in vehicles, busses, or trains (Maza & Hall, 1990).

The same is still true today, as several youth who participated in the *What Would It Take* study explicitly linked their homelessness to challenges in trying to access public systems, and one of the key access issues included mobility and transportation challenges (Gaetz et al., 2018; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). Additional barriers to school participation may also include lack of access to previous school reports, transcripts, and records such as immunization dates. It is also difficult for homeless youth to remain in school or return to school following a period of absence (Hyman et al., 2011, p. 3; Liljedahl et al., 2013). In addition, for youth who live in shelters, "the shelter environment may also pose a barrier to education depending on whether the shelter is close to schools, factors such as crowdedness, privacy and the ability to leave belongings during the day" (Liljedahl et al., 2013, p. 270; Buckner, 2008). Homeless youth confront poverty, hunger, poor nutrition, health problem, psychological problems, developmental delays, and academic underachievement, which are all experiences and risks that impact their overall well-being (Rafferty et al., 2004; Tarasuk et al., 2009; Dachner & Tarasuk, 2013).

Even if a young person desires to go back to school after dropping out, their educational participation may be restricted further by homelessness. Sometimes, they may be held back a grade because the school may feel this would be best in order to help them catch up, but this not only fails to help them catch up with peers and succeed in school, but it can also actually lead to academic failures and behaviour difficulties (Rafferty et al., 2004). Youth often report having trouble at school as far back as they can remember. In fact, growing evidence shows that "many

homeless youth enter childhood and adolescence ‘hard wired’ for behaviour and attention problems” (Paradise & Cauce, 2002, p. 226). Emotional and behavioural problems, which characterize many homeless youth lead to individual vulnerability and increased risk of educational disengagement and dropping out (Dryfoos, 1997; Paradise & Cauce, 2002, p. 226).

Similarly, Gaetz and O’Grady et al. (2016) found that “those who had dropped out were much more likely to report learning disabilities (41.8%), ADHD (46.1%), and physical disabilities (47.9%) than youth in the sample with higher rates of school participation and achievement” (p. 55). In addition, factors such as bullying and learning disabilities also impacted the school experience for youth experiencing homelessness (Gaetz, O’Grady et al., 2016). Research shows that exposure to bullying, violence, and aggressive behaviour during adolescence is linked to higher levels of depression, anxiety, substance use and suicidal ideations (Malette, 2017), and homeless youth are approximately four times more likely to have experienced bullying than Canadian youth in general (Gaetz, O’Grady et al., 2016; Kidd et al., 2018a; Noble et al., 2014).

Educational Responses to Homeless Youth

While much of the rhetoric around youth disengagement and dropping out shapes and shifts our thinking around this topic as an individual failure, there are wider contributing factors – systemic, hierarchical, and institutional problems that contribute to the issues – which also manifest in schools. Research informed by the voices of homeless youth points to the importance of espousing a critical view of the education system, its bureaucracy, and the production of social inequality, especially because social and systemic exclusion shape institutions and experiences such that some identities are formed and normalized, while others are denied (Bruno-Jofre 2014).

Schools are often sites of transformation or (re)production and therefore can significantly influence young people's patterns of dropping out, by creating conditions that influence student disengagement (Dhillon, 2011). When asked about their experiences of education schooling, youth from the *What Would it Take* study said it is difficult to pay attention and learn "without proper clothing, school supplies, transportation" and that such "challenges were made worse by school staff who were largely unprepared or unqualified to support them, limited school-based mental health supports, and curriculum that did not help them learn how to live independently and safely" (Malenfant et al., 2020; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 68).

As caring educators, it is difficult to accept that youth mentioned that sometimes school policies and staff increased their marginalization and risk of homelessness (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). Therefore, we need to pay closer attention to how schools themselves fundamentally contribute to the complex linkages between youth homelessness and fading out from school. Even more difficult to digest is that "several youth reported instances where their teachers disclosed their mental health challenges to peers, did not help them escape abusive homes, stigmatized them for their drug use, or punished them for sleeping in class when they had nowhere safe to sleep at night" (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 68). Youth felt misunderstood, isolated, and excluded. In this way, schools can also directly impact dropping out from school through unfavourable policies and decisions, which may lead youth to involuntarily withdrawal from school.

Examples of this can be seen when schools govern students through enactment of strict rules and regulations in response to low grades, poor attendance, misbehaviour (such as zero-tolerance policies), suspensions, expulsions or forced transfers, without consideration of their life circumstances (Giroux, 2015; Levinsky, 2016; Rumberger, 2011, p. 16). Gaetz et al. (2018)

discuss approaches that are targeted at preventing youth homelessness through the education system; they argue that "zero tolerance" policies in schools need to be eliminated. Sometimes referred to as the "school-to-prison-pipeline," such policies "function to remove youth from mainstream educational institutions and contribute to their criminal justice involvement" (p. 42; Heitzeg, 2009). Despite policies that aim to "keep schools safe," inversely schools are not always safe spaces for marginalized and homeless youth (Levinsky, 2016).

It is difficult for homeless youth to keep up with certain expectations and codes of conduct due to the chaotic and precarious nature of homelessness itself, further excluding and positioning them as "other." For instance, some schools do not provide interventions to students deemed at risk of dropping out, or misidentify students who need interventions. Additionally, there can be issues around inefficient management of limited school resources, as expensive drop-out prevention initiatives are aimed at students who do not even require intervention (Bowers et al., 2013). Homeless youth also have unique needs, due to developmental changes they experience during adolescence (e.g., physical, cognitive, social, and emotional), which greatly impact their conceptual and abstract thinking, decision-making, and risk-taking. Trauma can also significantly impair this development (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; p. 28; Steinberg, 2013).

It is important to note that dropping out is a process - students do not suddenly drop out of school - they often show various patterns of disengagement such as low achievement, failure, poor attendance, and misbehaviour, which eventually lead them to give up or be pushed out (Rumberger, 2011). This suggests the urgency of the need for early intervention and prevention strategies to be implemented in schools and across the education system (Gaetz et al., 2018). Sending youth out onto the street only puts the problem elsewhere (Levinsky, 2016). Aid

agencies in Canada provide a limited response, and the structural processes of schooling and education provide unequal opportunities and create differential outcomes for students according to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, culture, class, and disability, as well (Dei, 1996; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016), which further complicate the experience of being homeless.

Dhillon's (2011, p. 112) exploratory study about the intersection of social exclusion, gender, and access to education helps enhance our understandings of how systemic conditions produce boundaries of social exclusion in schools for homeless youth. Focus groups and individual interviews with 118 young women experiencing homelessness in Canada and 43 service providers and educators demonstrated the alienation young women felt from teaching and learning environments. Media representations and public discourses often showcase images of "the lazy and disengaged high school dropout," which was juxtaposed to the girls in her study, who consistently spoke about the importance of formal schooling – placing a largely significant emphasis upon the value of education – and yet simultaneously talked at length about the various mechanisms of exclusion that contributed to their disconnection from school (Dhillon, 2011).

From the narratives of young homeless women, it becomes evident that "the power of educational institutions is such that they act as a medium for advancing or hindering social opportunities directly linked to prospects for social mobility" (p. 112). Dhillon's (2011) work shifts the narrative from notions of individual failure in school to important questions about justice and social equality in Canada via a critique of issues of access in the education system. If we critically examine and analyze these wide range of variables and the complex interactions that take place within schools, we can gain insight into how schools function to engage some students, while disengaging others (Dei, 1996, 1997; Dhillon, 2011).

In similar ways to youth from the *What Would It Take?* study, the young women in Dhillon's (2011) study also talked about "the politics of caring," discussing teachers who simply did not care, or did not care to understand their life circumstances and struggles with poverty, racism, and sexism, which impacted their decisions to engage with or reject their educational pursuits (p. 126). The young women felt that schools often emphasized the "the problem of homelessness" rather than our society's inability to provide people with the fundamental necessities required to survive (Dhillon, 2011, p. 119), again making homelessness an individualized problem and ignoring the systemic issues that exist.

Whether youth drop out prematurely never to return, or stay in school but are disengaged through multiple absences, incomplete assignments, or not being able to focus, we need to ask what is it about the experience of being young and homeless that disengages youth, and what is it about mainstream schooling that does not allow them to pursue academic credentials in the same way as their peers. We cannot assume that all youth were in the process of disengagement before becoming homeless. Being young and homeless makes the problems of access, engagement, disengagement and dropping out structurally different. In fact, the experience of being homeless implicates engagement in school. Many young people are forced to drop out whether they are disengaged or not, because they do not have a home, stability, support, community, and money.

We can do more to support homeless youth to remain or reengage in school and achieve success, especially for those youth who are marginalized because of learning disabilities or bullying (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Noble et al., 2014). We need to better understand homeless and street youth in terms of the complex living situations and social factors they face, such as poverty, family violence, and unstable living conditions. These young people face different challenges than the general population of youth who live with their parents, go to

school, and have access to basic health care services (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). A systemic transformation of how all schools function in the system alongside the other structures and systems that are in place to prevent youth homelessness could provide the widespread impact needed to support young people who are at imminent risk of being or currently homeless.

Recent scholarship has shifted efforts to end youth homelessness, with a fundamental focus on prevention and school-based early interventions, outlining what prevention means and looks like in practice. As mentioned, common approaches to youth homelessness in Canada often only manage the problem, rather than prevent it. Reactive emergency services focused on life skills and self-sufficiency push youth towards precarious employment (Winland et al., 2011), and education often "takes a back seat," "including a historical emphasis on community-based services rather than an integrated systems approach and the belief of politicians (and arguably, much of the general public) that the fragmented web of street youth services takes care of the problem" (Winland, 2013, p. 25). However, in *The Roadmap for the Prevention of Youth Homelessness*, Gaetz et al. (2018) provide a comprehensive examination of how to think and talk about prevention. Informed by youth with lived experience, the authors argue for a shift in the way we address the problem of youth homelessness, from a crisis response to a focus on prevention and school-based early interventions, in order to keep families intact and help those who are homeless (or at risk) to regain stable housing, participate in school, and foster overall well-being (Gaetz et al., 2018). This alternative approach will be explored further here.

School-Based Early Interventions and Fostering Resilience

Central to this research, and a major contribution to the literature about prevention, is the importance of school-based early interventions. The research reviewed reveals some important

considerations: the pathways that often lead young people to become homeless have origins in childhood and adolescence and can be prevented through intervening early. Also, young people at risk for homelessness often show early signs of disengagement in school. As such, school-based early interventions are a way for the "education system to identify and quickly intervene when young people are at risk of homelessness or dropping out of school" (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016, p. 12). Current research by Gaetz and O'Grady et al. (2016), Schwan and Gaetz et al. (2018), and even more recently research reports by Gaetz et al. (2020) and Sohn & Gaetz (2020) as well as the discussion paper by Malenfant et al. (2020) makes a strong case for school-based early interventions as the most effective way to reduce harmful outcomes, and to move towards preventing and ultimately ending youth homelessness in Canada.

These ideas were initially put forward in the *Coming of Age* report by Gaetz (2014) and later in *The Roadmap to Prevention* by Gaetz et al. (2018) and suggest that when youth are at risk of homelessness, dropping out of school, and/or experiencing other complicated and adverse life altering circumstances, early intervention programs that engage the education system should seek to identify vulnerable youth and provide the necessary supports to reduce risks to prevent youth from becoming homeless in the first place, with programs that are youth-centered and family-focused and with community-based partnerships across different institutions and sectors (e.g., social services, healthcare, and education). Such programs have the potential to foster student success for those deemed at risk of homelessness and need to be made available starting in middle school (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Gaetz et al., 2018; Gaetz et al., 2020; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). This is especially vital if we refer back to study by Schwan, Gaetz et al., (2018) and the discussion paper that draws from that study by Malenfant et al. (2020), where young

people were asked what they felt would prevent youth homelessness and they spoke of the importance for schools to be more engaged on this issue and to intervene.

Preventative approaches like these can and should be adopted for the Canadian context (Gaetz & O'Grady et al., 2016; Gaetz et al., 2018; Gaetz et al., 2020; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). These solutions are meant to be long-term, with the aim of ensuring that youth can exit homelessness quickly, and to help keep youth engaged in school and/or get back on track if they are at risk of dropping out. Success in the school system with positive long-term benefits is one of the major goals (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Early interventions that are school-based are a core feature of youth homelessness prevention in countries like the UK and Australia – notable leaders in this field of work. In order to respond to an increasing rate of youth homelessness in Australia, the first Reconnect program was launched in 1997 (Mackenzie, 2018b) by the Australian federal government as a preventative solution. Some of the main goals were to intervene earlier with families and young people in order to increase youths' level of engagement with family, employment, education, training, and connections to community, as well as to stabilize their housing situation (Australian Government, 2009; Gaetz et al., 2020).

Local adaptations of such programs exist in Canada, with one example being the Youth Reconnect Program (Gaetz et al., 2020; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020), for which Making the Shift is currently operating a demonstration project in Hamilton. The *Youth Reconnect Program Guide* defines youth reconnect as "a community-based early intervention program that is designed to help young people (ages 13–24) who are at risk of or in the early stages of homelessness" and is guided by the main goals of reconnect mentioned above (Gaetz et al., 2020, p.6). Though Youth Reconnect originated in Australia, a similar program exists in the Niagara region in Canada, called RAFT. Unlike Reconnect in Australia, however, RAFT is not government-led but

community-led, “provided in partnership with other social service agencies, focusing on helping youth live independently, reduce high risk behaviour and maintaining school attendance” (RAFT, 2014, p. 1). Reconnect programs aim to prevent youth from becoming homeless, through four central objectives: (1) keep young people in place; (2) stabilize living situation; (3) support youth and their families; and (4) enhance school engagement (Gaetz et al., 2020; Mackenzie, 2018b; RAFT, 2014). Reconnect programs aim to be holistic, comprehensive, and accessible, with available approaches for youth and their families, such as counselling, mediation, and practical support (Australian Government, 2003; 2009; RAFT, 2014).

Reconnect is unique in that supportive adults can identify youth who are struggling, and “youth are able to access supports through self- or family referral, or referral by service providers, such as healthcare providers, community workers, employment workers, and help line staff/volunteers” (Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 82; Gaetz et al., 2020; RAFT, 2014). School-based early interventions are supported by extensive research that shows that such programs effectively prevent young people from becoming homeless, by keeping them connected to their families (if safe to do so) and to their schools and communities (Gaetz et al., 2018, 2020; Mackenzie, 2018b; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020).

Another revolutionary example of school-based early interventions that aim to reduce and prevent youth homelessness is the Upstream Project, which evolved from the Geelong Project in Australia (Gaetz et al., 2018; 2020; Malenfant et al., 2020; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). In the research report *Preventing Youth Homelessness and School Disengagement Through Early Intervention*, we learn that Upstream is now the international brand (including in Australia) for what was once Geelong. There is now an Upstream International Living Lab to help bring what was once called

the Geelong Project to Canada, the United States, and Wales. (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020, p 21; Gaetz et al., 2020).

The Upstream Project "employs a 'Community of Schools and Services' (COSS) model of early intervention for young people who are at-risk of disengaging from school, becoming homeless, and entering the justice system" (Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 84). Upstream approaches are "bottom up" and unique because they bring together key people and begin with a student needs survey, an evidence-based assessment tool that identifies young people at risk but also focuses on their assets (Malenfant et al., 2020; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). Given that research shows that most homeless youth had early and detectable signs of disengagement, every student in the school must complete the survey. It takes Youth Reconnect one step further by introducing a universal assessment tool (from 12-year-olds to high school students) to identify youth at risk of homelessness (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020).

Gaetz et al. (2018) suggest that since all homeless youth were in school at some point – and teachers, counselors, or coaches spend the most time with youth – results and outcomes of Upstream approaches are stronger and even more promising in terms of preventative solutions because they are based on both the universal assessment tool and on staff knowledge of student vulnerability and underlying problems, especially in terms of changes in behaviour or educational disengagement, bullying, and signs of abuse, neglect, or trauma. While Youth Reconnect also involves teachers, coaches, or other supportive adults in the process of identifying youth who may be at risk for homelessness, the Upstream Project combines staff knowledge with a needs assessment tool, a combination that can help identify youth whose struggles and vulnerability may be more hidden (Gaetz et al., 2018).

The ultimate goals of the Upstream Project in Canada are to: (1) improve student's overall and mental well-being; (2) increase school engagement; and (3) decrease youth homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2018). Despite this, it is still difficult as a teacher to know what to do and how exactly to intervene or provide resources or support to students. The knowledge and resources required to do this work requires a collective impact approach in which the homelessness service sector, researchers, and educators all come together and share the responsibility of identifying the needs of this population (Gaetz et al., 2018). The Upstream Project is an example of a collaborative project intended to prevent youth from becoming homeless and move towards eliminating youth homelessness in Canada.

Resilience Amidst the Grip of Homelessness

Fundamental to school-based early interventions are that they focus on strengthening young people's resilience, coping, assets, protective factors, and opportunities by enhancing school engagement, nurturing natural supports (e.g., family), and building life skills such as problem-solving and conflict resolution (Gaetz et al., 2018). Often, literature about homelessness focuses on pathways and on what puts young people at risk of becoming homeless (Prescott et al., 2008; Kidd & Shahar, 2009; Kidd et al., 2018a), but resilience and positive attributes of survival and resistance demonstrate courage and strength in homeless youth. In fact, findings from the *Without a Home* report demonstrates that homeless youth have notable resiliency resources that we must foster to ensure that they can be successful and healthy (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). We need to be aware when emphasis is placed on risk factors, as doing so further contributes to the stigma and social exclusion that homeless youth already face.

Still, discussing resilience (which will be defined in more detail below) in the context of youth homelessness has its challenges. For one, resilience is expressed differently by each person. Also, focusing on resilience can feed into neoliberal perspectives that view problems of social injustice like homelessness, by placing accountability on the individual to change (Ungar, 2019), as if homeless youth simply need to use their resiliency to "figure out" their circumstances. This narrative blames youth who are forced to become homeless, while absolving the state and society of any contribution to the problem and the collective responsibility needed to fix it. So, while personal assets and resilience are important, we must do much more than focus on individual strengths; "it is not ethical or acceptable to expect youth to rely *only* on their assets to "bootstrap" themselves out of homelessness". We must understand that each young person has the right to housing, safety, education, and supports, regardless of personal circumstance (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016, p. 113). The complex situation of homelessness makes resilience difficult for many, particularly given the significant diversity within the youth homelessness population. As such, unique and tailored approaches that can contribute to enhancing strengths, resilience, assets, and protective factors for the diverse population of youth who are homeless (e.g., young women, sexual and gender minority groups, and Indigenous and other racialized youth) is essential (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016).

Research in the field of resilience in relation to the risk exposure of children and youth best understands resilience as "a process, which unfolds in contexts of atypical exposure to stress" (Ungar, 2019, p. 2), and as the result of individuals being able to interact with their environments and with processes that either promote well-being or protect them against the overwhelming influence of risk factors (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Kidd et al., 2018a; Ungar, 2019). What this means is that youth do not just become resilient, but that resilience is learned

when people are subject to adverse circumstances (Ungar, 2019). Luthar et al. (2000) defined resilience as a "dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity" (p. 543). This definition of resilience is described as comprised of two essential components: risk or threat, and positive developmental outcomes (Hyman et al., 2011, p. 3). Resilience is also defined as that which refers to the capacity to do well despite adverse or difficult experiences and circumstances (Gilligan, 2000); "a resilient child is one who bounces back having endured adversity, who continues to function reasonably well despite continued exposure to risk (Hyman et al., 2011 p. 10). For instance, "in the context of examining academic resilience for homeless youth, the risk or threat would be the experience of homelessness, while the normal/resilient outcome is continued participation in school" (Liljedahl et al., 2013, p. 271); this suggests that homeless adolescents who are able to participate in school illustrate educational resilience, despite their adverse circumstances (Liljedahl et al., 2013).

To better understand how to strengthen resilience for youth, we must also understand the factors that make resilience difficult. Gaetz and O'Grady et al. (2016) point out that youth "who experience forms of adversity prior to becoming homeless, such as CAS involvement, physical and sexual abuse, and neglect, were more likely to experience poorer mental health, suicide attempts, lower quality of life, and negative psychological resilience" (p. 9). To build assets and resilience for homeless youth, we must recognize that their lives have been shaped by severe exclusion and adversity in all major life domains, including housing, healthcare, employment, education, and on the streets (Reza, 2018). Having faced constant exposure to violence, marginalization, and poor mental health does not allow youth to develop healthfully towards adulthood, and instead fosters paths towards homelessness, ill health, and early death - factors

that hinder assets and resilience, leaving youth feeling hopeless and helpless (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016, p. 108; Reza, 2018).

Still, youth have unique and remarkable resources that persist, despite the adversity they face. For example, in Gaetz and O'Grady et al.'s (2016) study, survey results verified that a high percentage of the youth have high levels of self-esteem. Correspondingly, Toolis & Hammack's (2015) study found that, rather than passively adopt a devalued sense of self, youth actively struggled to find self-worth, community, and hope. Common themes in these "resilience narratives" included self-reliance, social networks, caring for others, street smarts, and spirituality. A crucial component of building resilience in youth is fortifying natural supports, as many homeless youth stay connected with these. Staying connected or re-connecting positively with their families, friends, neighbours, or meaningful adults can be instrumental in helping youth survive on the street, exit homelessness, and have meaningful transitions towards adulthood (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Reza, 2018). Fostering these natural supports can also help youth remain engaged in school.

For youth with histories of homelessness, assistance in the form of mentorship relationships as well as connections to supportive organizations have been identified as key factors in helping youth exit the streets (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). Even though the number of youth who manage to stay in school while homeless is small, understanding the factors that helped them stay in school is important, as the specific factors that promote participation in school for some homeless youth might enable us to design programs and policies that provide better supports for all homeless youth (Liljedahl et al., 2013). Structural and systemic factors enhance resilience, and this cannot be left up to youth to achieve on their own. Being able to increase homeless youth's attendance and engagement in school through resilience

and protective factors is critical, especially because research demonstrates how closely educational achievement is linked with future employability, overall quality of life (Gaetz, 2008, 2013; Liljedahl et al., 2013; MacDonald, 1997), and connections to the mainstream community, as well as the dignity of these young people.

Chapter Summary

A review of the literature demonstrates that youth who experience homelessness face multiple and systemic barriers that do not allow them access to basic human rights. Such barriers also present themselves within the education system, which inevitably contributes to their disengagement from mainstream schooling. The pathways that lead to becoming homeless are diverse, and therefore different public systems (healthcare, education, child protection, justice, and employment supports) need to collectively engage for a more integrated and collaborative responses, with the intelligence of young people with lived experience kept at the forefront of finding ways forward (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018; Gaetz et al., 2020; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). Review of the literature also reveals that research with homeless youth points to strong linkages between homelessness, poverty, educational disengagement, and social exclusion – a framework that will be further examined in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

I use social exclusion, a critique of neoliberalism, and psychoanalysis as the primary conceptual and theoretical frameworks for this study. Scholars who write about youth homelessness often view the topic through the lens of social exclusion, which I believe to be a valuable framework for making sense of student engagement, disengagement, and school dropout for youth who are at risk of becoming, or currently, homeless. Particularly in the context of an understanding of how widely accepted neoliberal orientations produce a downloading of risk and responsibility on to individuals, we can examine how homeless youth face multiple and often intersecting forms of social exclusion (Dolson, 2015; Karabanow, 2010; Klodawsky et al., 2006).

I consider these frameworks useful to understand youth homelessness from an advocacy, social justice, and human rights lens. Like other scholars who examine exclusionary factors that limit youths' access to basic rights, I attempt to explain how neoliberal doctrines govern, control, restrict, manage and regulate behaviours, which are revealed through the exclusion of youth, who are often dehumanized and therefore judged and perceived as "uncivilized," "deviant," and "other" (Freud, 2002; Macdonald, 1997; Sibley, 1995). While such theories can be used to highlight why youth get stuck in a cycle of poverty and homelessness, psychoanalysis provides further possibilities for thinking and acting. A psychoanalytic lens allows for an alternative look into the social alienation of homeless youth and the lack of response to youth by society in general. Here, an exploration of anxieties, guilt, suffering, and responsibilities towards social justice issues may evoke the self-reflexivity needed to understand homelessness in new ways, and our potential role in preventing the problem.

Social Exclusion and Youth Homelessness

Doing this research allowed me to inquire into the lived realities of young people who are homeless, which shed light on conditions and experiences of social exclusion that put youth at risk; these are related to restricted access to housing, employment, and education (Abramovich & Shelton, 2017; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Gaetz et al., 2018; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). Existing and emerging literature about homelessness suggests that to be young and homeless is considered to be one of the most serious manifestations of social exclusion; various complex systemic, structural, and individual factors contribute to this (Adams, 2003; Blackman, 1998; Bryne, 2005; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Gaetz et al., 2018; Hyman et al., 2011; Macdonald, 1997, 2006; Macdonald & Marsh, 2005; Robinson, 2013) and such factors often extend far beyond the lack of physical or material needs (Watson et al., 2016).

For the purposes of my dissertation, the concept of social exclusion as it relates to the experiences of young people who are homeless can be operationalized as the restriction of participation in one's community; the violation and denial of access to basic human rights, services and institutions; and being denied dignity and respect (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). Social exclusion will also be understood as "the experiences and circumstances by which particular people are shut out of society's social, economic, political, and cultural institutions" (Byrne, 1999; Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 42; Mandianapour, 1998). This "shutting out" process is systemic, whereby people are barred from the social, cultural, political, and economic benefits that others accrue (Dhillon, 2011, p. 111).

Laderchi et al. (2003) and Gaetz & O'Grady (2013) further our understanding by characterizing social exclusion as stemming from extreme poverty and multiple hardships. While this is true, the concept also accounts for deprivations in other aspects of social life such as

health, education, and employment (O'Reilly, 2007). Social exclusion also points to changes that occur in the whole of society (e.g., neoliberal regimes and ideologies, safe-streets acts, or zero-tolerance policies) that have greater consequences for some than others (Byrne, 2005). Multiple and intersecting layers define and maintain this problem, due to the way that the complexities of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, citizenship, and sexual orientation are mediated and produced through lived realities (Dhillon, 2011). Learning more about the ways in which the daily realities of youth are patterned by exclusions "allows us to make sense of the degree to which individual experiences and histories overlap with … poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, racism, sexism and homophobia that restrict youths access to spaces, institutions and practices" (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013, p. 252), resulting in "social isolation, restricted access to opportunities and more narrow life choices" (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002 as cited in Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 42).

Nichols and Braimoh (2016) state that "social exclusion refers to complex, interlocking social relations that all people participate in and (re)produce" (p. 13). Being young and homeless, and therefore excluded and isolated, is one of the outcomes of such relations and can make youth feel "entirely alone"; this was a shared sentiment amongst many youth who participated in focus groups across Canada (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 113). For these youth, "this isolation often intersected with bias-based discrimination and stigmatization on the basis of class, mental health status, disability, sexuality, race, and other identities," with youth sharing "painful memories of being kicked out of public spaces and businesses on these bases, sometimes under threat of arrest." There were few free, non-discriminatory spaces available for youth, and as a result, mental health and addiction issues developed or worsened (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 113).

In this way, social exclusion points to the way our social relations are categorized, organized, and constrained to produce exclusionary conditions for young people (Nichols &

Braimoh, 2016). Homeless youth suffer the impacts and circumstances that social exclusion produces for them, through factors such as "inadequate housing, lack of income, educational disengagement, compromised health, weak social capital, chaotic lives, and interrupted phases of adolescence" (Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 42). Accordingly, responses to youth homelessness must be grounded in an understanding of these multiple sites of exclusion, especially from institutions such as the homelessness sector, education, and family (Cohen & Wardrip, 2011; Dhillon, 2011; Macdonald & Marsh, 2005; Winland et al., 2011).

Social Exclusion and Neoliberalism

My research also examined the educational experiences and needs of young people who are homeless; as such, I centre theories of social exclusion and the concept of "otherness" as an explanation for why so many homeless youth are unable to pursue their education. Here, it is vital to explore through a neoliberal context how the exclusionary process of "othering" and individualizing problems of poverty or homelessness unfolds for youth who become homeless. Neoliberalism is a political and economic doctrine and ideological orientation that favours less involvement from government, greater free-market competition, and diminishing economic and social safety nets, disinvestment in affordable housing, and an increase in precarious, part-time employment (Harvey, 2007; Johnstone et al., 2017; Karabanow et al., 2010; Larner, 2008; McKeen & Porter, 2003; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Webb & Gazso, 2017; Wilson, 2007).

Long studied and debated, neoliberal thought and practice supports a selfish and radical celebration of individualism (Giroux, 2015), self-sufficiency, and placing blame on the increased number of people who are struggling to meet their basic needs and find a sense of political, economic, and social citizenship and viability, despite the unfavourable social policy reforms

over the past several decades (Dolson, 2015; Giroux, 2015; Harvey, 2007; Hillman, 2016; Howard, 2007; Johnstone et al., 2017; Karabanow et al., 2010; Kennelly, 2011; 2018b; Webb & Gazso, 2017). Many scholars in this field argue that increases in the number of people facing poverty and homelessness in Canada can be attributed to the neoliberal restructuring of welfare programs and the decline of funding to support the building of affordable housing (Bridgman, 2001; Dolson, 2015; Karabanow et al., 2010; Kennelly, 2011; Webb & Gazso, 2017).

In a neoliberal society, "shared social, economic resources and supports are reduced" (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013, p. 245), and those most impacted are low-income groups, minorities of colour, the unemployed, the homeless and immigrants – all of whom are considered as disposable by financial and political elites (Giroux, 2015, p. 103). Despite any of this, social issues like poverty and homelessness are explained through "freedom of choice narratives," personal motivation, and morality, upholding the misleading and false idea that individuals have produced impoverished conditions due to personal shortcomings and inadequacy, which deceptively shifts the responsibility away from the government and society to address these issues, towards shifting the responsibility to individuals (Giroux, 2015; Hillman, 2016; Johnstone et al., 2017; Kennelly, 2011; Webb & Gazso; 2017; Willse, 2010). In addition, "the neo-liberal citizen [all of us]" is perceived as "the 'manager' of his or her own risk; one who contributes to the economy while at the same time caring for his or her family"; this is "informed by the neo-liberal critique of Beck (1992) and Foucault (1991)" (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013, p 245).

For years, scholars have examined how people who experience homelessness in relation to social exclusion and neoliberalism "have been depicted as morally inferior and lazy (the 'deprivation' narrative), to blame for their misfortune (the 'choice' narrative), and as potential criminals in need of confinement and punishment (the 'criminality' narrative)" (Schwan, Gaetz

et al., 2018, p. 61; Sylvestre & Bellot, 2014). These troubling ideologies become accepted as truths and normalized even though they reproduce major inequities and suffering, and homeless people are conceptualized as unruly, people who pollute our spaces, social "burdens" for mainstream society, and "irresponsible" beings who are incapable or unwilling to perform economically, educationally, and socially (Giroux, 2015; Karabanow et al., 2010; Sibley, 1995). Unfavourable neoliberal policies and practices are purposefully put in place, and already marginalized groups face severe consequences: lack of affordable housing, mental health supports, and employment; lack of support for at-risk youth and women who are victims of domestic violence; and poor provision for Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people, all of which impact minority groups who already face multiple barriers (Johnstone et al., 2017).

Left unchallenged, such narratives become threaded through various domains of society, affecting "how cities are planned, how citizens are taxed, and how our social safety net operates" (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 61), and who benefits. Most vital to understand – and fight against – is that at the core of neoliberalism is the discriminatory and oppressive idea that "at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy exists a group of people – people different from you and me – who have willingly opted out of a range of mainstream institutions; 'they' are perceived as not interested in getting jobs or going to school" (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013, p. 245).

We must problematize this, as "across Canada, there many differences in terms of privilege and opportunity, where wealth, education, discrimination and regional difference play a role," and housed individuals have distinct and significant advantages over those who experience homelessness (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013, p. 243). Homeless youth are excluded and denied basic rights to food, shelter, school, health care and the social and physical protection that most enjoy

(Reza, 2018, p. 286); the denial of these vital necessities exacerbates experiences of social, economic, and political exclusion for vulnerable young people (Nichols & Braimoh, 2016).

In some cases, it may be difficult to pinpoint exactly how and where social exclusion happens, which requires us to dig deeper. In *Geographies of Exclusion,* Sibley (1995) seeks to identify forms of social and spatial exclusion "that are more opaque instances of exclusion, the ones that do not make the news or are often taken for granted as part of the routine of daily life; these exclusionary practices are important because they are less noticed and so the ways in which control is exercised in society are concealed" (p. xii). He further argues: "in the developed society of racism, sexism and the marginalization of minority groups, exclusion has become the dominant factor in the creation of social and spatial boundaries" (p. xii).

Examples of exclusion that are less noticed appear if we consider that youth who stay in shelters may be "hidden," or not visible; or if a youth is regularly working or attending school we may not even consider them to be homeless, but they may be facing further exclusions as a result of their homelessness (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013, p. 245). Often, it is only when a young person "is panhandling or squeegeeing they become difficult to ignore, as our engagement with them – indeed, our engagement with homelessness – becomes direct, personal, visceral and to the chagrin of many, unavoidable." Furthermore, it is "when someone extends their hand, stands in front of us, speaks directly to us, looks us in the eye, homelessness is no longer invisible – it becomes something we are forced to deal with" (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013, p. 245).

Social exclusion, Sibley (1995) argues, is tied to oppression and denial; "difference is harnessed in the exercise of power" (p. 14). It is an agent of social control; it comes with power and control over social relations. Positioning and categorizing certain people as "other" allows for that control be exercised. He further argues that the homeless have been utterly dehumanized

in society, only existing as a residue, as a threat to "purity," the city, and the outside world. As a result, minorities, and homeless people, for example, are often represented as "uncivilized" and in need of being fixed, changed, civilized, or purified (Sibley, 1995). Along these lines, neoliberal philosophies view homeless and street youth as lazy, unwilling to work or engage in education; this leaves youth at the margins of society while blaming them for their circumstances (Robinson, 2013, Willse, 2010) as if homelessness is a choice, while the consequences of structural inequalities in the lives of those affected are minimized or ignored (Hillman, 2016).

Macdonald (1997, 1998), Macdonald & Marsh (2001, 2005), and Willse (2010) also maintain that, in neoliberal thinking, focus shifts to the problems certain groups of people are perceived as imposing on society, rather than the problems the state and the society creates for them. Youth are often cast in political and media rhetoric through almost entirely negative stereotypes. As such, homeless youth are seen as contaminating the spaces where the rest of us walk, rest, and relax, instilling an overwhelming fear and discomfort when we walk past a homeless person or someone who appears outside of the social order (Sibley, 1995). Stigmas then lead to the belief that homelessness is the result of personal failure rather than structural or systemic issues; societies governed by neoliberalism value individualism and meritocracy, which perpetuate the myth that success in society is solely determined by effort and skill (Powell & Barber, 2006, p. 40). In this way, neoliberalism fosters competition and toxic individualism, discourages collective responsibility and cooperation, and ties personal worth to professional achievement (Day, 2018). The most vulnerable and marginalized groups in society suffer most.

The classic neoliberal arguments are false and not as straightforward as they are typically presented to be, especially considering that many of the factors that socially exclude youth are ones we take for granted as part of everyday life. Neoliberal logic suggests that systemic barriers

do not exist but instead that homeless youth should “pull themselves up by the bootstraps” (Gaetz & O’Grady, 2013, p. 246). What results are further exclusions, and oppressive arguments such as: Why should housed people become inconvenienced by the “choices” of homeless individuals? These neoliberal constructs fill our consciousness and are followed by demonizing stereotypes and constructs of the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor (Robinson, 2013; Willse, 2010). The neoliberal narrative falsely maintains the idea that the distribution of resources, wealth and access are fair and equal, even as racism, classism, and sexism continue to limit upward mobility and inequalities continue to rise (Toolis & Hammack, 2015, p. 52).

Social Exclusion, Neoliberalism, and Education

Another focus of my research was whether education can play a central role in preventing youth homelessness; therefore, addressing issues at the intersection of exclusion, education, and homelessness is important. Research shows that low levels of educational attainment for youth becomes a barrier to their healthfully moving forward (Adams, 2003; Blackman, 1998; Byrne, 2005; Dhillon, 2011; Gaetz et al., 2010). Yet, neoliberalism also functions in the education system and works to establish a “new moral order of schooling to produce a student/subject who is appropriate (and appropriated by) the neoliberal economy” (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 1).

Current research reveals that experiences of social exclusion and neoliberalism present significant barriers for young people who are homeless to remain in school (Gaetz et al., 2018; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). While for many youth social exclusion and isolation begins at home, these experiences continue in the streets and in school, especially because school staff and peers often do not know or understand “the social environments in which young people live” (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 70). Many youth across Canada reported that “there are few processes in

schools to identify youth who are experiencing abuse, going hungry, or experiencing homelessness" (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 73), which contributes another layer to the exclusion and isolation youth already experience and feel.

Dhillon's (2011) study points to how social exclusion and neoliberalism function in schools for homeless youth, shifting our attention away from blaming youth for their personal failures in order to better understand the larger hierarchical and structural issues that can disrupt a student's access to education. In her study, "what became alarmingly clear was the way the life trajectories of these young [homeless] people were repeatedly being shaped by social forces outside the realms of 'personal choice' and 'individual accountability' – slogans synonymous with many governmental initiatives marked by the structural violence … of neoliberal regimes" (p. 111). These initiatives deny the state's responsibilities and position homeless people, and those who are jobless, as irresponsible, deviant and as the underclass (Byrne, 2005; Hillman, 2016; Klodawsky et al., 2006; Macdonald, 1997; Sibley, 1995; Visano, 2016; Willse, 2010).

Powell and Barber (2006) examine the unfortunate ways in which educational structures marginalize, exclude, and deny vulnerable youth fair and equal access to education, while simultaneously blaming them for disengagement or drop out when the poor design of the system had already assured their failure (p. 47). Highlighting how educational institutions perpetuate injustice and inequality, they reveal how the middle and upper classes dump their unresolved unconscious processes and displaced anxieties onto youth in order to regulate societal norms and maintain the status quo. Dhillon (2011), Gaetz and O'Grady (2013), and Powell and Barber (2006) stress that in order to understand why homeless youth have difficulty staying in formal schooling, we need to consider from an institutional perspective the ways in which the school system is organized, what ideologies and orientations have been adopted by the education system

and educators, and how all of these factors may be at odds with the lived experience of homeless youth. For example, schools cannot expect regular attendance, participation, and timely completion of assignments from these youth. Without shelter, food, transportation, and money, combined with inherent instability, normative school participation is very difficult (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018).

In relation, young women in Dhillon's (2011) study spoke about the complexities regarding issues of access, social and economic constraints, and alienation from teaching and learning environments. In fact, many studies find that "few adults are adequately prepared to confront the daily ravages of hunger, homelessness, family stress and political powerlessness" (Powell & Barber, 2006, p. 43; Kozol, 1991) that at risk and homeless youth face. Similarly, youth from the *What Would It Take?* study felt that teachers and peers did not understand their lived reality and absences, and homelessness was seen as their individual responsibility. Teachers were unsupportive and uncaring; they did not understand and stigmatized health risks such as drug use (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018) or drug rehabilitation efforts, which further impeded the students' ability to stay drug-free and remain in school (Dhillon, 2011). Students were judged and stigmatized for being homeless and often scrutinized by teachers and peers, as well as sexually harassed and threatened by their male peers (Dhillon, 2011).

Dhillon (2011) and Gaetz and O'Grady (2013) found that the inability to access safe housing affected youths' ability to meet the standard requirements of school such as regular attendance, dress code, school fees, and basic hygiene. Although youth recognized the importance of school in directing their careers and making ends meet, they needed to prioritize finding a safe place to live and accessing food and health care. Additionally, Dhillon (2011) argues that "schools function as a microcosm of what is happening within the larger society and

have historically acted as a vehicle for the legitimization of status quo ideas and capitalist state interests, which inevitably extend to the consignment of students" (p.113).

The status quo ultimately impacts the expectations and standards of the educational system. The status quo opinion states that it is not the school's responsibility to assist homeless youth in meeting their needs and getting an education. This ideology needs to change (Dhillon, 2011), because it distinctly draws the conclusion that society does not want certain students to succeed and therefore some children are worth less in the eyes of society (Powell & Barber, 2006, p. 40). The problem, Dhillon (2011) says, is that the educational system has not been designed for any other student than the middle-class white student. As Powell and Barber (2006) point out, by upholding the status quo, "we prevent many poorer students and students of colour from discovering that their failure is largely predetermined, and we protect privileged students from confronting the possibility that their success may not be wholly earned" (p. 41).

This issue of design is unfavourable to the needs of homeless youth, especially because Indigenous and other racialized youth, newcomers, and LGBTQ2S youth are overrepresented in the homeless youth population (Gaetz et al., 2018; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018) and struggle in school. Teachers' negative attitudes, lack of knowledge about homeless youth's needs, and stress on them to participate in school all position the individual as responsible for school failure as opposed to the school system being held accountable (Dhillon, 2011). In these instances, social exclusion becomes an important framework for understanding, as it "reveals the degree to which popular societal myths – things such as equality of opportunity, education as an equalizer, equal access to health care, safety and justice – are just that: myths that paper over the degree to which opportunity, access and rights are unevenly distributed" (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013, p. 252).

While programs to help homeless youth pursue education do exist, most aid agencies focus more on meeting basic needs of youth and "life skills". All of these factors demonstrate clear manifestations of social exclusion, whereby continued participation in school is different for homeless youth and tied to notions of failure and individual deficiency, despite their lack of resources. Not only does neoliberalism function in schools to socially exclude youth, but aid agencies and emergency services for vulnerable youth also operate with a neoliberal structure that focuses youth on training for the job market to earn an income (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013) Youth are prepared through workshops and programs aimed towards work in a precarious job market characterized by harsh competition for lower security jobs (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013).

To expect homeless youth to engage and stay motivated in achieving education in this form only further champions individualism and "one must be wary of the way neoliberalism" permeates through such a straightforward solution to school drop-out, especially because the failure of homeless youth to "stick it through" or complete education in this way may "unfortunately reinforce the neoliberal focus on individual failings and inadequacies, and the inaccurate perception that they are lazy or simply 'lack motivation'" (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013; p. 259). These exclusionary initiatives for homeless youth to complete school and get a job are deceptive ways to overshadow how neoliberalism conditions us and pacifies marginalized youth. Neoliberalism tends to unfold through internalization, where people unknowingly "take on" and "buy into" the individualistic ideology so pervasive in society today. As a result, homeless youth are pushed towards independence, and their educational aspirations are dismissed while a push towards precarious work is at the forefront (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2013), even though lack of housing, poverty, and inability to obtain basic necessities creates a daily struggle for them.

Social Exclusion, Neoliberalism, and Psychoanalysis – An Alternative Lens

In order to learn how to better respond to homelessness through listening to youths' voices, social exclusion as it relates to homelessness can also be understood through a psychoanalytic lens. I believe that psychoanalytic theories, while unconventional in the context of homelessness, have considerable value to the topic in terms of our interpersonal and social relations, which can be further examined through an understanding of the self. Exclusionary processes affect both groups and individuals, and sometimes we maintain the exclusion of others even though we know it is unjust because it supports our membership within a particular social group. Therefore, such theories can help us understand not only representations of others but also our own feelings about others which can affect our academic practice (Sibley, 1995).

All of us have walked through the city streets of Downtown Toronto, or elsewhere, and in other parts of the world and come across people who are homeless, not always thinking about how they withstand extreme cold or heat and survive in harsh environments. However, when we live passively amongst homelessness, we are complacent (Gaetz, 2014) and able to walk by as if it were normal for people to be living on the street. Such (in)actions serve to view those who are homeless as less human, legitimatizing the exploitation of homeless people and their exclusion from civilized society (Sibley, 1995). Through the mechanism of social exclusion and neoliberalism, it may be possible that our complacency around the issue of youth homelessness is created by the very civilization we are a part of (Freud, 2002; Sibley, 1995; Todd, 2003).

Though Freud's thinking is grounded in psychology, his work has implications across diverse fields. His text on *Civilization* draws in and also departs from his most commonly known psychoanalytic theories about human behaviour. While not the focus of my work, I am aware that Freud believed there to be the three main components of the mind – the id, ego and superego

– my focus is more on how we can use his theories of what happens in the mind (and sometimes what happens in the unconscious mind) to relate to the social world and its application to our broader communities and social problems (Twenlow & Parens 2006).

We can use his work to potentially understand and solve issues of social justice, such as homelessness, from a different lens. Drawing from this earlier work about the id, ego and superego, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud attempts to understand how a person's inherent and individual psychic forces (ex. id, ego and superego) interact with larger social forces, how they manifest on the social level and how people relate to their societies (Schlegel, 2017, p. 2). Using psychoanalysis may help us better understand how to actively intervene regarding how the group or community functions, and how such groups of people can collaborate on potential solutions (Twenlow & Parens 2006).

Freud's (2002) work can be used to suggest that the tensions in our society around youth who are homeless can be attributed to the fundamental tensions between civilization and the individual, and the way societies are structured due to civilization (Sibley, 1995). For instance, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud (2002) argues that the means we use to protect ourselves against the threat of suffering are a product of the civilization in which we live (p. 25). In large part, his suggestions in this brief text offers a response to conventional notions of civilization as progress and development. Freud explores civilization's negative features, discussing the limitations and possibilities of the demand that civilization forces on human existence, which ultimately creates the unhappiness we feel within.

As Freud's frustrations and ambivalences unfold through his text, the issue of (un)happiness, misery, and suffering become apparent and allow us to re-think more broadly the notion of pedagogy and education. Furthermore, civilization is a tool we have created to protect

ourselves from unhappiness; yet, paradoxically, it is the very thing that creates our greatest source of unhappiness, as it is built upon human ideals of control, beauty, hygiene, and order, which are often difficult for certain individuals to "keep up" with and abide by. More specifically, what we term "barbarous," "savage," or "uncivilized" are those who cannot conform to civilization, those who do not fit the ideals set out by modern civil society (Freud, 2002; Sibley, 1995[16]).

Freud's work raises a very important question for me: is it possible that the ideals of a civilization (and here I also include current neoliberal conditioning and ideologies) are responsible for youth alienation, stigma, social exclusion, and lack of support? Using Freud's work, I would argue that one of the reasons why youth who are homeless remain so vulnerable is because civilization is institutionalized, and this institutionalization creates barriers and excludes people. As a result, because of their vulnerability and inability to keep up with certain ideals, society most often thinks of homeless people as uncivilized: incapable of maintaining membership in civilized society, and therefore seen as "other." However, if we think about this more, we realize that during adolescence, it seems typical of *all* young people, not only homeless youth, to test out, rebel against, and reject the ideals of our civilization – we all did.

Amidst such ideals, homeless people are constantly constructed as "other": as persons who stand outside of the existing social order and threaten its existence (Mosher, 2002, p. 52 as cited in Robinson, 2013). This potential threat to social order forces us to keep those who do not fit our ideals at a distance, in order to regulate our fears and anxieties, which are powered further

[16] An alternative viewpoint from a Marxist perspective about this line of thinking or this analysis of "civilization" is challenging to reflect on as Marx passed away long before Freud's time. However, it is an interesting consideration because I think Marx would see civilization as a series of organizational structures or super structures, whereby each of us is responsible for ensuring that all parts of the systems and structures we live amidst work well for not some, but all. I think Marx might also discuss internal tensions, issues of power and class conflicts within civilization such that certain dominant ideological orientations are a way for the ruling class to control the working class.

by the media and society, especially when pertaining to homeless youth (Gaetz et al., 2013; Sibley, 1995). All of these factors contribute to the exclusion of homeless persons from the boundaries of both public spaces and consciousness (Mosher, 2002 as cited in Robinson, 2013, p. 31; Sibley, 1995). Powell and Barber (2006, p. 38) would suggest that such behaviours can be considered irrational and also unconscious, because when the complexity and diversity of society increases, our collective anxieties also intensify; and when our anxieties increase, one of the common responses is to employ maladaptive social defenses to avoid the underlying conflict.

Moreover, Freud (2002) would argue where there is a civilization, there is discontent; and where there is discontent, there will be the superego and problems of morality – this is where his earlier work is weaved into the text. This is especially so because civilized values and impossible ideals inevitably distort our natural and instinctual aggression, imposing a terrible burden of guilt (Freud, 2002). To be more specific, Freud suggests that instinctual aggression is like an oceanic aggressiveness that threatens to shatter civilization in the wake of its own pleasure (p. xvi), and that having to control our pleasurable impulses adds to our suffering. Tensions around searching for and achieving happiness (which can be differently defined for each person) are also largely responsible for our unhappiness, because unhappiness and suffering affect us deeply and point to our relationship to the civilized world and our relationship with the self.

Experiences of youth who are homeless provide examples of social exclusion in the way that youth are identified and labeled as different due to the narrow beliefs and actions of others. Kidd (2007) writes about the detrimental effects of social exclusion and stigma on homeless youth. His findings suggest that young people who are homeless express hurt, unhappy, and guilty feelings when faced with others' responses to their homelessness. The youth he interviewed report that others in the dominant society treat them like outcasts and think the worst

of them. They are insulted by strangers, and people think they are lazy and disgusting. In addition, most of the homeless youth felt that they had to "fight against the opinions and values of society" (p. 5). This othering process takes a toll on the psyche, instilling insecurity, shame, and inferiority. All of these experiences are understood to be different or deviate from the ideals of the "social norm." In differentiating others, we often attribute negative feelings onto those differences, which can have the effect of placing the individual outside of the cultural models of "normalcy" (Kidd, 2007) and "civilization." Our feelings about other people, marked as different, bring forth central questions about the self, the way in which individual identity relates to social, cultural, and spatial contexts (Sibley, 1995).

Freudian psychoanalysis claims that one form of repression is an excessive concern with cleanliness and order (Freud, 2002). Freud emphasizes cleanliness and order, distancing the self from both the uncertainties and fears of the urban environment and the "other" who lives amidst it. Urges to make separations – between clean and dirty, ordered and disordered, "us" and "them"[17] – are narrow discourses and dichotomous worldviews deployed to govern young people. Youth identities are then made to reflect anxieties about social order and disorder, making representations of young homeless bodies and identities a means by which normative boundaries can be constructed and structural inequalities legitimised (Farrugia, 2016).

How can powerful systems and structures that we ourselves have contributed to creating seen to be so contaminated by those with the most limited resources? Powell and Barber (2006) would suggest that "the 'institution of the mind' of school requires a denigrated 'other,' someone

[17] I agree with Sibley (1995, p. 7) "The question of otherness, however, can only be discussed meaningfully in a cultural context, for example, in relation to racism or to a "colonial other." Thus, enthusiasm for psychoanalysis in the social sciences has to be tempered with an acknowledgement of its failure to deal adequately with difference."

to do badly, someone to fail, and someone to be less capable" (p. 47). Could it be possible, then, that it is easier and more convenient to displace blame onto someone else, so as not to threaten the self? Despite research that illustrates how systemic and structural inequities have excluded youth, our neoliberal conditioning presents them as violating the norms of the social order. Homeless youth are constructed as not following social norms and conventions (ex. making money, tending to personal hygiene, and having secure places to sleep) (Robinson, 2013, p. 32).

Freud (2002) points to three different sources of suffering: the superior power of nature, the frailty of our bodies, and the inadequacies of the institutions that regulate our relations with one another in the family, the state, and society (p. 24). The most relevant here is the third source, the way the mutual relations of human beings are regulated through institutions, and the social relations that affect a person as a neighbor, employee, or sexual object, as a member of a family, or as a citizen of state (p. 32). Our social relations with youth who are homeless make this point very clear, as the perception of discrimination based upon negative stereotypes makes youth in these positions feel worthless, guilty, and lonely and socially alienated (Kidd, 2007; Sibley, 1995). This "othering" process encourages constructs of homeless individuals as "other than citizens", which increases the vulnerability of this group to economic, social, and political exclusions, marginalization, and further stigma (Feldman, 2004 as cited in Robinson, 2013).

However, it becomes particularly difficult to keep ourselves free from certain ideal requirements and to grasp what pertains to civilization in general; this difficulty causes suffering and guilt. This sense of guilt places itself in consciousness easily and this dominates our lives (Freud, 2002). Here, I attempt to examine the construct of guilt in two ways; first off, exploring why dominant society ignores homelessness, and secondly, how guilt operates in the research relationship. These two uses of guilt will support my understanding of how, in ignoring and

helping homeless people, we often miss the voices of youth. Todd (2003) provides a radical staring point to think about this lack of response by suggesting that “to discuss this type of distancing is precisely a struggle with the question: how *does* one respond when one both is guilty and yet has not ‘done’ anything wrong, when one is ‘strangely innocent’?” (p. 112).

This question of strange innocence largely interests me as it points me towards questioning whether guilt pushes us towards responding well and confronting the suffering of others, or whether it keeps us at a distance from those in need, because alongside guilt we feel we have not directly done wrong. Complicating our attempts to understand or respond to another’s experience in these situations is the often obvious sense of remorse that sets in when facing of another’s pain, not because one has been directly involved in causing that pain, but because the self is nonetheless called into account in confronting it (Todd, 2003, p. 93). In this way, can guilt be used as an excuse to stop caring - about the issue of youth homelessness, for example - or more specifically, is guilt a defense against confronting another person’s suffering?

Todd (2003) notes that it has become commonplace for individuals to proclaim their guilt and their feelings of responsibility for deeds they have not directly committed; “when discussing the issue of urban homelessness, for example, students frequently say they feel so guilty because they do not know what to do to help ... these students generally feel weighed down by the inadequacy of their position in the face of suffering they are witness to and they express a sense of being overwhelmed by the enormity of it all, struggling to maintain a sense of hope, when all they feel is despair” (Todd, 2003, p. 93). I share similar sentiments since I have not intentionally created or caused homelessness directly or consciously but continue to feel guilty about it.

Following Todd, it may be that we have been made to feel guilty by the very pedagogy that is supposed to make us feel enlightened, and I continue to struggle with whether or not this

is productive. Although Todd cautions us against simply dismissing guilt as a moral failure, as a grossly inadequate response to the suffering of others (p. 113), it is important to be aware of this kind of guilt, as well to ensure that we use our guilt for good instead of harm. Where does this guilt come from? Todd (2003) suggests that guilt signals to the self that one is implicated in a wrong committed against an other. Guilt assumes a social responsibility, where the other's well-being is always at risk. Furthermore, "guilt connects the self to the external world, to the realm of the social" (p. 94). Todd's (2003) discussion of guilt makes it "a feeling that is more closely tied to how the self is perceived in terms of the quality of relationships with others" (p. 95).

Understandably, it is difficult to accept social suffering when there is so much disorder in the world, and to such different degrees. It is also difficult to understand what others have been through as there are limits to our understanding, and therefore limits to our obligation to others and our responses as well. We have become so utterly susceptible to the world and to others thoughts, due to the structures of civilization, that guilt now places a potential burden on us (Freud, 2002), one that is at times too difficult to bear. The ways in which societies are regulated through civilization, and the way that most of us accept homelessness by living amongst it and simply "walking by," also makes me wonder if civilization may also regulate our guilt.

Suffering and guilt can also arise in a person when they are unable to conform to the ideals or expectations of modern society (Freud, 2002), or in people who encounter such a person. Our susceptibilities to guilt surface in relation to our own understanding and desire to help others who are suffering; the guilt we feel might point us towards the social responsibility needed in order to think about how we can shape another person's life. Alongside these tensions, it becomes apparent that feelings of guilt as they respond to the suffering of others, and more

specifically to the suffering of youth who are homeless, can provide a more complex understanding of guilt, and a broader understanding of homelessness.

When we see or think of a person who is homeless, guilt can arise, but often this guilt is left unconscious and is experienced as anxiety or "discontent" (Freud, 2002). Guilt can be displaced, causing the person who encounters homelessness to distance themselves from their fellow human being. This inability to recognize our responsibility is a form of societal denial (Powell & Barber, 2006, p. 42). Through this distancing or othering from the fear of associating with those who are rejected by the dominant society, the idea of civilization creates barriers and excludes certain kinds of people. This may also point to some of the darker sides of feeling guilt towards others, whereby we do not feel the need to envision ourselves in the shoes of another, and whereby neoliberalism, amidst civilization and its ideals, promotes in us selective responses.

Relating Todd's (2003) discussion of guilt to Freud's (2002) discussion of civilization, I believe we need to use our susceptibility to guilt to open up possibilities to think more about where we stand in relation to youth who are homeless. For instance, going back to the aspects of stigma measured in Kidd's (2007) study, feelings of shame and guilt that homeless youth felt had the greatest adverse impact. How can we bring together the guilt we feel towards homeless youth and the guilt the youth feel towards themselves, instead of letting the guilt distance us? To do so, we need to remind ourselves that there is hope in learning from the other, and that guilt can facilitate such learning (Todd, 2003). It is understandable that we feel susceptible to and dismiss our feelings of guilt. It can be hard to work through our own implication in the other's suffering and social injustices. Even when we may not have "done" anything directly, I would suggest that we may still feel guilty for accepting the social wrong – for accepting homelessness while doing nothing to address it (Todd, 2003). Doing nothing *is* doing something.

Diversi and Finley (2010) provide an example of this kind of guilt through Finley's extensive work and experiences with street youth, stating "it is immoral, shameful and pathetic for any society to accept homelessness for people who do not want to be homeless" … especially since "most people don't choose homelessness, but it is forced upon them" (p. 14). Finley's use of the words "immoral," "pathetic," and "shameful" to describe those who accept homelessness calls the self into question. Interestingly, her words also suggest that in feeling nothing, we are in fact "doing" something. When we defend against feelings that cause us pain and suffering, not feeling guilty or ashamed in the face of homelessness and doing nothing *is* in fact doing something. Diversi & Finley (2010) often wonder, with anxiety, whether their own work is "platitude," trivial and banal for homeless people who take the time to interact with them because they know those people are also managing life on the streets – which is a difficult predicament for many scholars doing work with individuals in a homeless condition.

If we think about conducting research with homeless youth from a methodological and self-reflexive standpoint, scholars like Diversi and Finley and myself "have the choice to move from the harshness of the streets back to the safety of our own homes" (Diversi and Finley, 2010, p. 14). Again, the danger in feeling too guilty lies in being overwhelmed by the amount of social injustice we encounter, and our focus again shifts less towards what can be done for the others than towards trying to come to terms with our own privilege (Todd, 2003, p. 93). As such, we need to remain aware of our privileged standpoint when doing research with those who have been increasingly marginalized, so that we do not (un)wittingly abuse the power of our guilt to shape representations and interpretations of lived experience (Diversi and Finley, 2010). What we do with our guilt cannot be used to advance our own or to make people in our research, activism, and volunteer service worlds treat us with more respect (Diversi and Finley, 2010, p.

16). It is critical to truly understand the experience of others as they tell it; and at the same time, we must remember that critical self-reflexivity is not the end of this work.

Conceptual and Theoretical Contributions and Reflections

Scholars who write about youth homelessness and social exclusion make clear that homeless youth negotiate complex and repetitive barriers on all levels to access food, health care, education, housing, employment, and the justice system (Gaetz et al., 2018; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). The literature about social exclusion, neoliberalism, and psychoanalysis explored in this chapter suggests that when examining youth homelessness in relation to education we need to deeply analyze issues of social justice and social (in)equality in Canada (Dhillon, 2011). In order for this to happen, a social exclusion framework should always include the voices of homeless youth, so that we can hear from youth about the inner workings of the barriers they face.

For youth who participated in my study, experiences of social exclusion, oppression, and discrimination were not always explicitly told to me; but in the shortest utterances, all the ways in which society and institutions had "turned their backs" on youth unravelled. Facing social exclusion and marginalization was an inherent part of young people's lived realities, and the way neoliberalism places blame on vulnerable individuals and leaves people to figure things out without the support required to do so, was something young people were forced to embody. They further understood this exclusion through the multiple and intersectional ways by which they were marginalized due to racism, classism, sexism, and ageism, which are all daily realities for youth whose identities have been misunderstood and crushed in society and in schools.

Social exclusion and neoliberalism are processes that are constant in the lives of these youth. In fact, past *and* present exclusions influenced the conditions of youths' experiences of

homelessness and of their belonging – in domains such as families, schools, and mainstream society. Social exclusion and neoliberal doctrines of empowerment, self-sufficiency, and independence hide the ways in which marginalized people are further oppressed. Neoliberalism presents itself through a lens of freedom of choice and independence, but for homeless youth, all of their individual decisions are still governed with scrutiny by the social, further contributing to the exclusions they face. Paradoxically, homeless youth are invisible and excluded, dehumanized and othered, and yet also the focus of selective attention – included in media and left on the streets, put on display for the public to see. The systems and structures that (re)produce and housing insecurity and deprivation are the exact same systems and structures that challenge and criticize the problem, despite having significantly contributed to its creation.

Neoliberal thought also operates in schools to exclude youth. Students who are at risk of becoming homeless, or are homeless, are excluded by the very institution that promises to support them, which should make us question whether the education system truly understands the nature of the social inequality and exclusion that is producing youths' conditions of homelessness in the first place (Dhillon, 2011) and that we as educators have our own blind spots amidst the institutions that we work within (Britzman, 2003; Pitt & Britzman, 2003). Education should be understood as a basic and human right, as fundamental to civilization and human freedom (King, 2005, p. xxiii as cited in Gordon & Zinga, 2012). When homeless youth are expected to "show up" and perform in the same way as their housed peers, social exclusion, and neoliberalism – which disguises itself as a system that provides freedom of choice and independence – actually limit these youths' human rights, opportunities, and choices.

Unfortunately, "education under neoliberalism is a form of radical depoliticization, one that kills the radical imagination and hope for a world that is more just, equal, and democratic"

(Giroux, 2015, p. 107). In this way, the experiences of social exclusion in neoliberal context have powerful capacities for the perpetuating of youth homelessness and in the same way may present powerful barriers for the prevention of youth homelessness. Several factors discussed thus far may explain our lack of response to the issue of homelessness, such as not wanting to face how we are complicit in this problem; we may not want to look inward at ourselves because then we will have to do something about it. After all, solving any problem requires us to reposition ourselves. Why is this response (or lack thereof) acceptable? This research forced me to consider the significant role that my feelings of guilt play in wanting to research and represent individuals who are homeless. This strange form of guilt is felt by students, teachers, and researchers faced with our desire to create new knowledge through researching other people's suffering. To begin addressing my guilt also requires the researcher, teacher, and the lifelong student in me to work through my sources (Diversi and Finley, 2010; Tarc, 2013; Todd, 2003).

The topic of guilt complicates my role as a researcher, as it makes me think of what the role of guilt is in an institutionalized place like academia, where, amidst the competition for publications and attempts to sound articulate, and even though we try hard not to ever allow a person to be invisible, sometimes we are all "guilty of not fully acknowledging the Other" (Diversi and Finley, 2010, p. 16). Acknowledging guilt may lead us to reflection and insight, as well to our being able to evoke positive and ethical change with regards to our responses to other people that we feel guilty for. Expressions of guilt, empathy, and understanding towards homeless youth can also justify the multiple forms of exclusion, isolation, and inequities that they face, pointing to who benefits from productions of guilt-fueled work and empathy. In feeling guilty about the suffering of others, we may also be unconsciously longing for our own guilt to diminish. If this is true, then in thinking about our guilt, or attempting to satisfy it, we

may not always think about the other, desiring our own self-interest over another's. There is value in this self-interest, as this mode of guilt makes available to us possibilities for our *own* emotional education and growth.

In being open to seeing and listening to things as others do through our feelings of guilt, we gain a broader perspective and an increased awareness and understanding of the possible modes of responses to the world. Therefore, in responding, we may come to see *our* world and *our* possibilities anew (Tarc, 2013). Although letting guilt lead us in this way is valuable for the self, it seems that through this unconscious guilt we seem to fall short of our responsibility to the other (Todd, 2003). If we feel guilty about what to do when a homeless person asks us for something – whether it be money, food, or a place to stay – do we pay a small price of responsibility to them, in order to feel less guilty ourselves? If a homeless person asks us for money and we give them a dollar, does that temporarily suppress our guilt, or make us feel better about our guilt, enough that we forget our encounter or even the larger social issue? Perhaps, in a capitalist, neoliberal, and materialistic society such as ours, we may sometimes "pay the price" to reduce our guilt and make ourselves feel better about the insufferable injustice we live amidst.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined how the frameworks of social exclusion and neoliberalism can provide a deeper lens into the lived reality that many youth who are homeless face, including how exclusions and the policies and practices of neoliberalism operate to present barriers in schools and the education systems. In order to acknowledge and understand the injustices of homelessness, actively listening to and having discussions with youth is a very necessary part of

this endeavour. Through a psychoanalytic lens, we may also be able to reflect on homelessness in terms of recognizing our own complacency amidst it (Powell & Barber, 2006; Sibley, 1995).

The methodology chapter that follows is informed by the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. Mixed methods, including surveys and in-depth interviews, allowed me to listen to and engage with young homeless people about their experiences. In hearing the narratives of youth, I believe we can further understand the more obscure and complex processes of social exclusion and how they work to present barriers, and what we can do to eliminate these barriers so that youth may have the opportunity to transition to adulthood in healthful and safe ways. Through the lens of social exclusion, we can read stories of youth from their own vantage points.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Research methodology always brings forth challenges, regardless of whether the approach is quantitative or qualitative; research is subjective and can be messy. Quantitative orientations, being related to numbers, are often taken to imply precision, whereas qualitative research is seen as focused on acquiring a greater depth of social understanding about experiences, phenomena, culture, or processes (Berg 2007; Hatch 2002; Leavy, 2017; Mason, 2018; Maxwell, 1996). This study uses qualitative in-depth interviews alongside a quantitative survey. As youth homelessness is a complex social problem, I believe both methods play important roles in a holistic examination of the population.

Together, these approaches allowed a rich understanding of the perspectives and experiences of young homeless people and "the contexts in which those perspectives and experiences are situated" (O'Brien et al., 2014, p. 1245). This chapter will provide a detailed overview of the qualitative and quantitative methods used in my study, and an exploration of the research design, the setting, and sample, and the specific methods of data collection, recruitment, and data analysis. This chapter will also include ethical considerations, research constraints and the limitations that must be considered when working with young people experiencing, homelessness, one of the most vulnerable and socially excluded populations.

My Research Questions

Being able to convey a clearly formulated set of research questions is fundamental to qualitative research (Mason, 2018). As such, the study presented in this dissertation is framed by the following research questions:

1) What are the experiences of being young and homeless in York Region?
2) What are the educational experiences of young people who are homeless?
3) In what ways has homelessness impacted young people's academic engagement and school achievement, prior to their becoming homeless and once they are homeless?
4) What are the educational needs of young people who are homeless, and how can the education system better respond to these needs?
5) How can institutional responses and supports prioritize education and schooling as part of a central strategy to prevent, support, and respond to young people who are homeless?
6) What can we learn about youth homelessness prevention from the voices of youth?

The chapters that follow demonstrate how asking these research questions has helped me better understand the causes of youth homelessness, and the ways it impacts youths' experiences in school. To answer these questions, I asked youth how homelessness and/or institutional supports made staying engaged in school, or staying in school, a challenge, and what would help to alleviate or prevent this. Questions about how institutional supports can work alongside the education system to support staying in school and prevent homelessness prompted several follow-up questions: what barriers do young people face in accessing resources? What specific barriers do homeless youth face in being able to access and engage in education? Do homeless youth feel supported by teachers and school administration? If not, how can we change things?

Mixed Methods: Different Ways of Knowing

Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches

To address these research questions, I used a mixed methodology, which combined qualitative and quantitative approaches and analysis. Mixed methods are framed around the idea

of gathering both qualitative and quantitative data and then combining and integrating the two datasets to analyze and convey what has been learned about the research subjects (Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2018). Scholars who see mixed methods as essential to research suggest that since there are multiple ways of viewing the world, it makes sense to apply mixed methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of that world and the data and persons involved (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Leavy, 2017).

While research demonstrates that qualitative *and* quantitative methods can enable the researcher to explore different parts of a process or phenomenon (Mason, 2018, p. 34), in the Faculty of Education at York University qualitative research is a prominent method used when conducting research. For this reason, even though both quantitative and qualitative components helped me address my research questions, when I decided to include a quantitative aspect alongside my qualitative research design, this decision was met with complexity, critique, and debate, not only within myself but from others as well. The most common questions that my academic peers and colleagues asked me were: “Why did you include surveys?” “What exactly are you measuring”? and “What will the surveys tell you that the interviews will not”?

Although this is never entirely possible in research, including both methods did help me to acknowledge and minimize bias. For instance, the quantitative aspects of mixed methods research can increase the reliability and validity of qualitative research results and analysis, allowing the researcher to draw comparisons, view the research through multiple angles, and make stronger interpretations of the data – what is referred to as triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Flick, 2018; Schwandt, 1997). Diversifying our methodological toolboxes is also essential to advance our understanding of equity and justice issues (Mistry et al., 2016), such as youth

homelessness. This can enable a more sensitive research approach to the practical problems associated with a group that is hard to reach, due to the precarious nature of homelessness.

The quantitative survey provided details of homelessness that might not necessarily have been conveyed in the interview, such as age, ethnicity, and gender and sexual identity, while the interviews revealed things surveys did not; essentially, one approach informed the other. This is important; it *does* matter whether a youth who is homeless is Indigenous, or female versus male, or whether a youth identifies as gender-fluid, as there are often multiple and intersecting layers that affect these populations, which creates substantial differences in the way youth experience homelessness, their pathways and access to resources, and the exclusions they face.

Some groups (e.g., Indigenous, and other racialized youth, LGBTQ2S+ youth) are over-represented in the youth homelessness population (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Through a combined and integrated mixed methods approach, we can better understand these differences in order to find equitable solutions for youth homelessness and disengagement with school (Mann & Warr, 2017). As a result of such considerations, my survey asked youth if they identified as Aboriginal, Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, or Metis. In terms of gender, research on gender-based differences amongst homeless youth has been limited in capturing the unique experiences of youth who define as gender non-conforming. To try to better understand the range and diversity of gender identities, and how intersectionality affects the gender non-conforming population, my survey also asked youth if they identified as cisgender, transgender, gender non-binary, or two-spirit (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Knowing these specifics impacts how we, as researchers and educators concerned with social justice issues, read and analyze youth narratives and offer solutions.

I learned that a mixed methods approach was more inclusive because it provided young people with multiple options through which to participate in a project that aimed to be directly informed by their knowledge and expertise. For instance, some youth felt more comfortable sharing the specifics of age, race/ethnicity, and gender/sexual identity through the survey rather than in a face-to-face interview. Often, if a youth has faced bias-based discrimination regarding their gender/sexual identity – a potential pathway leading to becoming homeless in the first place – it may be difficult for them to disclose or reveal this in an interview with a person they have just met, especially considering they may have already faced stigma and discrimination from loved ones, people working in the homelessness sector, or teachers and friends at school. Such reflections remind us that "research is a human endeavour," and that ethics should always be at the forefront of any research design and analysis, regardless of the topic (Leavy, 2017, p. 21).

Initial Reflections on Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is never free of bias, emotional tensions, and contentions. The process of doing qualitative research invites the researcher to engage in a creative and critical practice (Gazso & Bischoping, 2018). In order to draw insights, interpret a range of data, and essentially craft and co-construct knowledge, an inevitable relationship unfolds between the researcher's self, the participants, and the places and phenomena encountered along the way. The researcher begins to think through how theoretical approaches inform practice and where more abstract and "difficult questions" begin to take shape (Gazso & Bischoping, 2018; Mason, 2018). Engaging in qualitative research also brings forth questions about which data sources to use, which sections of interview transcripts to include as most appropriate, and what these will

represent to the researcher and to the reader. Although it can be challenging, the desire to "do justice" to the participant narratives becomes central to any meaningful qualitative study.

I used the qualitative approach of ethnography to explore the experiences, perspectives, and stories of young people who are homeless. Ethnography has been around for a very long time; however, researchers from various fields use the term in seemingly different ways, with much diversity in perspectives regarding what counts as taking part in or "doing" ethnography. Ethnography has origins in anthropology and is typically concerned with culture, but has become influential in disciplines such as the social sciences and education, with variation in the way researchers think about, and practice this method (Atkinson et al., 2014; Berg, 2007; Clifford, 1988; Green & Bloome, 2005; Hammersley, 2006; Punch, 2009; Spradley, 1979).

The common consensus about ethnography views it as a form of qualitative inquiry committed to understanding the first-hand experiences of a research setting and observing, analyzing, and interpreting the point of view of the individuals who are being studied (Atkinson et al., 2014). Hammersley (2006) "takes the term to refer to a form of social and educational research that emphasizes the importance of studying at first-hand what people do and say in particular contexts" (p. 4). This often consists of fieldwork over a long period of time and includes fairly open-ended interviews, that are more like conversations, with the main goal of making meaning of people's experiences (Hammersley, 2006).

This research was not a classic ethnography because I did not live amidst the community of youth who I wanted to know more about, but I believe the length of time spent in the field was adequate to gain rich and detailed accounts of youth's lives. While ethnography also "affords an intellectual space for the researcher to explore" (Purwaningrum & Shtaltovna, 2017, p. 2) and to become personally involved and invested in the field and community under study, the essential

core of ethnography is developing an understanding of the reality of human experience and a way of life from the vantage points of the participants (Agar, 1980, 1986; Berg, 2007; Carspecken, 1996; Haig-Brown, 1995, 2010; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). In this way, ethnography involves personal and emotional identity work for both the researcher and the participants. It can be challenging, but using ethnography to engage in research with homeless populations can capture data at a greater level of depth than other approaches (Hoolachan, 2016).

Engaging in ethnographic research with homeless youth helped me better understand their lived reality, but access in shelters had to be (re)negotiated daily. Gaining access meant that I was always negotiating the continuum of access as fully granted or denied, "full, partial, conditional, or intermittent" (Mason, 2018, p. 91). Engaging with the field always felt like both intellectual and physical work and an embodied experience mixed with observation, and an analysis of the body as an embodiment of culture; after all, "we cannot divorce our scholarly endeavors from the bodily reality of being in the field" (Coffey, 1999, p. 68). As Berg (2007) explains "regardless of one's language and terminological preference ... the practice places researchers amidst whatever it is they study. From this vantage, researchers can examine various phenomenon as perceived by participants and represent these observations as accounts" (p. 172).

Using ethnography in the field of education is essential because as Diversi and Finley (2010) write: "education is key to understanding individuals' access to voice and space, but people who are un-housed or who are otherwise economically poor face systemic roadblocks and overwhelming barriers to educational access and equity" (p. 14). Empowering these voices through critical ethnographic study gives youth a right to "expression ... power, and privilege in discussion and action" (Kay, 2012, p. 23). Ethnographic research is critical and valuable when doing social justice work (Carspecken, 1996; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Järkestig et al.,

2016; O'Leary, 2004; Reed-Danahay, 2017). Therefore, if ethnographic research and interviews, observations, and meaning making "can do anything to work against the barriers homeless youth face, whether it's to influence policy or procedures, or to join youth in their attempts to find their way through the system of encumbrances," we as researchers should aim to do so (Diversi & Finley, 2010, p. 14). Spending time with youth at shelters and inviting them to share their experiences of homelessness revealed some of the ways in which youth are marginalized and subject to oppression, inequalities, and social exclusion.

Interviews and Surveys

Interviews are rich sources of data; they can tell us "crucial things about a segment of society's conversations with itself, about the ways in which the world is typically legitimated, organized and justified" (Gebhard, 2017; Van den Berg et al., 2003, p. 13). Ethnographic research sees interviews as central to the social construction of knowledge, and acknowledges the power asymmetry between the researcher and the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and that the "interviewer is contributing just as much as the interviewee" (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 99). From the lens of narrative analysis, the interview is a place where knowledge is jointly co-constructed, where researchers and narrators - or in this case, myself, and youth - share authorship of what is being revealed in the interviews (Bischoping & Gazso, 2016, p. 43), even though the story does not belong to me and is a re-telling of something I have never experienced. During interviews, I was able to experience the youths' (re)telling of their stories. I then took these stories - and because the sample size was so large - I realized I could read across stories.

As narratives and stories are central to my findings, important to note is that listening to, understanding, and gathering the narratives or life stories of youth, was my main intention when

interviewing; I wanted youth to tell me (which I would later tell others) their life stories. If narrative analysis understands the stories being told as interconnected between researcher and interviewee, whereby a collective experience is unfolding, then we must also note that this process will inevitably impact the analysis as well and the way the data will be read (Bischoping & Gazso, 2016). My objective in this study was to ask youth both structured and open-ended questions about their lives, hoping that my conversational style of interviewing would direct me to learn about what leads to homelessness and how it impacts educational experiences.

I engaged in individual in-depth interviews with 40 homeless youth across York Region and administered a 17-page survey to each participant.[18] Therefore, my interview included two parts, using two complimentary research instruments. Initially, the first part of the interview (survey) was intended for the youth and I to complete together before we engaged in the second part of the interview, which would be recorded and more conversational in nature. I quickly learned that with each new participant I had to adapt my use of the instruments. For example, I would often begin each interview by thoroughly reviewing the informed consent. I would then aim for us to complete the survey, but some youth wanted me to turn on the recorder while we completed the survey so we could intertwine the survey and interview into one larger discussion.

By using the survey as an introduction, before the interview questions, I was able to establish rapport and build a relationship of trust with the youth. Sometimes it was in these moments, before the recorder was turned on, that the youth were most vulnerable and disclosed the most information. Once I recognized this common occurrence, I began to ask the youth if I should turn the recorder on while they were filling out the survey and ask them questions

[18] The survey and interview protocol administered can be found in Appendices B and C.

throughout so that we could work on the survey and interview simultaneously; this way, I would not miss out on what they were saying before we "officially" began the interview. While the methods being used were the same, the research process I originally envisioned was unfolding differently, and I allowed it to; sometimes intellectual and practical decisions must be made on the spot. For instance, while filling out the survey, some youth would expand on a question I was planning to ask during the interview. Other youth wanted to complete the survey with me question by question and then proceed with the recorded interview portion. There were also youth who wanted to work on the survey by themselves, while we both sat quietly, and then start the second part after completing the survey in full. Due to my awareness of the social exclusion and vulnerability homeless youth face, it made sense for me to relinquish control and accommodate the research in ways that made the participants comfortable. This approach aimed to empower the youths' agency with regards to how they desired to take part in the process, enabling us to share and co-construct the way the data collection unfolded. Social justice research should always attempt for meaningful inclusion of underrepresented groups (Leavy, 2017), and this was the most practical way to do research involving human participants.

During the first few interviews, I asked: "How would you like to be identified during this interview?" or "What do you think about the term 'homeless youth'?" These questions were possible approaches for interviewing that I had learned during a qualitative methodology course at the start of my doctoral studies. However, these questions and their responses proved short-lived and awkward. In qualitative research, it is often the case that our research plans on paper never really unfold as anticipated. I quickly realized that the first interview question needed to be more general and open-ended, so I asked them to take me through a typical day in the life of a young person who is homeless or a typical day at the shelter. In trying to understand how youth

ascribe meaning to homelessness and define themselves, and to understand life for a homeless youth "as it is lived and interpreted in the participant's own words" (Toolis & Hammack, 2015, p. 53), I realized I would only learn by slowing down, being patient, and listening.

Since my original questions had failed as an entry point for conversation, those questions would need to be addressed later; I was learning all this and more with each new participant. Slight changes to the questions and the order in which they were asked allowed youth (and myself) to feel more comfortable and opened up new possibilities for discussion and connection. For instance, if a participant's account of a typical day started with medication intake or smoking weed, I was able to ask them more about that. If they disclosed anything work- or school-related, I gained insight into their employment and education. Also, if a youth told me about visiting their child or their parents, we were then able to discuss family life, pathways, and life trajectories.

Compelled to try to understand the experience of being young and homeless, I came to realize that the style of inquiry embedded within ethnography and in-depth interviewing takes meaning to be inherently personal, social, and political. As such, like other scholars who have conducted ethnography, I found it to be a particularly strong method for exploring issues of social justice (Brown, 2012; Toolis & Hammack, 2015). Through each interview, in the words we exchanged alongside what was unspoken, I felt hopeful that the participation of these youth would allow for those who are often and deliberately silenced to speak – to dismantle "traditional" methods and modes of representation and to participate in and re-write social life in ways that can evoke social change, especially for those whose lives are considered marginal (Bischoping & Gazso, 2016; Toolis & Hammack, 2015; Webb & Gazso, 2017).

The survey instrument included questions I formulated, along with an adaptation of the surveys used for the *Leaving Home* study in York Region (Noble et al., 2014) and the National

Youth Homelessness survey used for the *Without a Home* study (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). As Noble et al. (2014) write, "the survey was designed to elicit basic information from the participants, including their demographic information, employment and education histories and current mental health and substance use concerns" (p. 35). Interestingly, the youth helped me understand where the survey could be revised and made better, especially regarding repetition and around potentially stigmatizing questions that had implications for them or others. Some youth felt that the questions were rhetorical; if one is residing at a shelter, for example, then why even ask if they consider themselves to be homeless? Some participants would criticize the survey before realizing that I had created it myself, at which point they would back-peddle. This made me reflect: all of these interactions pointed to the ways in which the researcher–participant relationship is complicated by emotions, attachments, performances, and anxieties (Gazso & Bischoping, 2018).

During these interactions, I also learned that some of these youth had taken part in research in order to receive an incentive, while others simply wanted their voices and perspectives to be heard by someone who they perceived as able to make change. At times, youth shared that they felt such activities to be redundant, structured, mundane, and meaningless, unless they were otherwise attached to the person with whom they were interacting. Having youth complete the survey also provided a chance to observe their thinking, understanding, and literacy skills. I learned about their attention span and how I could alter questions or the form of the interview to better accommodate their individual needs. For example, one youth was easily distracted, had trouble processing many words on one page, and required help reading questions, and therefore worked at a slower pace. Through this interaction, I learned about his learning disability, educational experiences, and his current learning in an alternative education program.

Many of the youth said that the survey was too long and daunting. Others found it to be thorough and said that they had never been asked such in-depth questions – this gave them hope that people care enough to solve the issue of youth homelessness through trying to understand a life outside of their own, and perhaps might make changes in terms of policy and practice. It is important to note that some youth (one in particular) felt that the survey – or surveys in general – was limiting, and did not like being "boxed" into categories. For one participant, this critique furthered discussions regarding his sense of self and how he self-identifies, pointing us towards a broader discussion of youth homelessness and all of the complexities that homeless youth face. Gaining the participants' feedback on my method was a very important part of the research and helped me elicit more sensitivity towards each individual I engaged with and interviewed.

Significant learning took place not only during the adaptation/creation of the survey, but through the implementation and analysis of the survey responses. But while the survey portion provided possibilities for analysis, it was also limiting. This paradox was balanced by the qualitative portion, the face-to-face interview. I found, however, that while the qualitative interview seemed open-ended and limitless, it was not always boundless, either. In fact, the survey gave way to possibilities that the interview closed, based off the participants' openness and willingness to share and their comfort level when speaking. More specifically, those who felt shy and not willing to disclose as much during the interview were able to be more specific and detailed through the survey, and vice versa, despite both being purposeful methods.

Sampling and Recruitment

Not having much prior experience with different types of sampling or recruitment techniques beyond what I learned in an undergraduate methods class several years ago, I started

by using what I knew – which was purposive and strategic sampling. Strategic or purposive sampling, as explained by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s, is a means of selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position, and the analysis being developed (Mason, 2018; Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Since the situation of youth homelessness is complex, nuanced, situated, and contextual, this type of sampling helped me gain a deeper understanding of the research.

Participants were recruited from four shelter service agencies located in York Region, selected because they provide programming, intervention, and supports specific to youth who are homeless across York Region.[19] Agencies included Salvation Army Sutton Youth Shelter, Belinda's Place (a women's shelter, not specific to youth homelessness), Blue Door Shelter (a youth shelter, but male only), and 360 Kids Homebase and Drop-in Centre. Agencies were aware that I would be identifying their names in the study, prior to beginning the study. Also, because there are limited youth focused agencies in York Region, a quick Google search could allow for anyone to identify and locate the agencies I visited. At the same time, since the youth were given pseudonyms, none of the youth who participated in this study can be linked to a particular agency and therefore anonymity and confidentiality was always maintained. Knowing there would be youth at these shelters, my sampling also included convenience sampling, which relies on available subjects – those who are close at hand or easily accessible (Berg, 2007). The interviewees included adolescents who have stayed in shelters and places commonly associated with homelessness, such as public places, parks, bus stations, or a friend's, family member's, or

[19] *Note:* I draw from the Canadian definition of youth homelessness outlined in chapter 1, which includes youth between the ages of 13–24. However, some youth who were 25 and 26 participated in my study, which I only realized after they began filling out the survey. I did not want to exclude them, especially because they were staying at a youth focused shelter and therefore, to counteract the social exclusion youth already face, I allowed them to participate and simply expanded the definition of youth for the purpose and intentions of this research project.

acquaintance’s residence (Paradise & Cauce, 2002). Having interviewed youth at these shelters for a previous project with United Way in 2013, I was able to (re)connect with agency staff through email and ask them if I could return to their agency to conduct research again.

A research package had been created for each shelter to explain the exact goals of my research, and I created a corresponding flyer for the recruitment of interview participants.[20] Each shelter ensured that my recruitment flyer was posted at the shelter at least a week prior to my arrival. In some cases, youth had already provided shelter staff with their intention to participate and the shelter began making a list of interested participants. However, this did not guarantee participation, as the precarious nature of homelessness and the ways in which youth navigate the shelter system meant that a youth who was at a shelter one day may not necessarily be there the next day. My logic behind using this kind of sampling and recruitment was strategic, purposive, and convenient, aiming to generate a detailed and meticulous view of the phenomenon of youth homelessness and how youth are socially excluded in relation to education (Mason, 2018). However, the unavailability of youth on some days due to the chaotic and precarious nature of homelessness troubles the use of convenience sampling for this population, because even at shelters operating at capacity, sometimes youth were hard to reach.

I began recruitment and data collection in October 2016 and ended in May 2017. With mixed emotions, I slowly drove into the parking lot at Sutton Youth Shelter, the shelter I would begin my data collection at. I felt hesitation and wondered whether I should walk in casually. Indecisively, I called the volunteer coordinator instead, who did not answer but sent me a text

[20] The research package consisted of the informed consent that would be provided to youth to assure staff and youth that confidentiality would be maintained, the survey, interview protocol and a recruitment flyer / poster. A letter outlining the intention and goals of the study was also given to each agency prior to providing the research package. The full contents of the research package can be found in Appendix section of the dissertation, attached.

message asking me to come inside. As I looked up from my phone, I saw two youth coming outside to smoke a cigarette. As we stared at each other, I suddenly felt nervous and heavy-hearted; in that quick glance, this project became more real. I tried to appear casual as I left my car, grabbed my backpack, and walked towards them. I said hello and asked how to get inside, even though I knew from a previous visit. I did this to show them respect for their space; after all, I was the stranger entering their home. One of them answered. I thanked them, and walked towards the door, while I felt them watch my every move (Field Notes, October 2016).

Initially, I aimed to interview 20 youth across York Region. However, as I spent more time at shelters, I established trusting relationships with youth, which fostered participation beyond what I had originally expected, and I did not want to deny any youth's desire to participate. Continued participation also demonstrated how widespread the problem of youth homelessness was across the region. As I had anticipated, each interview was different; interviews lasted between 30–90 minutes, depending on what and how much the participants were willing to share and their schedule constraints (e.g., having to go to work or having a doctor's appointment). I met youth at the shelters, based on who was there on respective research days. Despite shelter staff knowing I was coming in, there were strict protocols for entering the shelter, and I was always expected to stay in the common room until there was a willing participant. At that point, I would be provided with a private room for interviewing, which staff would direct me to and unlock for me. At Sutton Youth Shelter, I could walk right into the common area, whereas at Belinda's Place, I could not pass the front desk without signing in (and out) as a researcher with time and date stamp, plus my signature. Blue Door Youth Shelter is a house; I had to enter from the back of the house and staff would let me in once I hit the buzzer

and identified myself. At 360 Kids, I was able to walk into the Drop-in Centre but would always go straight to the staff offices or volunteers to let them know I had entered the space.

At the site, I would first aim to let others get comfortable with me being there, often interacting with staff and greeting the youth. Sometimes I would take field notes and draw rough sketches of the space while I was settling in; sometimes youth would ask me who I was and what I was doing, and that would be a point of entry for recruitment. Most staff at each site were very helpful, and because my original letter to them had assured my research would aim to have minimum impact on service delivery, I did not expect them to help me recruit. They tried to help where they could, but also let me interact with youth and do my own recruiting. At each shelter, the recruitment was initially supported by staff with whom I had become well acquainted through my requests to conduct research at their agency and who had helped me prior to my "official" arrival. Later, the volunteer coordinators, other staff members, and social work practicum placement students who I became close with were my first point of contact when I arrived at the shelters each day. These individuals would often put my research days on their monthly calendar so that youth who reviewed the schedule would be aware of the research study and that I was coming and could consider participating. Sometimes staff members would make an announcement when I got to the shelter and ask youth to see me if they wanted to participate.

Alongside strategic, purposive, and convenience sampling, youth I was already interviewing began to help me recruit others for surveys and interviews. This is when snowball, chain, or referral sampling started to unfold (Berg, 2007). I did not ask youth to refer me to others. Originally, I had anxieties about being able to access youth for interviews, but during the data collection phase it became common that youth who took part in interviews would then recruit future subjects from amongst the peer group they had established in each respective

agency. Through observation and listening, I noted that youth who had already taken part in the survey and interview process would then "use" the incentive of $20 that I was providing to get their "friends" to participate. This was interesting, because in their referral to friends, the youth established a stronger rapport not only with me, through continued contact, but also with the person they recruited. Perhaps, recruiting friends and having others share their stories with me also made youth who had already participated feel less alone in their vulnerability with regards to having exposed their narratives to me. Snowball recruiting became very prevalent, especially at Sutton Youth Shelter and 360 Kids, where youth I had become closer with and who had enjoyed the survey and interview process could be seen outside of the interview room asking others to join my study, and explaining the intention and process of the research to their peers.

The final sample size for my study was 40 youth participants. Of the 40 youth I surveyed and interviewed, a breakdown of demographics is as follows[21]: The average age of participants was 22 years of age. The youngest participant was 16 years of age, and the eldest participants were 26 years of age; there were four of them. In terms of racialized youth, 11 participants identified as Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, or Metis. Of those 11 youth, two of them Identified as Indigenous and *also* Black (Mixed Race), and seven identified as Indigenous and *also* White. Of the remainder of youth, there were three youth who identified as Black and 21 identified as White (three of which also identified as mixed race). In addition, one youth identified as Chinese and one as West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghani, etc.).

In terms of gender identity, 26 youth identified as male and 14 identified as female and of the 14 who identified as female, one youth also identified as gender fluid and androgenous. 32 youth identified as straight-heterosexual, and three identified as bisexual. One youth identified as

[21] Please see Appendix for figures related to study design and analysis for detailed information on demographics.

gay but also as “you don’t have an option that applies to me because I try not to get caught up in labels”, two additional youth responded, “there was no option that applies to them”, one youth identified as pansexual and one youth who identified as pansexual *and* bisexual. Unfortunately, 17 youth had some involvement with CAS and important to the focus of this study especially, of the 40 youth I interviewed, 30 (75%) were ***not*** attending school at the time of interview.

Doing Field Work and Data Collection

Research never unfolded the same way each day, despite my attempts to remain consistent in terms of which days I spent at shelters and to make youth aware of when I would be there, or my ideas about recruitment. Once I had settled into the first shelter I visited, on my first day, a volunteer coordinator – who had later became more like a friend as my data collection unfolded – made an announcement to the youth as we all sat in the common room about why I was there and the research purpose. I had not even been in the field for half an hour before my first interviewee approached me. Prior to the start of the first interview, a different volunteer coordinator who was also helping me recruit handed me a wooden block to keep lodged in the crack of the door in the room provided for interviewing. She demonstrated how to use it and how it is intended to leave a slight opening in the door. She gave me a subtle but firm wink and said, “it gets hot in here,” then whispered that it was to keep the door open, “just in case.” She also asked if I was okay to be alone in the room “with them” (all of this took place in front of the first interviewee). I indicated that I was fine. Did I need the reminder she provided? Were there potential dangers that I was overlooking? Was I naïve in feeling relatively comfortable? As soon as she walked away, I quickly removed the wooden block from the crack of the door and allowed the door to shut firmly (Field Notes, October 28, 2016).

Together, the youth and I explored their pathways into homelessness. The general intent of the interview was to ask them about a day in the life of someone who is young and homeless: where do you live, where do you sleep, what resources and supports do you use? I would then ask them about when they first became homeless, and the circumstances that led them to leave home. After this, I would ask them about school, and how homelessness has impacted their schooling, followed by questions about potential learning challenges, how far along in school they are, and what factors were relevant in their engagement or disengagement in school. However, considering how shy and mistrustful interviewers and interviewees can feel during such encounters, conversations did not always flow in this order or logically, and I allowed youth to speak to the topics they preferred to focus on after I had asked a few questions.

Many of the interview questions focused on educational experiences, in order to understand what protective factors the students felt the school system offered, and what factors were relevant in their leaving. This approach allowed me to gain first-hand perspectives on youths' lives and to examine various demographics, systemic and structural issues, and challenges to the accessibility and utilization of educational services. During the interview, I also asked youth if there was anything missing from research about youth homelessness that they felt was important to address. All the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed with participants' awareness and consent. Prior to beginning data collection, all research with human participants had been approved by the Ethics Review Committee at York University, and throughout the duration of the project I made sure to follow York University's *Guidelines for Conducting Research with People Who Are Homeless.*[22] During the data collection phase, I was also able to

[22] Guidelines for conducting research with adults and youth who are homeless can be found at the following link: http://research.info.yorku.ca/guidelines-for-conducting-research-with-people-who-are-homeless/

draw upon existing research that a team of graduate students (and myself), took part in during the summer of 2013 through United Way York Region's partnership with York University's knowledge mobilization unit. That project focused on the diverse background experiences of young people who are homeless, and how York Region can improve supports for youth.[23]

During interviews, youth mentioned other Canadian programs that aim to respond to youth homelessness in Toronto and York Region, such as Covenant House and Eva's Satellite, based on their use of such resources and services. Learning about other social services and programs was useful to understand their impact, and to learn more about the social and contextual factors that may contribute to student (dis)engagement and educational attainment. While in the field, I also wrote field notes in a journal to record details of informal observations, conversations, and developing thoughts related to my analysis of interactions and experiences. When conducting ethnography, "observation through fieldwork and field notes can be an intensely personal and intimate endeavour" (Mason, 2018, p. 87), whereby much of the researcher's self is invested in the work. As a result, this dissertation also includes selections from my personal field notes and lengthy informal conversations I had with service providers, front line staff, and social workers that touch upon general themes and observations, although I avoid specifying their identities in order to maintain confidentiality and research ethics.

Examining and Analyzing the Data

Thematic Analysis of Surveys and the Stories Youth Told During Interviews

[23] The *Leaving Home* report presents the analysis and findings from a research project that was conducted over the summer of 2013. This report is intended to inspire and contribute to a broader conversation about the problem of youth homelessness, so that young people and their families get the supports they need to avoid this undesirable outcome. The full report is available at: http://www.homelesshub.ca/leavinghome.

I engaged in in-depth interviews in hopes to get young people to tell their stories. I undertook a thematic analysis of participants stories as they were told during the time of the interview, and examined and analyzed the survey and interview data using a thematic analysis; I analyzed the stories by looking for themes. Thematic analysis is a type of qualitative analysis that is appropriate for any study that seeks a systematic way to analyze data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2016). In its simplest form, a theme is another word for category. In a thematic analysis, “themes are categorized based on the frequency that they appear throughout all of the interview responses” (Mason, 2018, p. 177). However, they still convey a great deal of complexity, messiness, contradiction, and ambiguity, all of which are intrinsic to the phenomenon of youth homelessness. The themes I captured and grouped represented patterned responses, common ideas, experiences, or meanings from the surveys and interview data.

The theoretical and conceptual lens of social exclusion explored in Chapter 3 provided me with an interpretive frame to guide the thematic analysis of the data. My thematic analysis comprised of both a deductive and an inductive approach to deriving and developing codes and themes, which I believe to be an unconscious and conscious processing of information and analyzing (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2016). For instance, some of my understanding of youth homelessness comes from my previous reading of literature and my interview guide, and my awareness of what is important in terms of pathways, problems, and solutions; here I imposed categories onto the data in what is termed a deductive analysis (Smith, 2015). At the same time, I also extracted themes for this study through my analysis of the interview transcripts, meaning that categories are also grounded in and spring forth from the data, which is called an inductive analysis[24] (Glaser & Straus, 2017; Smith 2015).

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[24] Personal Communication with Dr. Amber Gazso, March 2020.

Pure inductive analysis in qualitative research is difficult because analysis is always shaped by a researcher's prior knowledge, theoretical lens, research training, and personal and political standpoints (Smith, 2015). This was clearly the case here, as doctoral students at York University are required to complete a mandatory proposal and comprehensive exam before starting in the field.[25] In addition, having interviewed homeless youth in York Region a few years prior for the United Way also contributed to my bias. When using thematic analysis, it is important not to become overly categorical or place people's narratives into tidy themes or categories, which can risk missing the point entirely (Mason, 2018). Rather, "it is useful to reflect on the broad research questions that were established at the beginning of the process and to organize the themes according to those questions" (Frederick, 2018, p. 328).

Quantitative data was entered through Survey Monkey and analyzed for basic descriptive statistics, because I was mainly interested in frequency distributions. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using Microsoft Word. Data was first sorted deductively through colour coding using broad predetermined categories such as "education" and "family and home life." Once data was organized according to these broad themes, it was coded inductively by sub-themes that emerged within each category. For example, sub-codes from the category "family and home life" included "pathways" and "learning disabilities" under the category of education.

While transcribing, I made note of frequent themes that were emerging. I then printed every transcript and, using several different coloured highlighters, I made note of emerging and consistent themes through colour coding. Initially, I went through the first few interview transcripts and started to notice common themes. My initial list of themes and categories was

[25] The proposal / comprehensive exam takes place before the data collection phase and is when doctoral students begin reading and researching about their area of interest too ensure they gain comprehensive knowledge of their field of study and to prepare the candidate for a potential career in university research and teaching.

very long and included youth sharing about social stigma, family life, health and mental health, the shelter experience, trouble with the law, employment, education and schooling, and advice for educators, along with other topics that were not spoken about enough to see consistency in themes, such as sharing a poem, or hobbies, which are important but did not come up enough or have much relevance to the research questions I was aiming to explore.

The intention behind my analysis was to respect and honour the perspectives of the youth. After having interviewed 40 young people, it was challenging to include every single interview in the data chapters, due to the limitations of space. For those youth whose direct words I chose not to include, I have tried to encompass what I learned from them in broad strokes throughout. In this way, they have still been instrumental in shaping the direction of the research and analysis. I use quotes in their original form "to retain the integrity of these youth's voices as narrators of their own lives" (Thorstensson, 2014, p. 28), but for some excepts I have used ellipses in place of certain words (e.g., uh, um, ah). While such "pauses" in conversation are important to qualitative research because they may point to hesitations, resistances and the unspoken, I used ellipses to bring emphasis to experience and meaning. As the most systematic and refined way of extracting the data is through transcripts, I constantly referred to the transcripts (even the ones not used) to code, re-code, and be reflexive in my analysis, in order to vividly demonstrate the suffering youth have endured related to housing precarity, violence, marginalization, health challenges, and social exclusion.

While thematic analyses are often linked closely to a theoretical framework, thematic analysis is also flexible, and so the point of the research was not only about refuting or validating my original research questions or claims, but could be more concerned with the voices of youth and the stories they told. This is where actual learning occurs, and where social change can begin

to arise. Importantly, my analysis of youths' voices and narratives is my interpretation and only one interpretation, especially because there are no innocent researchers and no innocent readers (Fine, 1994; Smyth & Hattam, 2004). The interviews are mediated through me, and I come with my own view of the social world and am constantly in the midst of contemplating, unlearning, and re-ordering; "we are all politically, socially, culturally, and socio-economically situated" (Smyth & Hattam, 2004, p. 14), all of which can bring forth dilemmas and implications for the research process (Kennelly, 2018a). What is more, setting up the data chapters through a thematic analysis was not a neutral process. There are ways in which analytic and explanatory possibilities not only open up, but also close off certain ideas by organizing data in certain ways (Mason, 2018, p. 173). I hope that by illustrating the theoretical and practical significance of a mixed methods research approach using thematic analysis, I can help readers to begin to examine their own theories about youth homelessness in relation to the lives of young homeless people, and open further conversations rather than provide final answers about how social exclusion manifests in the lives of youth. Doing so will further enhance what we already know about youth homelessness, in order to lead to solutions that can reduce and prevent the problem.

Ethical Considerations and Questions

Ethics are central to any research relating to issues of social justice, especially when working with vulnerable populations, in order to minimize harm. Every researcher uniquely shapes the research experience, as each of us bring our own moral compass into our intellectual investigations, including our beliefs, attitudes, and ideas about the world (Leavy, 2017). As such, before choosing a method, I became very aware about the ethics and politics of doing research, and about engaging in fieldwork with young people who are homeless. Ethical considerations

begin to unfold from the moment we think of a topic, and extend to the planning of our research, who gets to participate and how we interact with them, how to interpret and analyze the data, who we share this knowledge with, and who benefits from the findings (Kennelly, 2018a; Leavy, 2017).

To prepare for my study, I ensured that I had read, understood, and followed all the guidelines provided by York University's Human Participant Review Committee (HPRC), as is essential for any researcher who plans to work with human participants. I also made sure to adhere to the specific guidelines for conducting research with people who are homeless (HPRC, 2010), as homeless youth are a particularly vulnerable group to conduct research with, a point that was further reinforced throughout the duration of the study. Ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity were conveyed through the human participant consent form, which promised youth the right to privacy and confidentiality, that their vulnerability would be protected by using pseudonyms and participant codes in place of their name, and that their words would be used for research, writing, and teaching purposes only.

Consideration was given to the motivation for the research (Diversi & Finley, 2010), and so I also wanted the youth to know why studying homelessness is of interest to me. Since the topic of human research is quite vast, I wanted to ensure that my genuine curiosity about the study and stories of youth who are homeless was being conveyed to the participants. I mean – of all the stories in the world, why this one? Here, many of my interactions with youth come to mind. Some wondered whether my research interests were simply tied to "getting a good grade in school to obtain my degree." Others wanted clear answers about my choice and intention to research youth homelessness. I explained that I was a student and would like to use my research to help them and include their words in my dissertation. Some youth were surprised to know that

I cared about the issue of youth homelessness and had created the survey and interview questions myself. This in itself was not only indicative of how youth felt about the priorities of society at large towards social issues, but it also showed me how they felt about themselves: not worthy of care, time, and attention, but like a project to be studied, and feeling as if no one cares about them unless there is a motivation related to self-interest. Such interactions and others, with youth in shelters, made it apparent just how frequently youth themselves were analyzing my methods.

All of these interactions furthered my understanding of ethics and social justice research, reinforcing how research is “an important vehicle for identity politics, social change, and influencing public policy” (Leavy, 2017, p. 29). In efforts to include underrepresented groups or marginalized perspectives, there are still contradictions and paradoxes at play. For instance, in preparing the human participant consent form, as soon as I wrote the words “homeless” on the informed consent page and in the interview questions, I realized that in many ways the data collection and interpretation had already begun. The consent form and the interview questions were chalk full of social attitudes and fears about homelessness, including my own, as well as policies about homelessness and the politics involved; the list could go on. We are often heavily constrained by the language we have ready to use, no matter what language this is (Bischoping & Gazso, 2016). As a result, this first step of the interview process also became a problem of interpretation, reflection, and inquiry, something I had assumed might only occur during the interview and afterwards.

Making sure that the section discussing confidentiality was clearly outlined also highlighted the irony involved: I would promise these young people confidentiality for an hour of their time, but we would be discussing their experiences of being a homeless person on the streets or in instable housing, contexts that had already made them lose confidentiality and

privacy countless times, without their consent. Most often, when working with youth under the age of 18, the signature of parent of guardian is required. However, this is usually not possible with homeless youth, as relationships with parents are often complex and some young people are no longer in contact with their parents at all.

York University's HPRC (2010) and guidelines for conducting research with homeless people states that, in research with minimal risk, homeless youth 16 years and older do not need guardian consent, but *may* require it. For these reasons, preparing a human participant consent form and an interview protocol was difficult, yet also a source of many new insights. As a researcher, I know how important it is to give the participant a copy of their informed consent form; I was surprised when not even one youth cared to have a copy, even though some of them read it very thoroughly. After a few rejections, I inquired further as to why no one wanted a copy; it was because they have learned to carry less weight in their backpacks! I asked if I could leave a copy with the shelter staff, or if they wanted to take a picture of it with their phones, but no one cared to do so. Reconsiderations and (un)learning of my methods and research ethics were constant.

Positionality and Active and Critical Self-Reflexivity

Stressed about the dilemmas of researcher positionality and subjectivity, I thought about what surveys and interviews could offer to the question of listening to, and better understanding, the stories homeless youth told. Listening to stories of suffering can be demanding (Todd, 2003); perhaps because the researcher knows that participants live the stories they tell. When engaging in research, we must also remember that the truths revealed are always personal and subjective; in interviewing youth, we are only hearing one side of the story. Objective and precise accounts

of another's situation will not be easily given, as the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is always implicated by rapport, trust, and emotionality (Mason, 2018). In research like mine, it is crucial to identify forms and instances of exclusion as they are experienced and articulated by the subject group. And yet, my own understanding of the worlds of these young people will inevitably be limited by my own background and perspectives.

Here, I regard Sibley's (1995) recommendation that "it is entirely possible and certainly desirable to represent other people's experiencing of exclusion if one acknowledges that the question of positionality is one that must be addressed" (p. x). To put it simply, positionality can be taken as the researcher's identity (Purwaningrum & Shtaltovna, 2017), which inevitably facilitates and impedes the research relationship. Doing ethical research means that we are always engaged in active and critical reflexivity about our positionality, "as it impacts the entire research process" (Savvides et al., 2014, p. 411) and "influences the portraits researchers render of their study participants" (Thorstensson, 2014, p. 21). It is important to consider the politics of my positionality as a researcher and as someone who aimed to represent understandings of the experiences, perspectives, and narratives of homeless youth.

With this, I am conscious of the different privileged positions I occupy and the complexities that arise from these multiple and often intersecting positions. As a woman of colour, a feminist, an educator, a student in my mid-30s, and researcher (the list goes on), in my interactions with youth within the fieldwork setting my standpoint and positionality matter just as much as the positionality of the participants.[26] In fact, all of my diverse and intersecting identities also consciously and unconsciously shaped the way I approached youth, interacted with them, and read their stories, as well as how their stories were mediated through me, how I

[26] Personal communication with Dr. Amber Gazso, March 2020.

analyzed the data, and how I now write about them and what I choose to write about – several factors related to my positionality inevitably influenced the research process and research relationship. Re-telling another's story of being homeless, especially when you have not experienced this dire situation yourself is an ethical dilemma that requires sensitivity.

Qualitative research allowed me to take these multiple identities into account and consider the power relations at play between researcher and researched. Because of the multiple and intersecting positionalities I occupy, my anti-oppressive – anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-homophobic, and anti-classist – values are inherent to me and my work, and are threaded through all aspects of the research process and my interactions with youth. Paradoxically, despite our genuine attempts, researchers can never be transparent; we are classed, gendered beings, and we receive the most direct benefit from the research, which problematizes our desires to study particular subject groups, our choices in how to portray their stories, and how such accounts might essentialize them (Thorstensson, 2014).

A researcher's self and methods are fully intertwined within the knowledge and analysis being produced (Bischoping & Gazso, 2016). In terms of standpoint and positionality, then, the researcher is constantly trying to find the balance between being too involved or too much of an "outsider" to the fieldwork environment. Making choices around involvement and immersion, rapport and over-rapport, and loss of self are complex negotiations that the ethnographic self and the researcher must inevitably face (Mason, 2018, p. 93; Coffey, 1999, p. 36). The longstanding insider/outsider debate highlights key theoretical and methodological issues that are important to consider when undertaking qualitative research.

Deeply informed by feminist theoretical and methodological examinations of reflexivity, standpoint and positionality, power relations, and social justice (Bischoping & Gazso, 2016), I

question the insider-outsider dichotomy commonly used when considering the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Purwaningrum and Shtaltovna's (2017) article about the reflections on fieldwork helped clarify that engaging with research involving human participants teaches us that capturing even a glimpse of an individual's identity is "an ongoing, fluid, and complicated process" (p. 2). Neither the researcher nor the participant ever lives with, listen through, or speak from singular identities, and ascribing such a binary to myself or to the participants only further limits our possibilities of being.

Discourses about insider/outsider experiences during fieldwork complicate what are "fluid engagements between researchers and participants" (Savvides et al., 2014, p. 411), as researchers often oscillate between insider and outsider. Active self-reflexivity blurs the lines between the binaries and singular identities that insider/outsider accounts present (Bischoping and Gazso, 2016), especially because a researcher's standpoint and positionality are multilayered and involve intersecting identities and values about the social world, and because research often transpires much differently than the researcher originally expected; "this makes it untenable to operate exclusively under the binaries of insider-outsider" (Purwaningrum & Shtaltovna, 2017, p. 3).

Admittedly, I often wondered whether I would make strong connections with youth considering I had no "insider" or first-hand experience being homeless or in a homeless shelter, apart from my previous research work there – but even that did not matter, since all the people I met were people I had never met before. Despite my feelings about the insider/outside debate, it is difficult not to carry the feeling of being an "outsider" when you feel like a stranger to knowledge and experiences you have not had yourself but can only imagine. However, I was quickly welcomed by the youth as one of their own. I was often asked to eat lunch together, join

them in art workshops, and work out at the shelter gym, and to write raps and poems and learn how to play the guitar. Any insider/outsider worries I had quickly dissolved as youth transformed my "outsider" status with connection and belonging. What I learned from these meaningful involvements is that fieldwork experiences can be transcendental, having transformative power.

Being able to engage in research with young people who are homeless afforded limitless possibilities for learning, dispute, argument, and conflict with my self, and with the youth I had the privilege of interviewing. Though I strived for reciprocity with youth during interviews, it was difficult to take an experience, event, or a problem and make it significant – revise my thoughts around it and question my understanding about it – when I had not experienced it myself. Establishing rapport and building trust with youth was very important, especially because researchers must be aware of the various ways in which youth have been marginalized and discriminated against due to social exclusion.

Given the complexities that come with being young and homeless, confidentiality needs to always be considered and maintained; "participant information should be kept confidential to the fullest extent possible" (Frederick, 2018, p. 328). I had to be extremely sensitive about confidentiality while interacting with youth, and I made sure to emphasize this often, prior to the interview, during it, and afterwards. However, sometimes high levels of trust are established in such a short period of time, and the boundaries of confidentiality can become blurred. As a researcher, I had to make sure that the confidentiality of the person sitting across from me was always maintained. For example, one interviewee became very comfortable and trusting, and divulged a lot of personal views and gave me permission to reveal their name and identity when I wrote the dissertation. This was a significant learning opportunity for me, because, although they may have desired this and felt confident about it in a moment of "connection," or after the

interview, they might not feel the same way later, or once the story had been publicly expressed. As such, issues of confidentiality and anonymity must always be considered even when the participant consents otherwise at the time of the interview.

Sometimes before interviewing, I felt guilty that I might be making demands of these individuals' time. The time I was asking from participants might otherwise be used to make money in order to eat and survive for the day; or they might have to be in a certain place at a certain time, like taking a specific bus at a specific time to go back to a shelter due to set rules and regulations. Instances like these did occur: during some of the interviews, some youth missed time from work because they were making more money through the incentive I was offering than they would during an hour at work. Some were late for doctors' appointments or meetings with friends and family; although this was their own choice, and I had reassured them I could interview them on another day or wait until they came back, I still felt guilty and sensitive about my research project imposing on their time.

I offered financial remuneration to the research participants to acknowledge that some might be taking a day off work, or a day away from being able to make money, only because they wanted their story and their experiences to be heard and told. I also recognized that they deserved compensation for their time. However, besides the $20 honorarium I would provide, which might be meaningful to some and perhaps not to others, how could I convey to these individuals that there was value in their stories, when they may not feel valued by society in general? The interview is a place of thinking, and as I continue to think and write, it has been quite difficult to communicate about a topic on behalf of another person, especially considering that I have never experienced homelessness first-hand. This brings forth further dilemmas. There are important questions that need to be asked from a methodological standpoint, such as, what

does it mean for an interviewer to approach someone they do not know? Through interviewing then, the researcher is also in a vulnerable and emotional position.

The consent form raises additional tensions for me, and I began thinking deeply about what I was promising in the form. In many ways, I was giving the research participants hope: I was making a promise that I would somehow use their experiences to make things better. But research does not always make things better; rather, it clarifies what we face. Making things better is difficult. So then, what does it mean to understand the experience of others? Another ethical consideration, then, is whether we are interviewing people, and exploiting them for the purposes of our own research, to give ourselves an "ego massage" amongst our academic peers (Diversity & Finely, 2010, p. 16); which should then force us to consider: "at what point does representation depart too far from the experience of youth themselves?" (Kennelly, 2018a, p. 19). What if what we propose as solutions towards advancing social justice do not come to fruition? What if what I propose here does not solve, alleviate, or prevent youth homelessness – in that case, was the research useful, did it matter, was it worth affecting this population in order to achieve this accreditation? All of these things require further thinking and acting.

Limitations to the Study

This study had several limitations. From the onset, the way the nature and timeline of this research project unfolded presented inevitable limitations. Most studies regarding the lives of homeless youth "are built upon assumptions," because most studies "do not use longitudinal designs (gathering information at more than one point in time to see what causes certain outcomes)" (Kidd, 2013, p. 218). This was an evident issue with the youth from my study, some of whom I never saw again despite my consistent visits to the same shelter over the course of

many months. This can "greatly limit our knowledge base" (p. 218). Despite the research being ethnographic, using a single-point-in-time interview for analysis only provides us with a partial understanding into the lives of youth.

Research on homeless youth also has major limitations because homeless youth constitute a large and very diverse population, and therefore capturing a complete picture is difficult. For instance, much of the research about homelessness looks at youth homelessness in large cities and cannot be used to discuss homelessness in smaller towns and suburban areas such as York Region. Ethnography, as a methodology, is not able to fully explain the incomplete and impartial picture it captures, as no ethnography is ever complete (Carspecken, 1996; Clifford, 1986) as it is impossible to include all perspectives, experiences, or individuals. Sometimes, too, ethnographic research is comprised of situations we immerse ourselves in for short timelines, and so we do not know the reality of what is happening in those spaces and with those people outside of those situations. Such data cannot be treated as typical of how people in those spaces *always* behave and what is *always* happening there (Hammersley, 2006).

My study would benefit from including large representative samples, reliable and valid measures, comparison groups, focus groups and assessment of strengths as well as problems of homeless youth, but due to the nature and time frame in which I hoped to complete my doctoral degree, all of this was not a realistic possibility. Moreover, research about homeless youth would also benefit from more input by educators, service providers and policy makers, but this was not the aim of this particular study. I understand that, due to its small sample size, my study likely underestimates the true magnitude of the youth homelessness problem in Canada (Paradise & Cauce, 2002). I chose the sample size in consideration of the nature and timeline of this project and my studies. While the sample size of 40 youth was not large enough for me to conduct a

detailed analysis of homelessness across Canada, I do believe it is sufficient to draw important conclusions. Sometimes, sample size is not central when completing in-depth interviews; instead, the researcher may be focused more on acquiring “new and richly textured” understandings of people’s lived experiences (Vasileiou et al., 2018, p. 2).

Additionally, while conducting surveys alongside in-depth interviewing is an effective means of understanding the experiences of study youth and gathering information about their lives, the validity and accuracy of the data is dependent on the comfort level and honesty of the participants, as well as how the researchers’ world views and individuality affects the research (Thorstensson, 2014). Following Kidd et al. (2017), the cyclical and poorly defined nature of homelessness and street involvement makes it difficult to capture a highly detailed account of youths’ lives, especially when we are relying on retrospective re-telling. Furthermore, the transience that characterizes the lives of youth who are homeless made it difficult to get feedback from youth before the final submission of the dissertation, even though my intention when beginning the work was to co-construct arguments with the participants in the study as a relational process.

In addition, it is likely that some segment of the homeless youth population was systematically under-represented in my study. Sample bias can be identified: youth who resided in unwarranted places, who did not visit shelters, or who were not at specific recruitment sites are not included. And while the youth I interviewed were certainly well acquainted with issues of homelessness and/or street involvement, only gathering data from individuals who access youth-based services presents issues of generalizability. Many factors impact how the educational experience for homeless youth differs when they have limited or no access to formal support services (Dhillon, 2011), but gathering data from youth outside of shelters was beyond the scope

of this study. Also, Belinda's Place is a female-only shelter and Blue Door[27] is male-only. Therefore, when conducting research in these two shelters, I only had access to a specific segment of the population, as agencies that operate with gender-specific gatekeeping do not represent the realities of homeless youth who are unable to enter those spaces or choose not to.

Survey fatigue with this population was another limit to this study. Some youth were hungry and tired while filling out the survey and during the interview, which takes time and energy from youth who already have limited resources. Kidd et al. (2017) write that survey fatigue can often "affect the psychometric properties of the metrics used, as well as questions of participant representativeness, given that in some cases the surveys were administered in agencies by agency staff" (p. 499), which was the case for some participants.

Another key limitations of my study involves trying to understand how schools respond to young people who are homeless. This would be a large-scale task on its own; however, in this study I am more interested in the issue from the perspective of young people who are homeless, rather than educators – whose voices are inevitably missing. Another related limitation of my study is that the available literature on youth homelessness as it relates to education and schooling is sparse. While there is research and information about young people who are homeless, some of the research is dated and less in-depth than the research that is available about homeless adults and families.

There were also limitations during the interview process that simply relate to what happens when people are trying to listen, understand each other, and make meaning. A lot of the qualitative research process happens after the interview is over (Gazso and Bischoping, 2018).

[27] During the time of my data collection, Blue Door Shelter was also named Leeder Place. I recently looked up this shelter and noticed that the name has now been changed to Blue Door Shelters – Kevin's Place Youth Shelter.

While minimizing harm to participants should always be a researcher's priority, there may be oversights; and reflexivity is needed, as certain things can only be learned in hindsight (Gazso & Bischoping, 2018). For example, an interviewer's own anxieties may unconsciously or unintentionally spill over into the interview in the way they ask or respond based on prior knowledge, projections, or countertransference, which may impact the interview or even put the participant in distress. As such, it is important to scrutinize our own changing perspectives and assumptions as interviewers, as this is essential practice in order to be actively reflexive, even after fieldwork ends (Gazso & Bischoping, 2018; Mason, 2018, p. 22).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I explained the suitability of a mixed-methods approach when engaging in research with young people who are homeless. The qualitative and quantitative approaches used in the study provide methodological rigour and offered diverse opportunities for social inclusion amongst this population. Ethnography is valuable in better understanding the lived experience of those who are homeless, and findings from surveys and in-depth interviews can provide the capacity to advance research related to homelessness and education from an equity and justice perspective (Mistry et al., 2016). For me as a researcher, these approaches allowed for deep self-reflexivity and meaningful considerations of the ethics involved in the research process.

I hope that the qualitative and quantitative findings from this study can influence research, practice, and policy by providing those who research youth homelessness, work with youth in the service sector, and all those who have the ability to make changes for young people - including the general public - with some important information about youth homelessness in York Region, and perhaps the results can be extended to the larger Canadian context. The

findings and analysis that resulted from my implementation of the methods described in this chapter will be the focus of the next two data chapters, and can help us consider how we can better understand, and then address, the problem of youth homelessness in relation to education.

Chapter 5: Through the Voices of Youth

A Word About the Data Chapters

Before I began graduate studies, I had limited knowledge about the education system. In retrospect, my ideas about teaching and learning were romanticized. I believed that education could solve all the world's social and political ills. Through discussions with young people experiencing homeless, it became clear to me that my educational ideals were quite vulnerable, or as they say, "loosely hanging by a thread." Pedagogy and education are supposed to make us feel enlightened, but the issue of homelessness points to blind spots that force a narrowness in how educators, and the education systems in place, respond to young homeless people. Is providing an education to young people who are homeless a hopeless and impossible task? And if so, why – and how do we resolve this, and resolve their homelessness?

This and the following chapter present findings from the research and data collection conducted for my doctoral studies during 2016 and 2017. I consider these chapters the heart of my dissertation and the most meaningful parts of my work, as this is where I describe and examine the young participants' experiences of becoming homeless – a process that lead me (and will hopefully lead you) towards unlearning and new learning. While I originally set out to ask youth to reflect on their educational experiences prior to becoming homeless and while being homeless, the interviews pushed my thinking far beyond the education system.

As our discussions unfolded, institutional barriers and larger societal and systemic problems such as ageism, racism, discrimination, prejudice, classism, homophobia, poverty, and structural violence were overwhelmingly apparent in their effects on youth in families, the homelessness sector, the health care system, and schools, often creating and perpetuating homelessness and housing instability for these youth. Such factors often also maintain youth in

states of homelessness and immensely impact their educational engagement and attainment (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Noble et al., 2014), often starting from a very young age.

In the subsequent days and months spent establishing meaningful relationships with homeless youth across York Region, I was exposed to their experiences of living on the streets, their endless struggles with securing safe, adequate, affordable and permanent housing, and the ways they managed to survive by obtaining basic necessities. These interactions revealed the adversity, frustration and despair of young people but also their courage, hope and resiliency. What became increasingly clear was just how disenfranchised and socially excluded these youth were from mainstream society. My presentation and analysis of data is divided into two chapters. The current chapter, Chapter 5, discusses the home and family lives of youth as well as the shelter system, a temporary home where youth can go when unfortunate circumstances lead them to the difficult decision to leave home, or force them out of home. In Chapter 6, I focus outward on wider systemic contexts, with further discussion regarding the homelessness sector and the healthcare system, and then turning to my specialized focus on education and schooling.

Through this study, I realized that the contexts which lead youth to become homeless are all interconnected, and rather than pinpoint one cause of disengagement from school, I have aimed to explore how all of these different factors contribute to school disengagement and dropout for youth at risk of being, or currently, homeless. This way of presenting the findings may perhaps help us to better understand the educational (dis)engagement of youth who are homeless through a supportive and composite lens, and encourage school-based early interventions, with a focus on prevention, and attempts to reduce institutional barriers, exclusions, and stigmas faced by youth. The findings may also help us understand that, if the contexts which lead youth to become homeless in the first place are interconnected, we

desperately need a system of care that includes a coordinated integration of services that allows young people to access the supports they need (Gaetz et al., 2018). The narrative accounts provided by the young people who took part in this study express the urgency of preventing, reducing, and ending youth homelessness in Canada, and their voices contribute to enhanced understandings of homelessness and the available solutions that are necessary for positive and caring changes to take place.

Indigenous Youth Who Are Homeless (And Family Life)

The diversity within the population of youth I interviewed included ethnic differences that influenced the various pathways to homelessness. It would be remiss not to begin with the experience of Indigenous youth, whose homeland comprises the territory that became Canada. Exploring solutions to youth homelessness cannot happen without addressing Indigenous youth (Kidd et al., 2018), because Canadian research consistently indicates that Indigenous youth are overrepresented in the homeless population (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Gebhard, 2017; Kidd et al., 2018; Stewart, 2018; Thistle, 2016, 2017). This fact is particularly evocative when one considers that York Region – where this research was situated – is land originally and exclusively cared for and stewarded by the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation; "the Anishinaabe people" who currently reside in York Region "are descendants of a larger group known as the Chippewas of Lake Huron and Lake Simcoe" (Noble et al., 2014, p. 24).

Centuries of colonialist activities resulted in cultural oppression, assimilationist policies, and a legacy of injustices that persist today. Partly in result, "Indigenous Peoples face multiple housing barriers" (Stewart, 2018, p. 89). In this study, 11 youth, more than one quarter (27%) of participants, identified as Indigenous, which typically in Canada "describes three distinct cultural

groups: First Nations, Métis and Inuit" (Stewart, 2018, p. 89).[28] Although Indigenous youth face many of the same challenges as non-Indigenous youth, it is crucial to emphasize that Indigenous youth experience different pathways into homelessness, linked to the historical legacy of colonialism, cultural oppression, and intergenerational trauma.[29] One of the darkest examples of how Canadian colonial policies were implemented to attempt to eradicate Indigenous Peoples and their familial culture was the residential school system, "characterized by forced removal from families, systemic physical and sexual assault; and spiritual, psychological and emotional abuse; malnutrition, inhumane living conditions, death and murder" (Cannon & Sunseri, 2011, p. 278; Gebhard, 2017). The residential school system "accomplished what is today considered cultural genocide against Canada's Indigenous Peoples" (Gebhard, 2017, p. 3; Tasker, 2015).

The gravity of these racist and oppressive historical events continues to impact Indigenous youth today (Gebhard, 2017; Stewart, 2018), creating major disruptions of family life and mental health as well as educational disengagement, drug misuse, and independent living (O'Callaghan, 2017; Gebhard, 2017; Kidd et al., 2018; Stewart, 2018). Indigenous youth in this study spoke about various deficiencies within structural systems (for example, in child protection services, the education system, the justice system), strongly articulating the link between the institutionalization of Indigenous youth and the high rates of Indigenous youth homelessness in many cities (Stewart, 2018). The ongoing colonial project continues to make Indigenous Peoples

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[28] Indigenous is the global term (typically used in international context). It refers to Indigenous Peoples and cultures around the world and acknowledges both shared commonalities as well as diversity of culture, history, beliefs, languages, and experiences. That being said, it is now generally the more preferred term, even when referring to Canadian FNMI (First Nations, Métis, Inuit) (Personal Communication with Dr. Alesha Moffat, 2018).

[29] Indigenous youth live with their own trauma and also that of parents and grandparents. The term "Intergenerational trauma, also referred to in political terms as historical trauma, explains how traumatic experiences from colonialism have been carried over from one generation of Indigenous Peoples to the next" (Baskin, 2013, p. 407).

vulnerable, with a popular and stereotypical view being that residential schools left Indigenous Peoples broke, addicted, and incapable of parenting (Gebhard, 2016).

Such false and obscured discourses conveniently and defensively exclude the perspective that this was *not* the case until the dominant white European culture oppressed and decimated the existing, robust culture of the Peoples who originally possessed the land. As a result, common colonialist views define Indigenous families and homes as “broken,” “weak,” and “unstable,” despite historical processes and the racism and prejudice practiced by the Canadian state and settler society that have produced Indigenous homelessness (Gebhard, 2017; Thistle, 2017). This perception echoes the discourse of the residential school system, “which ‘institutionalized’ the idea that the ‘welfare’ of Aboriginal children was in conflict with that of their families and communities” (Gebhard, 2017, p. 17; Thobani, 2007, p. 199).

This discourse locates the problem *within* Indigenous families, such that proposed solutions were and are individualizing and pathologizing. In this discourse, Indigenous Peoples are perceived as needing to be fixed, rather than fixing the documented and ongoing racism in Canada’s justice system and wider society (O’Callaghan, 2017; Gebhard, 2017; St. Denis, 2007; Stewart, 2018; Thobani, 2007). The legacy of colonization, including calculated attempts at cultural erasure, displacement, and disconnection, continues to impact Indigenous youth. The experience of discrimination is exacerbated when combined with poverty (Gaetz, O’Grady et al., 2016; Gebhard, 2017; Kidd et al., 2018; Stewart, 2018; Thistle, 2017).

Although Indigenous Peoples resist assimilation efforts, challenge pervasive governmental control, and endeavour to ensure continuity of languages and cultural practices, the impact of residential schooling and racist policies continues to profoundly affect Indigenous communities. When we see youth, who are homeless *and* Indigenous, and who may also have

strained relationships with parents and difficulties in school, we must recognize that these youth have been shaped by an oppressive and unjust history (Gebhard, 2017, p. 15). If education can be used to prevent youth homelessness, how can this effort apply specifically to Indigenous youth who are homeless? It is often claimed that "families and education are absolute partners," but like those in other studies, the youth I interviewed do not support this claim, signaling distress and trouble in the space of the home, the family, and school (Gebhard, 2017, p. 16).

When James, an Indigenous youth, and I were talking about his family life and life experiences and whether there was anything else I should incorporate into to the research, he spoke to recognizing the impact of the *intergenerational* issues I briefly mentioned above:

> See if there's a link … and I think it does briefly touch on this but if there's a link between … you know, the kids that are homeless and family problems that maybe branched from the parents, like if the parent had problems and if their parents had problems kind of thing, cause I know with a lot of my friends that have, are still homeless, they have a really rough relationship with their parent but their parents had it rough as kids and their parents had it rough as kids so, so I don't know, maybe there's a correlation there …

James, age 24, Indigenous Youth

Indigenous youth experiences will be highlighted throughout the data chapters. Note that I will identify each youth as they identified themselves in the survey and interview (i.e., First Nation, Cree, Inuit), to respect Indigenous identity, diversity, and naming practices.

Family and Home(less) Life

As I began interviewing young homeless people across York Region, I noted that they shared the complicated family situations and relationships that often underlaid their homelessness. In this section I present the vivid views of the young people who took part in my study, revealing the complexities of their home lives and the nature of their family relations.

Their narratives can help enhance how we understand the dynamics, roles, meanings and compositions of family (Winland, 2013, p. 15). This is particularly relevant for this study because of the impact such factors have on a young person's educational engagement and attainment, considering that "many young people described a slow process of disengagement from school, a process that typically began with problems at home" (Noble et al., 2014, p. 62).

Such processes come untangled through a glimpse into the diverse family lives of youth like Paul. As he and I talked about his experiences of school, he led us into a deeper discussion of his difficult childhood, family, and home environment and how that impacted his education:

> To be honest with you, I just felt like I didn't have support from both my parents, and that it ate away at me because I loved both my parents from a very young age, I was very close with both my parents … they were just two negative people that hated each other and I feel like, yeah, it did affect me in school, it made me just think like a fucking 18 year old when I was like 8 years old like about that shit and I would just, I would literally sit in school and I would have other things to think about that are going on between my parents rather than uh sitting there and actually caring about what my teacher's saying ...
>
> Paul, age 20, White youth

"There's No Place like Home"

The family is often regarded as an institution that provides a sense of belonging and support to members and across generations (Winland et al., 2011). Generally, families are seen as providing nurturing and loving spaces for children (Abramovich, 2013). Such cultural norms and assumptions map homogeneity onto family and home life (Gazso & McDaniel, 2015; Gallagher, 2016). While stereotypically and traditionally, "childhood storybooks teach us that home is a place of shelter and safety, and a place of refuge from the rest of the world" (Abramovich, 2013, p. 387), homeless youth often have had family lives that are unstable, abusive, neglecting, and rejecting (Abramovich, 2013, 2018; Cully et al., 2018; Noble et al.,

2014; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Hasford et al., 2018; Schwan et al., 2017; Winland et al., 2011). For some young people – like the ones who I had the opportunity to interview for this study – "home" is thus far from a safe haven where primary caregivers love unconditionally.

However, pathways into homelessness are far more complicated than the generalization of "family dysfunction," which oversimplifies the issues and makes assumptions about *all* family members (Winland, 2013). Importantly, the youth in this study revealed that – as most scholars acknowledge – the path to becoming homeless is not linear, or comprised of a single event, but is rather a complex process marked by multiple experiences and repeated episodes of leaving home that begin in early childhood, resulting in varying degrees of social exclusion (Gaetz et al., 2013). The youth in this study shared the complex family factors that forced them to prematurely impoverish connections with family members, other supportive adults, friends, and community.

Youth revealed individual, relational, and structural factors that contributed to them becoming homelessness. Poverty, inadequate housing, and social services were obvious factors (Durana, 2018; Edwards, 2018; Noble et al., 2014; Preston et al., 2009, 2010) but underlying reasons centered around familial instability that negatively impacted educational engagement and functional transitions during adolescence (Gaetz et al., 2013; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Noble et al., 2014; Stewart, 2018). In sharing their experiences, the youth disrupted prevalent and assumed views about the home and family lives of young people across York Region. In fact, the home and family lives of these youth, and their concept of "home," were constantly evolving.

As the youth shared their pathways into homelessness, it emerged that their concept of "home" was far more enigmatic and fluid than the simpler, traditionally ideal ways in which it is typically understood. When I asked how she become homeless, Maya shared an apparently strong coping response that can help us reframe our ideas of home and homelessness:

> I don't really classify myself as home/homeless because my body is always the home to my soul. So, you know, no matter where I am, I'm not *exactly* homeless, I feel … it's not *really* a necessity to pay rent or actually have a shelter over your head. Or yeah, that's ideal, you would always want shelter and to have a roof over your head or a place too but no matter what, you always have your body and that's, you know, the home to your soul.
>
> Maya, age 18, pansexual, Indigenous youth

At first, I found myself probing Maya's response to derive more meaning from it. How did it relate to her staying at a shelter and resisting being classified as home-less? In saying her body is the home to her soul, no matter where she is, does she complicate or simplify the notion of "home," as she disrupts the binaries through which society conceptualizes home and homeless? Her response illuminates how binaries, exclusions, and stigma can contribute to the social oppression of others, leaving no room for alternative ways of thinking and being. Her response is a reminder that understanding the lives and experiences of homeless youth entails going beyond dichotomous and strict categorizations to confront the ambiguities from which novel thinking emerges.

The "Stable" Suburban Family

Since York Region is "affluent," the reality of homelessness and all the factors that lead to it are more hidden than in urban regions. As Sofia said, while disclosing the family problems and extreme addiction issues that led to her homelessness, you "grow up in like the suburban nuclear family life, you know, where everything is so good on the outside, but you hide everything on the inside." Because suburban identity is culturally tied to affluence, the racial-economic segregation that exists is kept from sight and remains underrepresented and undisclosed as a problem. Homelessness amongst racialized immigrants and refugees in York Region is often hidden (Preston et al., 2009, p. 1; York Region's 2018 Homeless Count, 2019),

as these groups tend to double up with friends and family and do not always use the shelter system (Noble et al., 2014; Preston et al., 2009, p. 1). Children are often sent to different households to reduce the burden on families they usually stay with (Preston et al., 2009).

Indeed, "you don't really see it as much as you do in Toronto, with Toronto, you can see the groups just by even, by talking to people, you can see where, where the dividing line is with them," Tyler told me. Yet, the dividing lines of the impoverished and homeless exist in York Region. For instance, when his mom was unable to purchase new clothes for him, James, an Indigenous youth introduced earlier, was bullied: "so I would come to school in either childish clothes or raggedy clothes and they're just like *what are you wearing, oh my God, why would you wear something like that?*" As a kid in elementary school, he did not know how to respond; he'd try to "explain that his mom couldn't afford that and then they'd go, *well why doesn't your mom get a better job?* They come from super rich families and don't understand what it's like to be in that lower class, it's, its rough." Many friends in high school came from what he referred to as "poor families" and "poor areas across York Region." James narrative included and showed that "there was a social hierarchy at the school," resulting in racialized youth, youth of lower class, and homeless youth being stigmatized, socially excluded, and bullied; LGBTQ2S+ youth were marginalized even further. All of these factors significantly impact home and family life, education, and overall mental health (Abramovich, 2018; Cully et al., 2018; Noble et al., 2014; Hasford et al., 2018; Schwan et al., 2017; Stewart, 2018).

Similarly, Sofia very sarcastically described her family as "the suburban nuclear family," the sarcasm relating to an incident of sexual abuse by a close family member and her mother's dismissal of it, combined with her mother's extreme emotional abuse. All of this seemed to in

some way contribute to Sofia's addictions to alcohol, cocaine, and crystal meth, and eventually to homelessness:

> So, my mom had … some severe mental health issues … she wanted to make it look like everything was okay, she was so emotionally abusive, would just like tear us down all the time. I remember just always thinking like everyone hated me … she would always yell, like *"why did you say this!? Why did you say that?! You embarrassed me, you make, you look like such an idiot!"* Like constant! She would tear us down like, *"why did you wear that you look like a, you look disgusting"* … yeah, so it's always been in my head that … I hate myself, like *"you'll never grow up to be anything"* … and my dad! He basically just hid at work … he couldn't take it either, he was just kind of silent and emotional.
>
> Sofia, age 23, White youth

Despite the difficulties she faced growing up, Sofia managed to complete her Bachelor of Education and was accepted into a prestigious university in New York for her Masters, until addictions and homelessness reduced her mental health, finances, and, ultimately, her aspirations. At the time I met her, she was 23 years old and living at the shelter where I interviewed her.

The instability of the so-called stable suburban family life became more apparent with each youth interviewed. Joanne emphasized this idea when she told me: "I don't think I'm homeless because of my anger issues, I think my mom was just really unstable, like she was not stable growing up." It is not uncommon for youth to have experienced a great deal of family instability, where issues of control and abuse are at the forefront of their interactions with parents and guardians (Cully et al., 2018; Noble et al., 2014; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Most youth in the study would agree with Joanne that "it's always the stability thing, always about the support that you're coming from to get to where you need to go to" (Joanne, age 23, mixed race youth), which many strongly believed could have ultimately prevented them from becoming homeless.

(Un)safe Havens Versus Leaving Home for the Wide-Open Road

My sustained conversations with youth about their unstable home lives echoed extensive research that reports the high percentage of homeless youth who are forced to leave home because of interpersonal violence, including home-based physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse during childhood and adolescence (Ballon et al., 2001; Cully et al., 2018; Gaetz et al., 2013; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Hasford et al., 2018; Karabanow, 2004; Noble et al., 2014; Schwan et al., 2017; Stewart, 2018; Tyler & Bersani, 2008; Van den Bree et al., 2009; Winland, 2013). Beginning in early childhood, many youth recalled stories of conflict with parents and siblings that eventually lead to their homelessness, some of which were mentioned in the preceding section and other instances I include in the pages that follow.

Qualitative survey results revealed that many (About 50 %) of youth I met were "thrown out" by parents or left home when conflicts escalated and became extreme abuse. Sometimes an answer like "to make a longer story short ... [it's] just, fucking … the list is infinite, I can't live at my house, I just can't, I don't want to get into it too much" (Kamran, age 21, White youth) was a substantial enough response for us to move on to the next question, and seemingly "reason enough" for this youth to leave home. While I respected those youth who opted to not disclose further, others provided explicit examples of how their home lives became unstable and emotionally and physically harmful. Laila described her father as an "insanely abusive, angry alcoholic," and did not get along with her mother because "she had a little bit of a problem with uh drugs and shit too." While growing up, she was living with her dad and then moved in with

her mom for a bit but "got kicked out, so I was kind of doing my own thing since I was 13" (Laila, age 17, bisexual, White youth).[30]

Evidently, for many youth in this study (60%), homelessness is the much safer option than remaining in an abusive and unsafe home. Even when youth decided on their own to leave home, various factors forced that difficult decision. Aisha and her mom "were constantly fighting, she was always trying to over-power my parenting with my son, like everything I was doing *was wrong* … and I was like *okay why can't you just let me figure things out on my own?*" Young people often feel their growth hindered by a need to adhere to unfair and contradictory rules set out by their parents. One day, the conflicts became unacceptable and "she literally pushed me on the ground and started choking me … I had to walk on eggshells around her" (Aisha, age 23, White youth).[31] The impacts of such extreme abuse were damaging. Dominic, an Indigenous youth, provided alternative reflections: "[My mom] had a rough upbringing so she thought that was how you raise people, she didn't know it was a different time, she didn't understand, you know? And my dad was just an asshole and never around" (Dominic, age 22, Indigenous / White youth). While having a home can provide safety and security, an unstable family life counteracts that.

There were always a variety of issues at play between youth and their parents; verbalized conflicts (72.5%) and physical conflicts (52.5%) were most prominent. Some were overlapping issues, isolated events, or recurring issues, such as smoking marijuana or leaving dishes in the sink. Conflicts also revolved around taking responsibility for chores at home, or the way youth

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[30] Think about this: 13 is a very young age at which to leave home with nowhere to go! The age at which a young person leaves home matters; youth who become homeless at a younger age are more vulnerable to victimization and crime on the streets and become more entrenched in homelessness and street life. As a result, their health and safety, dignity, rights, and overall well-being are hugely compromised (Gaetz et al., 2010; Gaetz et al., 2016).

[31] From a methodological standpoint, we need to keep in mind that in speaking to youth, we are only hearing one side of the story. This does not at all excuse parents for their abusive behaviour, but it is a point to keep in mind.

chose to live their life versus what was expected of them in terms of decisions around education, drugs and alcohol, friends, and financial spending. Perceived minor issues (doing the dishes, cleaning your room) would escalate because of much deeper previously unresolved conflicts. Often, having strict rules at home was frustrating and did not give youth the independence and autonomy they needed to experience healthy transitions between adolescence and adulthood.

Youth who leave home are often framed through popular media and society as rebellious rule-breakers in search of independence and freedom (Gaetz et al., 2013). The personal narratives shared in this study point to this as a gross misconception. The lived experience of homelessness helps us see that for many youth, including some I interviewed (32.5% overall), leaving home is the only option to flee from living conditions that are unsafe, physically and psychologically. For Aisha, her relationship with her mom was characterized as extremely conflicted, controlling, and physically abusive; she left home for multiple reasons:

> Most people, when you look at a teenager, they don't want to follow rules, but some people have a reason why they're not at home which needs to be voiced out. When I say, I don't like my mom, I don't want a relationship with her, they're like *oh you're just one of those people*, the teenager kind of thing and it's like *no, I actually have a reason*.
>
> Aisha, age 23, White youth

While some youth explicitly mentioned clear desire and need to leave their home environments, there was also ambivalence, because while "it is kind of exciting getting independence, learning new things and stuff is kind of hard" (Denisha, age 22, Indigenous; Algonquin; First Nations; French Canadian Youth). This youth learned to navigate through employment centers and temporary agencies, learning about what modest resources were available. While she did miss home, she mentioned that: "it was nice to be away from my father, who was controlling all the time because I didn't have my mother there for me [mom left at age

8], and I kind of needed to start branching off" (Denisha, age 22, Indigenous youth). The majority of youth found it very difficult to leave but knew that staying in their home environment was detrimental. Steven, an Indigenous youth, told me about his stepfather: "he would drink, on occasional days, come home, and … most days when he's drinking, takes it out on me, my mother and brother … one time he actually grabbed me by my throat and threw me" (Steven, age 22, Indigenous; Black youth). For Steven, leaving home was necessary for survival, as it was for Ryan, who said, "[my father] kicked the shit out of me every day" (Ryan, age 20, White youth).

With difficulty, youth choose homelessness as a refuge from home. This reverses the typical pattern. Sometimes it was not an acute crisis but an ongoing burden that became too heavy that precipitated leaving home. Maya, an Indigenous youth, "felt like I was raising my parents my whole childhood"; leaving home was necessary to no longer enable her parents:

> I had a really abusive relationship with my father, my parents were divorced at a young age, so my mom was an alcoholic and I chose … I'm willingly not going to see you unless you make the commitment to stop drinking, she eventually weaned herself off and it was kind of perfect timing cause she had just quit like a few months prior to the time that um the abuse got so bad that I actually had to leave because one of my friends witnessed it all happen, it was like no we're calling the police, like this is going to court, like you're getting a restraining order, like that's not happening, you're not going back there, went to my mom's um, she had cut down her drinking a lot but then got back into it and things weren't working out so ended up getting kicked out on Christmas.
>
> Maya, age 18, pansexual, Indigenous youth

None of the youth in this study left home without provocation. There were also rare cases where youth would go back home periodically, oscillating between home and homelessness. It is important to emphasize that leaving home can be seen as a courageous, novel, and generative idea; these youth exemplify resilience in the face of extremely oppressive challenges and few opportunities for change within their households. Rather than seeing themselves as passive

victims, the youth I interviewed assert themselves as active and resilient agents who finally left an intolerably negative situation. At the same time, many missed their families and home.

House of Cards - "A Love I Never Had"

We tend to assume that people are guided and socialized from childhood through adolescence to adulthood by loving, supportive, and engaged adults and family members (Winland, 2013). We view parents and supportive adults and caregivers as the key agents of support (Mitchell, 2017). For the young people in my study, the situation was often radically different. Participants experienced severe interpersonal and contextual stressors that elevated their risks of homelessness. Martin shared important insights about suboptimal parenting and family life:

> We shouldn't just be looking at the people who are homeless; we need to look at why they're homeless and where the problems are coming from. It's the families … home environments are not working. There's issues with parenting, either parents are becoming parents too young and they don't know what they're doing, or they don't care or they're too busy at their jobs. Like my teacher tells me every day how there's all these pressures being put on the education system to do what the parent is supposed to do. It's really sad.
>
> Martin, age 23, gay, White youth

From the youths' perspectives, their parents projected personally unresolved issues onto their children, creating injuries in the relationship with severe and long-lasting effects. In some cases, substance use was an additional contributing factor causing distress for the youth. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the youth in this study felt neglected by their parents. Some youth, like James, disclosed feeling unwanted, unloved, and rejected by their parents, noting that it is especially confusing and "weird to think of the person that everyone tries to tell you is the one

person who is supposed to be there for you is the complete opposite and is the person who wants to get rid of you the most." James continued to provide insights about his mom:

> When I was really little, it wasn't as bad but I've talked to therapists that have also talked to her … and they've said that another thing that it could be is that when my brother and I were growing up, she was a single mother and … she had to work like all the time and she had all this stress that was placed on her. And I understand that, and I respect that but they, but they said that what it could be is that she's taking out all that stress on you.
>
> James, age 24, Indigenous / White youth

Similarly, as Lauryn and I discussed family life, she tells me that her mom made it clear that: "she just didn't want me in her life, she would tell me that she wished she had an abortion, she regrets giving birth to me, she should have listened to my father, and so it was very clear that if I didn't find somewhere to live, I was getting kicked out at 16" (Lauryn, age 19, Black youth). Joanne also told me about how her "childhood was really messed up," revealing the many layers that resulted in downward spirals of mood that she saw as resulting in her homelessness:

> My mom and my dad divorced when I was 11 months old, so I never really got to be raised in my dad's arms. My sister pretty much raised me. My mom worked three jobs, I never got to see her. We were too broke … It was only when I turned, I think, like 12 or 13, that the subsidized housing finally accepted her so we moved to [X Street] ... my mom had worked her ass off to the point where we were able to get out of subsidized housing … I guess we moved and had sort of like a normal life. I grew up with anger my whole life. I felt neglected completely … My sister and I would constantly fight because I wasn't getting any of the attention that I needed … my mom's just had so much frustration her whole life, like she obviously got pregnant and her husband leaves her with these two kids. My mom's an immigrant speaks no English ... my mom's Spanish. She has no idea how to live in this country and this is what my dad does to her. And so, I built a lot of animosity towards him and my mom and I would constantly fight. I just wanted to be normal, all my friends … this was just before 14 years old and like everyone got to run around in the field, play video games. We couldn't afford shit, we couldn't do anything, so I would always get mad at my mom you know? And like I feel so bad, but I just got so mad because we never had money. It was just awful … her drinking got really bad and she was just like intoxicated, I was like *what the fuck is going on?* … so, I took care of her [when drinking] and ever since that day, I just grew animosity to the max …so we just started fighting more and then my mom kicked me out. So, I went downtown.
>
> Joanne, age 23, Mixed Race Youth

Listening to Joanne's story increased my awareness of the additional stressors encountered by children of immigrants, which complicate the challenges they face. Joanne expands on these feelings when she tells me about her unfortunate experience at a Toronto shelter: "When I was 18, I started getting trafficked and I had no idea what I was going through, I just thought they were nice guys who wanted to be with me, take care of me, it was a love I never had, like an affection that I was completely like a stranger to and then, it just got worse." Joanne's story points to the importance of addressing that in Ontario, human trafficking is a major problem, and a rising issue in York Region in terms prevalence and visibility. According to research, homeless youth face a greater risk of becoming victims of human trafficking (Noble et al., 2014; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Informal conversations with York Regional police in study by Noble et al. (2014) revealed, "they could pull a youth out of trafficking 365 days a year" (p. 79). Noah also shared, "I wasn't directly doing it, but I was involved in it" (Noah, age 20, Indigenous – half Ojibwe First Nations youth), but he did not want to elaborate further, so we moved on. While Joanne was the only youth who openly shared her experience of being trafficked, it is one story too many, and further illustrates the vulnerability of homeless youth.

Many youth I interviewed also referred to troubled relationships with stepparents. Often, it was the disruptive stepparent relationship that precipitated a youth to leave home or get kicked out. Never having been able to meet his biological father, whom he described as a "pretty heavy duty, white collar criminal," James tells me about his complicated relationship with his stepdad:

> Him and I have always had a really rocky relationship. We just don't get along and she [mom] likes him and I think specifically for that reason, because he's always been very aggressive and when I was living with them, um, she kind of used him almost like a dog … if I got defensive and said *that's not fair, you can't say that to me*, then she'd call him in and of course, I'm this super skinny little kid and he's a full grown adult and he'd come in … grab me by throat and hold me against the wall and while she would lecture

> me or scream at me kind of thing, it wasn't a good home environment. So, I was homeless after that, after I was, that was back when I was 16.

James' relationship with his mother was riddled with conflict since childhood, and even though he identifies as "a skinny little kid" in comparison to his stepdad, who is "a full-grown adult," paradoxically, having such severe issues at home also forced him to grow up fast:

> I think that's just when, when you're forced into these situations, you just have to … grow up … you have no time to enjoy your childhood or be a teen anymore and even when I was little, I didn't have much of a childhood … but I feel like that part of me [childhood self] never fully went away and it never fully developed. It's like every single part of my past got a chance to kind of grow a little bit but it was never fully developed.
>
> James, age 24, Indigenous / White youth

For some youth, homelessness was conceptualized and imagined as a reality for them before it actually happened. This was motivated by years of continuous abuse, neglect, and rejection at home. Sadly, despite being insulated by a home, several youth felt empty, bare, and unstable – feeling homeless at home, never accepted, safe, or secure. The last step of actualizing their homelessness was not surprising after having endured years of pain and suffering. After neighbours noticed Linda was being neglected by her mother at the young age of three, because she was left on the balcony alone, Children's Aid Society intervened, giving her mom a warning. However:

> ever since then, my mom went crazy on me and then CAS came again in grade three 'cause my stepdad came into the picture … there was verbal abuse, physical abuse, [he] used to drag me down the stairs by my ear and one day my, I came to school and my ear lobe was separated, from it being like pulled too much, I remember telling my best friend in grade three … she went to my grade three teacher who then went to the office and then CAS came again and they tried taking me away five times, and my mom was like somehow like kept me and I was like delusional and every time cops would come or whatever and I had bruises or whatever, I used to say like I was playing soccer or I was whatever, like I always protected my mom, 'cause I was like she loves me still, she loves me. But then, and she would like thank me after and it would be like a whole illusion, like a delusion.
>
> Linda, age 22, White youth

There were also youth who were ambivalent about whether or not their parents truly loved them, due to the extreme neglect and abuse they had faced, and about whether to protect their parents or to flee home. When I met Alesha, I learned how years of parental abuse could be internalized and normalized, due to a combination of "fear of the unknown" and extreme abuse:

> so basically my mom went through a very big bout of postpartum depression that she didn't really feel really needed to be monitored or … handled so that never really went away so according to anyone who knew my mom before she had me, she was like all sunshine and rainbows and happy and as soon as I came into the picture, she was miserable and negative and depressed and hated her life so naturally she thought that the only thing is could've been was because I came into the world. So, I was kind of the punching bag for 25 years and I didn't really understand what was going on for a really long time … I lived a very … confused life. I was getting hit all the time, I wasn't allowed to speak, children were supposed to be seen and not heard … that was her motto, it was actually written in needle point … then the family motto, which was *tough luck* …
>
> I was considered developmentally delayed, mostly because no one was speaking to me at home and I wasn't being engaged, I was being held back …a lot of problems that were going on in my life were like school based or intelligence based, which also caused a lot of stress for my parents because they thought it was all my fault. I was constantly being hit and beaten up because of my grades or because my teachers wanted to speak to my parents and see what was going on ... If I told anyone what would happen, I would have the shit kicked out of me or now … I had two younger sisters that I felt very responsible for so they would use that as kind of a, okay if you tell a teacher what's happening at home, we're going to beat the shit out of your sisters, so if you don't want that to happen to your sisters right? You love your sisters, right? So just don't say anything. So that was kind of my whole life for a very long time, so um, by high school …
>
> Alesha, age 25, gender fluid, bisexual, pansexual, White youth

School was impacted as a result of issues at home. Alesha's intelligence was questioned, and she was viewed as "less than" amidst these various mental health and addiction issues happening simultaneously. When she tried to tell her grade seven teacher, CAS was called right away:

> I got the shit kicked out of me later on because this poorly trained CAS girl, *I will never forget this*, she shows up the next day and I remember my mom and dad were in tears for 24 hours and as a kid, you're 12, you don't know what the fuck happened, you just came home, mom and dad are in tears, they are telling you how much they love you, and *I'll never forget*, my mom made pancakes that morning, like it was ridiculous, she was just

> trying to … show us how much she loved us because later on, CAS showed up so I was okay now I see what's going on so my mom sat on one side and dad sat on one side and the CAS worker was sitting right in front of me at the table and she was asking me to tell her what I had told the teacher … and I was terrified … I had to lie because I knew that I'd get the shit kicked out of me, so I told the CAS worker that I made it all up, all of it was a lie. What else could I have done, my parents were sitting at the table. The whole day my parents said, *well you're going to tell them how much we love you, never forget how much we love you* … what the fuck?! Like the whole situation was so fucked up, so when she left, *I will never forget*, I had the worst beating of my life. I can't tell anybody, I have to keep this a secret, this is my family, this is normal, that's what they told us, this is our family, this is normal for us. You can't go around telling people our business … women are supposed to be very lady like and subservient, we're not supposed to be that intelligent, we're certainly not supposed to be outspoken. And the fact that I was bisexual, pshhhh, oh my God! You'd think that I was a demon child to them …
>
> Alesha, age 25, gender fluid, bisexual, pansexual, White youth

Her parents never forgave her for telling her teacher the truth about their abusive environment. She had to pay a price for her disclosure. Her mom was also diagnosed with bipolar disorder shortly after she graduated from university, and "played the pity card of you know I've been depressed my whole life, my whole life has been so shit because of you and the only reason my life sucks is because I had you, and I wish you were never born and …" At the time of the interview, Alesha was 25 years old and living at the shelter where I met her. Issues at home were always made out to be her fault, regardless of her high achievements in school and graduating from college and university. Her achievements were minimized by: "the fact that I smoke pot and the fact that I'm bisexual means that I'm a complete fucking loser, but you've grew up in Woodbridge, so I'm sure you can imagine how that works. Yeah, the slightest inclination that you're not like anybody else means that you're a fucking write off."

Unfortunately, consistent with Alesha's experience is research that shows how and why LGBTQ2S+ youth are disproportionately overrepresented in the youth homeless population. Family conflict resulting from a young person "coming out" is a major contributing factor to

youth homelessness (Abramovich, 2013, 2018; Abramovich & Shelton, 2017). Alesha described her emotional state after all of the incidents of neglect and abuse that took place throughout the years at home: “I lost it, so um, I wasn’t sleeping, I wasn’t eating properly, I was just trying to get through school …” After multiple incidents and years of abuse, one physical altercation “broke the camel’s back”: “so then they dropped me off here, luckily there was a room available and I was so fucked up from the experience that I just shut down, I almost dropped out of school, um, that was the hardest, that was actually the Saturday before exam week.” Alesha’s experience, and that of other youth, highlights childhoods damaged with abuse and neglect that create a push and pull towards the streets, as a refuge from the home.

Children’s Aid Society (CAS) and Foster Care

As other research has, I found that participants’ homelessness was also contextualized by difficult child protection experiences, some of which I have already alluded to. For example, national study results by Gaetz and O’Grady et al. (2016) revealed that a high percentage (57.8%) of youth indicated prior involvement with child protection services, which can include “foster care, group home placements, and/or youth custodial centres” (p. 46). Consistent with other research with homeless youth in York Region (Noble et al., 2014), many of the youth that I interviewed (approximately 50%) turned to the “street” after living in a group home or foster care. Their group or foster care experiences were most often described as uncaring, abusive, and unstable. It is difficult to exaggerate the long-lasting impacts such involvements have had on youth like Malcolm:

> Living with my dad was terrible! I had been living in foster care for 2 yrs / 27 mths before I moved back with my dad, because I was living in an abusive foster home … I left the abusive foster home and entered into my house, which is fully wheelchair accessible [foster home was not] but he’s emotionally abusive. So, while I had some of

> my physical needs met, my emotional needs were not being met at all and slowly, the physical needs started to not be met too, which made it impossible for me to remain there.
>
> Malcolm, age 17, White youth

Furthermore, when I asked Malcolm whether he was able to reach out to anyone for support, he said: “I was told to keep quiet about what was going on, um, because nobody wanted me anyways, so that was the message I was receiving. It was a false message, but I was 12, my life was already broken … So you start to believe that’s the life you should live … so I wasn’t able to tell anyone” (Malcolm, age 17, White youth). Similarly, other youth who also had negative experiences with foster care and CAS revealed that “you need to put on an act or stay quiet” (Malcolm); they behaved in accordance with the expectations of foster parents and of their biological parents when CAS came, for fear of getting into trouble after the case workers left. Malcolm’s words about abusive foster care experiences reveal the systemic and structural barriers that exist for homeless youth, all of which significantly impact social opportunities related to education, employment, and access to services (Gaetz, O’Grady et al., 2016).

In addition, CAS caseworkers often made decisions for youth, which was problematic because that did “not really give me the option ... I find that that’s kind of the number 1 concern of people that are in foster care is that there’s too many moves, there’s not enough consistency within the system and so that really messes with people” (Lauryn, age 19, Black youth).

Linda told me her experience of being a part of CAS and foster care for multiple years, implying that foster parents care more about the money than the kids they foster:

> being in Children’s Aid, going through workers and workers, being moved house to house … the other sad part too that I found out how much foster parents actually make like on average [implying that they make a lot] … it started becoming like a hurtful thing cause a lot of them like, they don’t give a shit about the foster kid. When you’re trying to go to school and you’re trying to do whatever and you’re in a foster home and you sense the vibe of like, they’re, you’re just there for extra money in their pocket kind of thing, it

> makes, you're already in care because of your parents or whatever your situation is but then when you have that feeling on top, then that's when like you like start not caring about people in the world or yourself because you're like, well no one cares about me.
>
> Linda, age 22, White youth

Multiple group home/foster care placements can make youth feel "unwanted" and negatively influence how they feel. Improved consistency and stability of care was a common need youth shared in terms of how they can be better supported and how homelessness can be prevented. Youth make clear how structural and systemic constraints abound for this population and make life difficult. Lauryn said more about the dark side of her CAS experiences:

> I hate the fact that … I've been treated the way I have been in certain homes and by certain foster parents. I think there needs to be a lot more awareness about what actually goes on behind closed doors, like I've been bullied and I've been tormented by people, I haven't been fed and that has all affected me and somebody who has been so resilient, who has been able to conquer so much and to hit a breaking point and collapse the way I did, it shouldn't have happened, it should have been avoided, and if you [society] really cared, you should have been doing everything that you could to prevent that from happening. The message that I got is that I'm not really worth it and that's been going through my mind a lot is that I don't have as much worth as some kids or you know, because of my age especially, that everything changes, you know, you're 18–19, you're independent and so you should be able to do it on your own ... I just feel like a lot more investigation should be happening within like foster homes and group homes, places that are very well known that people view so highly of, behind doors it's different, it's a lot more dark, and I hate it and yeah, I just, there's so much that I would want done and I want to be able to make these changes myself and make a lot more awareness but I feel like am I really going to be listened to? I don't know, 'cause I'm just one voice, right?!
>
> Lauryn, age 19, Black youth

Child protection services "are given the responsibility by the state to ensure that youth are protected from harm, neglect and/or abuse" through counselling and support, and removal of the child from the home if it is deemed to be unsafe (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016, p. 46). However, many youth suffer through bad experiences and receive inadequate support, left to fend for themselves. Due to the rise in neoliberal ideologies and practices and their concurrent

individualistic perspective – which views homelessness as a choice – we need to question what the state's obligation is to young people who are in these situations or transitioning out of care (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016, p. 46), especially when their narratives are full of the complexities, abuse, neglect and rejection they feel in foster care and group homes, leaving them choice-less and without adequate resources.

Home–School Continuum

For young people at risk of becoming homeless and/or who are homeless, their family lives are often so tension-filled that to focus on school is difficult. Many youth have unstable home environments that do not provide the necessary supports essential for achieving success or consistency in school, despite their own intelligence and motivation. What role does the school play amidst such significant family instability? Before Sofia's controlling and abusive home environment became a reason for her to turn towards drugs and alcohol, she explained that she "was really good in high school, I got great grades and I was always like that, the kid who did, you know, really well like, I never needed much discipline, things like that" (Sofia, age 23, White youth). When I asked what school was like while growing up and now, Martin said:

> Um, isolating, I had a lot of social anxiety because of home life … I didn't make a lot of friends, I was a little socially awkward because I was out of the social circle from grade 4, that's where I started kind of splitting off because of my home situation. That's where all the over thinking started, I'm sure and just complete isolation … I may have had one friend, and I was always a very awkward kid, because I was unsure of myself. I had a father telling me, you're worthless and you're no good …
>
> Martin, age 23, gay, White youth

In so many ways, youth shared how school (at times) was more like "home" than their actual home. School was the safe haven their home was not, and for some youth, school became a refuge from their abusive home lives, where they could spend eight hours in a safe space,

regardless of their attendance and participation. When asked about her educational trajectory, Alesha retold her experiences in high school, college, and university in relation to her family life:

> But when you're a kid you just think man, what the fuck did I do to get hit so much? ... man what the fuck am I doing wrong? …You know, my parents just lying to my doctors and teachers telling them these horrible things that just weren't true ... they were trying to convince me that I was crazy and that there was something wrong with me … so, when I was in high school, it was very hard to hear from people niceness, I had never known respect before … I was like, oh this is what it's like to be treated nicely … but then it just made so much sense and that's where like the teen angst came from I guess so I knew all of a sudden, oh this is why I'm so anxious all the time, this is why I'm depressed, this is why I'm lying all the time and making up these little stories in my head, this is why I'm escaping and watching television constantly, this is why I'm not doing well in school … it just kind of clicked, but imagine trying to code very egotistical people that information, hey, you're the one that fucked up my life! Oh no, they wouldn't have that.
>
> Alesha, age 25, gender fluid, bisexual, pansexual, White youth

Young people's narratives tell us that the homelessness of some youth was a result of the ways in which their problematic family lives penetrated their school attendance and classroom experiences, making it difficult to continue with school. For example, David told the story of being in a foster home from the age of 11 onward, because neighbours had filed complaints and concerns to CAS and police, resulting in police reports. While he was living with his mother, after coming back from visiting his father in the United States, CAS intervened:

> CAS took me from school because there were concerns about my mom and her boyfriend fighting all the time, I remember I was there for some of their disagreements and it became physical, it wasn't good, you know? My mom was a single mom and I didn't like seeing that at all and I didn't want to like grow up to eventually, because I always used to want to hurt the guy for putting his hands on my mom and it wasn't healthy for her or for us seeing that. So, CAS took us and that was the last time I lived at home.
>
> David, age 24, mixed race – Black, Indian, and Spanish youth

Being in foster care also sometimes meant multiple moves, in addition to all the moves prior to foster care. Such excessive mobility can be a major factor that hinders the school experiences of youth. Daniel, an Inuit youth, shared the sad reality of him being "ripped away

from home in grade three and then grade six; I grew up rough so I'd get drunk at school, like in grade school and high school" (Daniel, age 26, Indigenous; Inuit youth). When I asked Malcolm, a disabled youth, whether or not the school supported him in the ways he needed, he mentioned that he had "been to about 15 schools since I was in Kindergarten," and when I asked him whether school was difficult because he was moving around from place to place, he added that "No, it was because my mom was, would get angry at the school administration and then move me, so I never really stayed anywhere too long and there are pictures of me in every school" (Malcolm, age 17, White youth), which made him feel embarrassed amongst peers.

Instability in the home lives of youth was also characterized by parent's being separated or divorced. Having to jump from one parent's house to the other, especially when both parents lived far apart, also impacted school stability, attendance, and participation. Timothy mentioned:

> I'm now 20. It started when I was 16 and I was not going to class, not doing my chores at home, stealing stuff, so that's what originally lead my dad to kicking me out of his house. I went to my mom's house in Markham, was in school for a bit, had a situation with someone who made a comment about my mother, I happened to be carrying a knife that day and I pulled out my knife and said to him that if he ever made a comment like that again, that that would be his last day alive … after that day, cops were called and I ended up getting kicked out of school … not too long after that my mom kicked me out, I ended up at [X Shelter] since then, I have travelled around to different shelters from Toronto to Sutton to Barrie to Oshawa. So yeah, it's been a difficult four years, almost five now.
>
> Timothy, age 20, Indigenous; Black youth

At the time of the interview, Timothy mentioned having lived for periods of time at different shelters. He had made money by panhandling in Toronto, experienced living on the streets for months, and temporarily with a girlfriend in an apartment they both rented with money from panhandling. In terms of school, he had scheduled an appointment for an initial assessment with a learning centre hoping to earn high school credits, as he felt motivated to finish school after being kicked out. Another youth, Martin, who identified as gay, told the story of growing

up with his mother and her boyfriend, who "tried to choke me to death; he was an alcoholic and would attack me if I didn't do what I was told; that's not how you discipline a child. When you create fear, you create anger, resentment and uh, I was taken from them and put into CAS."

Being alone was hard for him, as he kept moving between relief homes, "so that started to create the instability; I have a history of abusive relationships, family members, and friends." During high school, he struggled with addiction and started to give up initiatives aimed at improvements: "At this time, though, school had just become completely not important, I was flying, like I was going through different homes, stayed with a couple of friends, was in a group home for a year, I continued trying to go to school but it just became unimportant." The priority was basic necessities. He was couch surfing with friends and "wouldn't know where to go next," and life was "very inconsistent, so I just dropped school entirely and just got a [full time] job" as a cook at a daytime restaurant, and was able to find an apartment shortly thereafter. However, after numerous times of "being late," "showing up drunk" to work, and "making so many mistakes" (Martin, age 23, gay, White youth), he was fired after being given three warnings.

Homeless to Home: Family Reconnection

It is well known that young people and adult caregivers live with some degree of tension or conflict, often resolved over time, as youth move into adulthood, and families are able to positively reconcile and move forward (Winland, 2013). However, when considering homeless youth, emergency supports and aid agencies often do not focus on reconnecting youth with their families (Winland, 2013, p. 15). For these youth, since family is often framed as the "problem" due to histories of conflict and abuse, there is a common myth that when youth leave home they sever relations with family and no longer desire or pursue contacts. This is an incorrect myth

(Winland et al., 2011). Many youth in this study (73%) currently keep in contact with various family members, including parents, siblings, aunts, and grandparents, despite having left home. Additionally, over 50% went back home multiple times before leaving for good, pointing to missed opportunities for family reconnection and interventions that could have supported youth and their families. While many youth framed issues at home as irreconcilable, both parents and youth often desired to mend relationships with each other, as evidenced through sentiments such as: "I love my family, family over everything" (Paul, age 20, White youth), despite being disconnected at the time of the interview. Such examples demonstrate that encouraging natural supports through positive relations with family and meaningful adults are assets that will help homeless youth make a healthy and resilient transition into adulthood.

Homeless youth see the importance of family relations, too, and sometimes try to justify, or explain away more punitive relationships. For example, some youth made excuses for strict parenting and used stereotypes and perceptions of "strict European values" to excuse poor parental behaviour. Youth did this to preserve their parent's reputation in front of me, but it also seemed that they were negotiating their own feelings about why their parents may have acted abusively or neglectfully. Even those who had extremely abusive relationships with their parents had attempted to reconnect, like Craig, for example, an Indigenous youth who described his father as an "abuser" and a "deadbeat" whom he has not talked with for eight years – but "honestly, it's not that I haven't tried" to reach out and talk to him, he told me, "it's just he has not put the effort out to reciprocate the communication so I've just learned to move on." (Craig, age 23, Indigenous; White youth). Reconnecting youth with family or attempting to mediate and resolve underlying conflicts is important, but we need to acknowledge that there will also be many situations in which family reconciliation is not a safe or possible option (Winland, 2013).

During interviews, discussions unfolded around what would have made a positive difference or prevented homelessness. A significant number of youth felt that professional interventions such as counselling or family mediation could have helped to resolve family issues.[32] Amber told me that her relationship with her parents could be better if: "I guess I could sit down with them and talk and see how it goes but I mean, I would probably have someone outside of the situation, or some of my other family members there, to just kind of mediate it all" (Amber, age 22, White youth). This, she thought, could have prevented family separation, and ultimately, homelessness. Many youth indicated their desire for improved relationships with family despite past conflict, and some (approximately 30%) said they had positive and consistent relationships with parents. Therefore, it is important that those supporting youth see the value in helping them reconnect with families and communities (Winland, 2013). These connections can be critical in helping young people survive on the streets and move out of homelessness.

After a series of conflicts at home, Noah, an Ojibwa First Nations youth, and his siblings were separated into different foster homes through CAS intervention. Not knowing anyone and being separated from his siblings was difficult. Despite being disconnected, he mentioned that: "eventually they put us in one group home in Markham together for a little bit and then they separated us again, but … they always let us keep in contact, my foster family and their family, we would make arrangements to meet at like McDonalds or something so I'd go and see … my one sister" (Noah, age 20, Indigenous-half Ojibwe First Nations youth). Amidst all the flaws the foster care system presents, combined with being homeless, these youth (and others) still made efforts to remain connected. Noah and his siblings' desire to stay connected is consistent with

[32] This suggestion from youth is important, and we need to know more. Examples of places in the world, such as the US, UK, and Australia, where such interventions are made possible can be found throughout the dissertation.

other research with Indigenous youth that advocates keeping siblings together if families have to place their children into care, and that foster families should always take into account what Indigenous youth and their individual families wants and needs are (Baskin, 2013).

One very important way that youth were able to “stay connected” with their family and friends was through their smartphones and social media outlets (e.g., Facebook and Instagram). Almost every youth that I interviewed had a cell phone; many did not have a data plan or were perhaps using ‘pay as you go’ instead of a monthly phone plan. While phones and a phone plan cost a lot of money, it seemed that some youth prioritized having a phone over affording other facets of daily life, although the participants and I did not discuss affordability or phone plan costs in detail. Most youth preserved their smartphone and related internet communications, demonstrating their strong desire to “stay connected,” which was also a way for them to maintain their sense of belonging. The shelters I visited did provide Wi-Fi and therefore, youth without a phone plan or data could use Wi-Fi to stay connected. For those without a phone, they mentioned that social media and email, which they often accessed through computers housed at the local library or shelter were a way for them to contact family and friends.

Undoubtedly, for some youth, reconciling with families is not possible or safe (Winland et al., 2011). However, even when it may not have been the right time to fully integrate back with family members after becoming homeless, or while at the shelter, it was still important for young people to remain connected. Raza told me that “these past few days and stuff, they’ve [my parents] been coming here and stuff and I’ve been going out like, not with my parents but like with my brother, because it was like his birthday too, but like I’m connecting with them in some ways, like I just don’t feel like right now is the right time” (Raza, age 19, Iranian youth).

These youth point to the importance of reconnection, as “people flourish when they have supports, which may include family” (Winland, 2013, p. 16). It was David, whose words reinforced this point and the importance of family support as essential to his development and growth as he shared what could have made a positive difference and prevented homelessness:

> “…just being with my mom, you know, because I really loved my mom, I was always close to her…and everyone needs their family, like your family, when you’re with family, you feel stronger, you feel healthier. Like, we talk here and there…but like I’m saying, I never got to grow up with her you know and my siblings, any of them…
>
> David, age 24, mixed race – Black, Indian, and Spanish youth

Heartfelt disclosures by youth suggest that policies and programs that target family instability, including mediation and counseling could assist the prevention of youth homelessness in York Region. It appears possible to prevent and reduce homelessness by working with youth and their families through caring and inclusionary approaches (Making Ends Meet in York Region, 2011; Winland et al., 2011). However, the investment in doing so remains one of the major obstacles to moving forward, as will be discussed further in chapters 6 and 7.

Shelters as Replacement Homes

As I continued to listen to the youths’ experiences of what it is like to be young and homeless in York Region and the circumstances that led them to leave home, the research setting and questions about supports and services in the region led us to discuss their shelter use, and how these institutional response and supports can be improved. The number of youth in shelters was bleak and depressing, especially when I would visit the same shelter for consecutive days and see different faces each day. For some youth, having to go to a shelter brought forth stigma, social exclusion and feelings of isolation, all of which will be discussed in the following section.

As such, while shelters provide alternative accommodations, young people who have nowhere safe to go are left with very limited choices – or none at all - but to rely on emergency services, overcrowded shelters that may not be youth specific, or drop-in day programs. In this section, I highlight conversations with youth, and draw on insights from volunteers and shelter staff to explore and better understand the nature and purpose of shelters, and whether shelters are the solution to homelessness or merely reproduce the problem (Hurtubise et al., 2009).

A Snapshot of the Shelter System in York Region

In their chapter about shelters for the homeless, Hurtubise et al., (2009) discuss the history of shelters, and how in the 1990s critics of shelters raised the issue of shelters being "perceived as part of a system that tries to hide the homeless population" (p. 3). At this time, the media started to present homeless people in public areas as an annoyance and menace. Various strategies and solutions emerged as a result of this inhumane thinking, in hopes to "fix" the "problem." Firstly, cities designed public spaces to be less attractive to homeless people (architecture, streetscape) and controlled the behaviour of homeless people (sleeping or squatting) through litigation (Hurtubise et al., 2009). Such efforts to rid cities of those deemed "undesirable" or "unfit" encouraged the development of shelters as a way to "protect" society from those who are homeless (Hurtubise et al., 2009; Johnsen et al., 2005; Sibley, 1995).

In York Region, there are limited shelters, which leads to an underestimation of the homeless population that exists there, even though many suffer from absolute and hidden homelessness (Noble et al., 2014).[33] York Region has shelters, transitional housing, drop-in

[33] It had already been an hour of driving and my GPS said there were a few minutes left, but I was in the middle of nowhere and there was no shelter in sight! I couldn't help but wonder, how does someone without money or access to transportation get to some of these shelters in York Region, anyway? (Field Notes, October 2016).

centers and other services, but they are spread out and sparse, often forcing youth to leave the community to access services in Toronto.[34] The varied and unique experiences of study youth make apparent that not all those who suffer from homelessness are shelter users and not all who use shelters are living on the streets. However, the youth who were using the drop-in services, such as the gym, coming in to get bus fare, or coming to eat or attend workshops related to training, employment, and education were living in unstable housing, such as temporary basement apartments, with friends, other guardians, or in and out of their parents' or extended families' homes; a few were absolutely homeless, navigating life on the streets.

The shelter system poses limitations and restrictions that can also subject youth to the revolving door of poverty and homelessness. For instance, what happens to youth after they have exhausted their shelter stay? In addition, eligibility criteria for youth was different for each shelter and for each program offered, and caseworker discretion also plays a role, which is evident in the stories youth shared. Shelters and emergency services are able to manage the crisis of homelessness, but they do not always aid in the prevention of the problem. Therefore, it is not surprising then, that becoming a part of – or dependent on – "the shelter system" is something youth resisted but were often forced to choose, because they had nowhere else to go.

An example of this point was made by Isaac, who said the shelter system was "alright if you have to do it, but I obviously don't want to be here. It's ridiculous!" (Isaac, age 26, Black youth). The experience of going to a shelter can be anxiety inducing and emotion filled. When friends congratulated Malcolm for getting a spot within the shelter, he was enraged:

> People were saying congratulations to me when I got in [shelter]; I was like congrats for what?! And they're like, *well this is what you wanted,* and I said no! None of this is what

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[34] Taken directly from the *Leaving Home* report: "The City of Toronto has a population of 2.7 million, and over 3,800 emergency shelter beds, while York Region, with 40% of the population, has a fraction of the number of beds (115)" (Noble et al., 2014, p. 30).

> I wanted. I didn't want a mom with a mental illness, a father who was emotionally abusive, and I didn't want to end up in foster care … or think I'd be involved in trying to advocate for services, you know, I didn't know the horrors of the child welfare system!
>
> Malcolm, age 17, White youth

Although youth appreciated having shelters as accommodations while homeless, many felt ambivalent about using a shelter because of associated stigma, and because they perceived the shelter system as an institutional trap that keeps them in a state of homelessness due to potential dependency on the system. This ambivalence is made apparent by Steven, while he also points to how the shelter can also be a supportive place and provide accommodations for youth until they can find a more permanent place to stay: "When you get into a sys ... a shelter system, you're like *should I be here, should I not be here?* But half the times when you're in a shelter, there are people that actually will help and so that way they get you out of the shelter and that way you can find a place" (Steven, age 22, bisexual, Indigenous, Black youth). Some youth believed that being around people who don't depend on the system would help them find pathways out of homelessness. Submitting oneself to what many referred to as "the system" raised important questions for youth: Will I be accepted into the shelter? Am I homeless if I stay in a shelter? Can the shelter be considered a home? If I enter the system, will I ever get out?

Shelter Season; Shelter Hopping

Spending countless hours with youth allowed me to follow their movements across shelters as they attempted to establish some semblance of stability in a precarious situation. Most interviews were conducted during the coldest months, which helped me learn a lot about the shelter system and its users. I almost always had participants; staff told me that in the winter months youth stay for long hours or days due to harsher weather conditions outside, intensifying

their inability to survive outside, and shelter use even more essential. The impacts of weather on shelter use became clearer one Friday, when I anticipated participants but had none. The weather was unpredictably warm that day and, after lunchtime, many youth had left the shelter.

Many of the youth in the study (approximately 50%) reported using emergency services and had found them to be helpful. Interestingly, however, research shows that "generally, youth are less inclined to use public services and shelters and prefer life on the streets" (Hurtubise et al., 2009, p. 4; Brooks et al., 2004; De Rosa et al., 1999), for several reasons. The understandings I gained about shelter use and preferences through my interviews came from youth who *did* access services, and so may not be representative of all homeless youth, as many avoid shelters and services. Connor said: "the only reason I'm here, is just like, I would just kind of be living out in the streets if it wasn't so cold out, you know what I mean? But like Canada's like freezing" (Connor, age 22, White man). Most youth were at shelters due to their limited options, and the issues were multilayered. Craig explained his battles with the streets and shelters:

> For six years … [sigh], I've been on and off the streets and shelters over 30 times, shelters more often; it got to a point where I got robbed for money and items and I lost everything [at shelter] so I finally decided to just start living on the streets because if somebody were to wrong me, I could take care of it … without the fear of an unjust system and it's rough because you gotta panhandle, look for food, try and obey the laws as much as possible to the point where you're not causing an abnormal ruckus in public, which is really hard to do because people will make assumptions regardless of if you're in that situation or not.
>
> Craig, age 23, Indigenous youth

Craig also suffered from chronic back pain after enduring an injury, and the winter months made his "condition severely worse," which was "the reason why I finally got off the streets and came here". Evidently, youth often perceive the shelter systems as sites of further frustration and loss, places where their homelessness is managed and maintained, rather than solved.

I learned that some youth use "shelter hopping" as a survival strategy if they maxed out on their stay or burned bridges with staff. In this way, shelters can also instil fear and insecurity in users, as some shelters let youth stay for 30 days, four months, or up to a year. These rigid and short timelines are not always sufficient for youth to "get back on their feet," often forcing youth to spiral back into homelessness. This can also undo the progress they have made to find pathways out of homelessness, leaving them further entrenched.

After being homeless for seven years, bouncing between the streets, living with different partners, and in shelters, Joanne shared how limited shelter stays are detrimental for youth:

> This place doesn't make sense to me because they only give you four months to live here so … after the four months, you're kicked out and if you come right now, you can't start the new [X program], until a month later so then that leaves you with three months … then, when you go down to three months, it becomes two months because the program is a 12 week program and by the time you go into your work, you are down to two months so when you get down to two months, you probably have a lot of debt, like my boyfriend and I, so then we were left down to a month because we spent a month of our paycheques on getting rid of debt and now that we have 1 month left, we got to our savings and which those savings, we only have $3,000, but that has to go towards our first and last so here we go with the vicious cycle left into summer, we have no idea if we're going to be okay, we know that we will because we have one another to work hard but it's the preparation, it's the getting there, you know? … If it was six months, it would make sense but it's not and it makes everything so impossible, like living is impossible; it's messed up, I hate it!
>
> Joanne, age 23, mixed race; Spanish, Haitian and French youth

One participant in particular, Matthew, a 26-year-old, White youth, continued to rotate between shelters for four-month periods, gaining a reputation from staff as a "shelter hopper." However, despite rules in York Region around four-month maximum stays, most staff turned a blind eye to his situation, not wanting to expel him back into homelessness, especially because he was working towards his GED and they wanted to support him. For him and others, having

somewhere to rest and recover was needed in order to move forward;[35] this became essential as he worked towards his educational goals, and the response he received from the shelter staff gave me some indication of the emphasis and support placed, in some shelters more than others, on educational advancement for youth.

Suffering, Suffocating and Surviving: "I Have Nowhere Else to Go …"

During my long days at the shelters, I noticed all the ways in which residents (and myself) were restricted and bound by limits and rules. It became evident that, "most shelters set rules and regulations that outline acceptable and unacceptable behavior for both shelter users and practitioners" (Neale et al., 1997; Roy et al., 2000; Hurtubise et al., 2009, p. 48). In many ways, shelters were structured like other institutional settings; constant announcements echoed, and there were high levels of security on each door that at times seemed excessive. Like Hurtubise et al., (2009, p. 7) state, rules around permission to enter shelters are often dependent "on the person's mental state (intoxication / aggressiveness),[36] personal characteristics (gender / age), or history with the shelter (number of visits)." Once inside, "there are rules governing personal hygiene (showering / changing clothes), curfew and wake up times, respecting others (noise, aggressive behaviour, violence), and participation in group chores (food preparation / dishwashing)" (p. 7). I noticed that youth faced additional policing, reduced access to services and were assigned extra chores if they did not respect the already existing shelter rules.

[35] Recent contracts with shelters across York Region stipulate that individuals cannot be discharged into homelessness. This is a very positive, progressive, and supportive development (Noble et al., 2014).

[36] I noticed that such factors were assessed case by case. For example, I remember 1 youth lying on the floor with eyes glazed over and he was not allowed in the common area until he sobered up, staff seemed to know he was intoxicated. Aggressiveness seemed to be measured by arguments or physical fights with other youth.

Youth who are already facing exclusion and isolation are sometimes further marginalized in a system that purportedly aims to temporarily house and support them. Joanne, who we met earlier, provided an account of the cold and harsh complexities that come with shelter life:

> I do not want to go to [X section] at all whatsoever, definitely not. It's awful, it's the same thing, you get your same room, like you're in a shelter, attached to a shelter, and you just get a room that you have to pay $367 for and it's actually not even that great because you're living with other people who are still in the shelter, who have mental illnesses or physical whatever and they all bicker, they're not friendly, it's kind of like an apartment, the most unwarming apartment, you just have a bunch of rooms, one of the rooms, nobody ever likes to chill in the common area, and in the common area, everyone is just kept to themselves. It's just like a miserable place, like why would you want to go and live for $367 there, right beside the shelter and we also don't want to be near the shelter, like we're established in our heads and like, my boyfriend and I just feel like if we want something, we have to go and get it so we don't want to wait back and be like even though $367 is good … you gotta abide by a lot of rules, you know you can't have an animal, you can't have a lot of guests, there's a maximum. You can't live together, you can't have sleepovers, you know what I mean? It's all these rules where people can dictate our lives and it's like as if I haven't been through enough of having people tell me what to do, you know, so it's so annoying and it's really dehumanizing and degrading when you see, there are girls here that are like 23 and I'm 23 and then they look at me like I'm still a kid and they're so much more above me, that's why I hate being here!"
>
> Joanne, age 23, mixed race; Spanish, Haitian, French youth

Due to the vulnerable situation of many of the clients entering shelters, and the staff's difficult task of caring for individuals in distress, I understood the need for some structure. However, since shelters can be sites of exclusion that divide the homeless from the housed, the policing that happens at shelters, while framed as being in the best interest of the clients, is often questionable. Because of the ways in which homeless people are publicly perceived and dehumanized, one can't help but wonder whether those safety and security measures are also in place to "protect" those who are not homeless in spaces where they are amongst those who are.

This becomes even more questionable when access to certain rooms and areas in the shelter are reserved for certain people, or when staff members can walk in on clients at times set out by them, essentially treating the unique needs of youth inequitably, as Megan expressed:

> This place … you get your space and your own privacy, the one thing I hate is the 8 AM wake up calls and you know when … the staff enter your room, they will knock and then scan and open and it's like, can you knock first and then let me answer you, cause' I can be butt naked and you're walking in on me … there are males who work here, that's another thing, like that makes me uncomfortable, like if you're female, I've given birth in front of plenty of females, I don't care, like if you're a chick, walking in, like oh sorry, no one cares, but if you're a male, I'm sorry, that's a whole different ball game.
>
> Megan, age 19, White youth

Also, while the perception is that all of these safety measures provide privacy, there is also a paradoxical complete lack of privacy, seen in Alesha's description of what a typical day at the shelter is like: "Okay, uh I wake up around, well 7:30 is when we are woken up and I am incapable of having a shower or using the bathrooms because they're communal." The lack of privacy also manifests itself between clients when they have to share communal rooms, or bathrooms that are often left unkept and unclean because "people have no consideration for others due to mental illnesses, different personalities and different cultures clashing together in one communal space, so they kind of just don't give a crap about hygiene, blood, piss, shit on the floor that kind of thing so believe me, I'm not exaggerating, it's, it's pretty friggin' bad"! (Alesha, age 25, gender fluid, bisexual, pansexual, White youth)

Alesha and David also shared the annoyances of shelter life, pointing towards the anxieties associated with being in the shelter environment:

> Once the women who has her three-hour shower decides that she wants to leave finally leaves, then I go up to have a shower, then I will generally leave a magnet in my door so I can get in, because we are locked out from 9-11, or sorry 9-1, so that's a little frustrating if you forget to put something in the door, hahaha, so basically my day is filled with little annoyances, while being here, um, which are kind of triggering sometimes because I

> obviously don't want to be here, I'm here because I have nowhere else to go. Um, usually the food's not that great but you eat it because you don't really have anywhere else to eat.
>
> Alesha, age 25, gender fluid, bisexual, pansexual, White youth

> You always have to worry about your shit getting stolen, there's just people coming in, abusing the services, they take it for granted, treat staff like shit, treat everyone like shit, … sometimes you'd have to be worried, because you'd get a maniac, somebody who just doesn't care about anyone else so it's like they're mixed in with your living environment, you know what I mean? So, it wasn't really healthy, mentally healthy environments.
>
> David, age 24, mixed race; Black, Indian and Spanish youth

Due to the instability that homelessness presents, homeless people are at higher risk of health issues, and so the health status of people using shelters is of concern. For some youth, using shelters can cause further health issues because of "sleep deprivation, personal hygiene difficulties, or limited space for storing personal goods" (Hurtubise et al., 2009; p. 5). Alesha discussed how aspects of stigma associated with those who reside in shelters have some truth: "this is the first shelter that I have ever unfortunately had to be at and the stigma was that I would be surrounded by drug addicts, prostitutes, people who were mentally unstable because that's what I had seen and I'm not gonna' lie, pretty much ticked all the boxes when I got here." Martin added: "my CAS worker directed me to a shelter, and even I had the assumption that I was going to get stabbed, hell – raped, mugged, who knows?! (Martin, age 23, gay, White youth).

This youth identified as gay and told me he had to act and dress in "certain" ways in order to "pass" within the shelter system, especially around other residents. For Martin, what it meant to "pass" was related to not presenting as gay due to related stigma and exclusions. Passing also meant gauging an environment to determine what is appropriate in order to feel comfortable and adapt. Unfortunately, shelter systems are not always equipped with solutions aimed at attending to the needs of gender and sexual minority youth (Gaetz, O'Grady et al.,

2016; Noble et al., 2014), Martin is a reminder that we need to ensure that the system as a whole does not replicate or amplify the homophobia and transphobia that young people experience leading up to their homelessness. If not, services and institutions become part of the problem (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). There is a constant fear and fight that comes with staying at a shelter, especially in relation to "figuring out the system" and preventing having food, money, or other belongings stolen, a commonly given reason why youth dislike staying at shelters.

Megan told me, for example: "you gotta fight for your stuff … even with food, you leave a plate of food out, your food gets taken … you can't even leave a pen out and your pens get taken." Anxieties around belongings being stolen were prominent, especially since if "you have roommates, your space isn't exactly your space, your belongings are locked out and people are going to steal your crap" (Megan, age 19, White youth). Shelters include a mix of people who have varied experiences with homelessness, and complex challenges and traumas that are not always adequately dealt with (Hurtubise et al., 2009). Fears and anxieties about what might happen at shelters are commonplace. Youth viewed shelters through multiple lenses; they can deprive youth of freedom due to enforced rules that "control the physical and social environment, which can reinforce their marginal identity," and the culture of shelters can be alienating, as identities become defined by belonging to a shelter, often "translating into a loss of autonomy and a feeling of domination and enclosure" (Hurtubise et al., 2009, p. 13). Study youth shared just how scary, overwhelming, stressful and challenging shelter life can be.

Despite these criticisms, shelters can also bring comfort and provide youth with more stability and safety than living at home, the streets, or couch surfing: Steven stated: "I feel more safe than I was when I was living with my parents at the time, like before they kicked me out so it's, now that I'm in a safe place, it makes me feel happier than I was before" (Steven, age 22,

bisexual, Indigenous, Black youth). The shelter environment can also be more positive than home, because “no one is yelling at me and telling me how ruthless I am, you know? So, I feel pretty good here, there are a lot of resources and good counsellors” (Sofia, age 23, White youth). Furthermore, Malcolm told me that despite the busy days at the shelter, where you may not get to eat and feel rushed, “it’s also good to know that at the end of the day, you can go back there and stay there” (Malcolm, age 17, White youth).

Youth who are homeless create communities amongst themselves as a way to survive their challenging circumstances and be around those who understand them. Sofia, who was suffering with severe addictions and felt as if her home environment enabled her drug use, said:

> Yeah, I feel like just being around people [at the shelter], I feel less depressed, even the thoughts of wanting to use, like when I’m around people and I feel supported and counsellors saying like how are you doing … having people who get it, who are in precarious situations, who understand addiction, like that just changes everything for me.
>
> Sofia, age 23, White youth

Similarly, Amber advised youth who are homeless and not feeling mentally well to “go to a community centre, go to a shelter, something … at least you can be around others cause you know, if you’re by yourself too much, you’re going to go crazy” (Amber, age 22, White youth). For some, like Matthew, the shelter can provide the space for personal reflection: “I’m just trying to find out what I want as a person and like what I want to do” (Matthew, age 26, White youth) – in order to move forward.

Lost in the Shelter Shuffle: Services and (In)Accessability

Asking youth about their experiences with access and services at the shelters also provided an opportunity to examine potential areas of improvement. About 80% of study youth

felt there should be more services and resources available in York Region, as the region does not have services that accommodate the needs of every youth. All four shelters[37] I visited promoted job readiness and labour force participation through workshops and helped youth seek employment through temporary agencies. They also tried to direct youth towards the best services for their health and mental health needs. However, the "on the ground" experiences of youth did not always match the declared intentions of the shelters. Sakina shared an example of this contradiction when she explained how difficult it is to access services:

> I called [X Shelter] every day, like for a week or so and then I got it, you have to call them, like mostly in the morning or at 12 in the morning and then you call them every day and ask them if they have a bed available and then, umm, and then they say, and then they call you to see if there's a bed or not and then you get, and then you get in.
>
> Sakina, age 22, Chinese youth

After asking how youth "figure all of this stuff" out, Megan had told me:

> I've mostly just seen this stuff through flyers and mostly just other people who have been a lot more experienced with the homelessness thing so I, I'm more of like a friend resources type of thing, I've learned a lot from other people um, but I know there is a decent amount, especially for homelessness in York Region.
>
> Megan, age 19, White youth

Most youth learn about services through word of mouth or avenues like CAS. When relationships with family are damaged, accessing shelters is crucial for safety and rest:

> No, it was just they didn't answer, didn't pick up the phone so I was assuming the best, maybe they weren't at the phone or something or but uh, I tried calling them a multitude of times and then ended up getting a bus to come to Newmarket and … it was like 10ish when I got into Newmarket and then I ended up not finding a place and I went over to … there's a little out of the way portion towards the train tracks, it's a little, kind of secluded area so I went and chilled there and luckily my pack had enough stuff in it to keep me warm and it wasn't a cold night or anything so it wasn't absolutely dreadful, I've survived worse … so then Saturday rolled around and I was trying to find a place again, called Sutton, Covenant House again, [X Shelter] and … it was [X Shelter] said that they

[37] Details of the four shelters/agencies where my research was conducted can be found in the Appendix; this includes the number of emergency beds, transitional beds, and other services and supports offered.

> were going to see if they had space available because they had someone leaving and that was the best option that I had and so … I went over to my parents' and uh, and asked if I could stay the night, they said no, but we'll get you a cheap hotel room for the night so that was good, and uh stayed in the hotel room … of course I was miserable so, it was the hotel room that was right … over there so there was an LCBO right near it and so first thing I did, I used to have a big alcohol problem, so first thing I did, I went and bought myself a nice big thing of whiskey and I didn't get super drunk but got, you know, it wasn't fun but I stayed there for the night and the next morning is when I came here.
>
> James, age 24, Indigenous, White youth

The challenge of accessibility is a central point, especially when needs are clearly defined but accessibility is limited. All needed services were not readily available in the shelters I visited, and the complex problems of the homeless were not always considered in those that were offered. Malcolm, whose homelessness was a result of years of abuse and neglect from biological and foster parents, provides a clear example of inaccessibility. He was in a wheelchair due to having cerebral palsy, making his accessibility issues even more challenging. Although one shelter did provide space for him, they originally told him that they had never dealt with a case like his before.

> I came to [X Shelter] and the question that is given to me is we've never had a disabled homeless youth, and um, I said, well you have one now and they said yeah but we don't know what to do and I said well, who does know what to do? And nobody has any idea and it got to a point where the housing worker here at [X shelter], which is a great person, but she says to me, I'm out of options, the CAS won't help you, you don't quality for something you'd quality for if you had a developmental disability, you can't stay in our residential program because it's not accessible, you can only stay in X for four months and then what would you do? We can't find a house, or a room for you to rent because even if you were to rent a room or a house, if it's not accessible, it's not safe. So, it really is the most frustrating experience to be homeless and then to be homeless and disabled, I guess the expectation, it feels like anyways …is that disabled people aren't homeless or couldn't ever become homeless … I tried to start getting into [this shelter] since July and um, there is a shortage of beds in York Region for homeless youth if you are able bodied and homeless or normal and homeless, if you want to use that terminology, I don't like it but, um, the, you know, for instance, there's only two youth shelters in York Region that are accessible and it took me months to figure out how I was going to live here because I have personal support workers who come in to help me with my personal needs … so it took me months to push [X Shelter] to put together a plan to put me in here, that's why it

> took me so long to get out of my home. I wanted to leave home earlier, but I just couldn't, there was no space available, the lack of services is amazing and then at the end of the four months here, that I have, there isn't really an option for accessible housing anywhere, you're looking at $600 a month of OW to pay for all your basic needs, trying to find something that's wheelchair accessible to rent for $600 a month, good luck. So, you know, the obstacle that I now face is on top of trying to go to school and trying to do all that, I have to figure out at the end of four months where the hell I'm going to live, because there isn't really any government funding available for that.

Malcolm, age 17, White youth

Before meeting Malcolm, I had not come across a youth with as many complex challenges. He provided me with just some of the many details of his multiple accessibility issues:

> Well, buttons on doors, which they don't have right now here, like the washroom door, it's accessible to get into it but if you can't get into it, then there's that, which is no good. Um, bars in bathrooms and stuff like that, the shower chair which I talked about earlier is the one thing that I need … a wheelchair that doesn't cause me physical pain. Right now, my wheelchair is causing me physical pain because I am $6,000 in debt and I can't afford to pay it off so, and a walker which I have … so, just, there's a lot of equipment that needs to come with me and as well as assistive technology for writing and typing and that kind of thing as well as a scribe in school or somebody who can write so there's many, many, many things. I should be going to physiotherapy at least twice a week, but I can't afford to do that either … I need a bath seat to be put in … so I can sit on it so it's safer for me when I shower but there's no funding and no money and I don't have any money, so I can't pay for it and [X Shelter] has a limited budget to pay for that kind of thing, so they may not be able to, so … right now, I have to stand up in the shower and hold the bar but if I was to fall and split my head open, it would be a problem so you know, it's multi-faceted because every time you move, there's another part of this … where you move to, your services have to move with you … it's complicated to move for any youth but when you're moving and you add the disability into it, it's quite um, challenging …

Malcolm, age 17, White youth

Malcolm argued that the provision of safe place to stay and the alleviation of accessibility issues (for him, personally) need to be addressed before education as *the* priority responses to homelessness:

> I think you need to start with addressing the fact that there isn't really an accessible shelter and accessible housing because bouncing youth around from place to place to place to place, I mean nobody should have to do that but especially when you're a youth,

> because we're trying to go through life, right, um, so I think we need to address that issue before we can even look at education. Um, and we need to do that like yesterday.
>
> Malcolm, age 17, White youth

Physical barriers like these make homelessness even more difficult. In these cases, homelessness is often associated with a loss of autonomy and a decrease in support networks. Being at a shelter can often increase the effect of these losses, especially when issues of access are at play. Finding space in the shelter on a logistical level was one concern, but it became apparent from what youth shared that issues of belonging were even more difficult. Feeling isolated and excluded from their home lives and society was already an issue, and then they went to a shelter where they also felt lost and alone. The youth's responses about shelter system were full of contradictions and ambivalence: they felt appreciative for shelter, despite the flawed system that needs improvements, but they also expressed a lot of hopelessness when they were described their stays at the shelter; there is a significant loss of dignity and identity, due to discrimination from shelter staff and others outside of the shelter. For example, if a youth is able to maintain employment and position themselves to leave the shelter to rent and move out into their own apartment, they face discrimination from landlords due to the fact that their last place of residence was a shelter; it makes them appear as irresponsible and unstable, and landlords often do not want to risk giving these youth a chance.

When discussing her waitressing job and her seven-year experience with homelessness, human trafficking, exploitation, abuse, and attempts to move forward, Joanne explained:

> I hate this fucking system, it's flawed in every way and we have no help and for people like me, I have no idea why I'm in a shelter. Firstly, if I've been homeless seven years and then I got trafficked and then literally thrown from every corner, now I have victim services helping me but, there is never enough help, it's like *what can we do to soothe the moment for you*, I don't need you to soothe my moment, I need shelter, I need somewhere I can go, I need all these things that I can't get. And even if the housing worker can help

> me, I have to go to these apartments where I have to present my banking, how am I supposed to show them if I'm coming from being homeless, you know, like where are my savings? I'll probably have like $1,000 which is still isn't good enough for them.
>
> Joanne, age 23, mixed race, Spanish, Haitian, French youth

In so many ways, youth kept explaining how the shelter system is flawed. Homeless people have access to limited resources and not much help or support; instead, they receive momentary support from staff and through shelters, aid agencies, and emergency services that are often not enough to sufficiently help youth exit homelessness permanently. One of the major barriers for homeless youth in York Region is the incredibly high cost of housing. James, an Indigenous youth, provides a detailed account about struggling to find housing in the region:

> The housing market and stuff around here is ridiculous, like the price of apartments and stuff compared to other places, like the cheapest that I was able to find in York Region specifically was, it was a basement bachelor apartment that was $900 month and all it was a one room … Yeah, all it was one room with uh, a bathroom and then no laundry, no kitchen, you get a separate entrance but that was it, I think it was split, split, you could split their internet for an extra $50 or something, it doesn't need to be that expensive. I get that it's close to the city and there's a lot of jobs and they expect people to be making money but that's, if they raise the prices and keep raising the prices, that's going to make people leave instead of stay so at least around here, I would say if it was a lot, if it was a lot cheaper to live or if the government offered incentives to places to have, like to have tenants that are homeless or that have uh, low income, stuff like that, if they offered incentives to them, that would help hugely but there's like nothing going on right now. They have all this low-income housing but the problem with that is that once you get into the low-income housing, rarely do you ever get out unless you get a better job"
>
> James, age 24, Indigenous, White youth

Martin also described his experiences with homelessness, housing, and the shelter system due to the issue of unaffordable housing. He mentioned that his being part of the shelter system is out of choice, but these "freedom of choice" narratives are heavily tied to the grip of neoliberalism. We need to make clear that this is not a true choice, but a confined one, considering that finding affordable housing in York Region is next to impossible. In the same

breath, Martin also shared the limits and restrictions posed by the shelter system and also points to the positive aspects of the shelter that support youth in finding pathways out of homelessness:

> Well, I've been homeless for a full year now. Um, it started off because I couldn't afford my living arrangements. I kind of just stayed in the shelter system, to be honest, out of choice because affordable housing is nearly impossible to find unless you're willing to live with a stranger, you know, or several strangers and because I've had that go so wrong in the past, I've opted to stay in the system and with a program like this, it's been possible to continue to grow while still being in the shelter. Finances are a big issue, nothing's affordable anymore, what can you get for $100, not a whole lot, you go to rent a place, what can you get for under a grand? ...I guess I am a little different in the sense where I'm getting to the point where I'm tired of being not in control of anything, you know, I have no control over when I wake up or when I get fed, or um, the people I have to see here every day. You know, if someone's around here causing trouble, you still have to see them every day and for me though, I guess I am closer to the end, like I'm working towards my success now but a lot of people like, I don't know, this place is different in the sense that they're looking to inspire people, not just get them onto the streets and into an apartment and a job. They want kids to want better for themselves and to seek out help instead of having it forced on them. And it's a lot of discussion …
>
> Martin, age 23, Gay, white youth

The youth also provided evidence that shelters in York Region are operating at capacity. Many described their recurring and "revolving door" shelter stays. Across the four shelters in the region, two were youth-specific shelters, and each shelter allowed youth to stay for thirty days, four months, or one year, dependent upon the shelter's policies. Curious to know more about Martin's experience with homelessness, and his views about the allocated time that youth can reside at shelters in York Region, I asked him to educate me further:

> I was in [X Shelter] until I was allowed back in, so I stayed there until I was allowed back in and then the year renewed … I stayed there and kept going to school here [York Region] and I got myself a job and now that I'm back here, I've got my head on straight and I've got a plan for how I'm going to save money and where to find an apartment when I leave here … that's another thing being discussed, is four months really enough? I don't think so, but it's better than other shelters where it's two or one … Belinda's Place is brand new and they only get one month, one month of bliss and then boom!
>
> Martin, age 23, gay, White youth

Some shelters, or sections of shelters, have waiting lists for availability, often leaving youth to make desperate and continuous calls in order to get a bed, but you can access day services in the shelters that offer drop-in services, which not all do. Often, Sofia said, “it’s first come, first serve, so if you call at the right time … but the waiting list is for the one upstairs, the self-contained. I think there are good resources in York Region; I just think there could be a lot more” (Sofia, age 23, White youth). Having exhausted the maximum days allowable in a particular shelter, some youth are left in a holding pattern, waiting to get back in. Through Megan, I learn more about the fee structure for staying in different parts of the shelter:

> You can stay up to, they say the first time, a year, but after that year, if you’ve made good payments and you’re always on time with your payments, and you’re meeting up with the workers, for $375 a month, all inclusive. Um, so if you’re being consistent with them and you’re doing good in the program, they will extend it to two more years or maybe just another year and then look at that other year as well … so it just depends.

What these youth explained is that too many in the region are relying on emergency services and become entrenched in a cycle of homelessness, with time-limited stays as well as limited access to resources. When shelters present barriers, youth seek alternative shelters and resources and are sometimes forced to break the law to fight through an unjust system. Megan explained to me how her and friends would act desperately in order to find ways to acquire what they needed to survive:

> We would actually have to go into Canadian Tire and steal tents, um and then we called, what’s that van called again, the orange one, they give you food, give you tents, like give you anything you really needed, um so we just called them for food and for extra tents and stuff like that, it’s pretty bad, like we’d steal liquor, we’d steal drugs.
>
> Megan, age 19, White youth

Faced with the challenges of navigating systems, social relationships with others – with friends – are important. Many of the interviews revealed a strong sense of community amongst

homeless and street-involved youth. These youth became the best of friends and some even found romantic partners while navigating the shelter system. A few of the participants were dating; one couple even had a child together, and one watched the child while the other one interviewed. In these instances, while youth respected the rules of the shelter whereby females and males cannot share rooms, they still wanted to stay in the same shelter together.

For some youth, shelters – along with transitional units and drop-ins – were their only access points for support services. If youth are not in contact with shelters, there may be a lack of knowledge preventing them from accessing the supports they need. In addition, "the region is not sufficiently covered by public transportation, and therefore does not allow ease of travel between youth services" (Noble et al., 2014, p. 10). Since the shelters are few and far between, accessing services is challenging; 25% of the youth felt that services were too far away to be able to use.

Kamran, a 21-year-old, White youth explained that he was "working in Aurora at Tim Horton's and doing a short-term rental, all the way up in Brampton," making his commute a "ridiculous" four hours each day. When he came to a shelter in York Region, "it was still four hours," so he told his boss he "could not travel four to five hours for a four to five-hour shift"; it just made no sense. Living in shelters may also pose barriers to education, depending on whether the shelter is close to schools or factors like crowdedness, privacy, and the ability to leave behind belongings during the day (Buckner, 2008; Liljedahl et al., 2013). Moreover, there are long wait times for services, and sometimes youth are referred outside of York Region due to the lack of local services; "youth who leave the region run the risk of becoming further disconnected from positive supports" (Noble et al., 2014, p. 10). While shelters can support youth when they have lost home, they are temporary and short-lived, leaving many entrenched in homelessness.

Shelter Staff

Being immersed in the shelter environment, I came to learn that staff at shelters have a very difficult job. Those who use the shelter system and associated services bring with them trauma, despair, and mental health issues. Youth are often fleeing from disrupted family situations; and each staff member is met with the challenge of providing support. Sometimes youth feel shelters are too restrictive and also distrust staff (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Noble et al., 2014). All of this is not surprising as the experience of homelessness brings forth a lot of rejection and loss; youth lose connections with family, friends, and their school community, and relationships with shelter staff are also impacted. Because of the mixed emotions youth feel towards authority figures who remind them of their parents, foster parents, case and aid workers, or law enforcement officials, youth may not trust shelter staff or feel comfortable enough to be vulnerable with them either. Some of those feelings also spilled into our interviews.

Joanne described the culture of the shelters, and her words about the shelter staff are fuelled with confusion, contradictions, and complexities:

> I don't even know, like some of the staff make you feel uncomfortable, some of the staff make you feel good, some of the staff make you feel normal but then it's just like I don't know, I hear like their baby tone voice or they just don't have interest to talk to you in the first place, you know, it's just one of those forced things where you're sitting there and you're like talking to yourself, it's legit, that's exactly how it is.
>
> Joanne, age 23, mixed race, Spanish, Haitian, French youth

Not only this, but because the definition of youth is so broad, some youth are older than other youth and also older than staff, which also presents barriers to forming alliances between staff and youth because some of the homeless youth feel they have more life experience than staff. There were situations whereby youth felt that staff at shelters could have done better.

Joanne advised that sometimes spending time with youth to ask them about their day is more important than helping them become self-sufficient:

> Like you don't have to know what the person went through in order for you to talk to them, you know, like a lot of these people, oh you got a house, oh you got a job, good job, you know, like how about what are you planning to do today, you know I heard about a really cool festival, you know, talk to me like I'm human!

Despite being jaded and upset with her experiences of a flawed system, disclosing that being in a shelter room can be lonely and depressing and feel as if the room is caving in on you, Joanne is still able to describe positive encounters with staff, who make all the difference:

> They personally help me and it's really nice … whenever they see me struggling, they'll speak to me and ask are you okay, or do you need this, what do you need and regardless of what time they have, they always make time for you. And like honestly, that's the one greatest thing about [X Shelter] is that they have such a strong employment team

Sometimes youth felt as if they had to appease the shelter staff through their actions, on top of all the challenges of homelessness. Even when shelters offered flexibility, youth felt as if they were being watched, judged, and policed. Negative experiences with shelters and staff were offset by youths' comments about the incredible staff members that work at shelters. When asked about her experience when coming to a shelter, Tyler stated:

> It's, for me, every time I've ever went into one, it's horrifying, not in the sense that the staff is rude because that was never the case but I always put a bad image in my mind of shelters so every time I went into one, it was always thinking the worst possible thing and that would never happen. I had this mindset set and the staff would say *hey, how's it going?* and treat me really nice and then I'd get that, oh my God, they're actually being really nice and then I would actually start communicating more so. Every experience was different, like some staff didn't have that approach, they were a little bit more by the books, they didn't understand what people were going through so how they approach might be a little bit different, you might take it the wrong way and get upset …
>
> Tyler, age 25, White youth

Similarly, Justin discussed his shelter stay by saying, "It's alright, decent people come in here, good food, the staff here are excellent. Um, services are excellent as well, all the resources.

The staff are like very helpful and they're like personally like just uplifting" (Justin, age 26, White youth). Consistent with other research in York Region, using services was a more positive experience when youth forged strong connections with staff and staff were respectful (Noble et al., 2014). In similar studies conducted in Toronto, formerly homeless youth emphasized how necessary it is for service providers, teachers, school administrators, and support personnel to be caring, friendly, persistent, reliable, and prompt, and to provide outreach (Raine & Marcellin, 2007 as cited in Liljedahl et al., 2013, p. 282).

For some youth, the shelter created feelings of insecurity with regards to forging relationships with staff. Since a shelter is considered temporary housing, many youth felt that the relationships they established with volunteers and staff were also temporary and fleeting. This brought forth feelings of guilt for me as a researcher, as I knew my relationship with youth would also be short-lived, despite my having established strong bonds over a short period of time. Linda had shed light on this, and also implicitly reminds me that I will do the same to her:

> I rarely talk about it out loud, like this is all in my head, but like, I'm just learning these things about myself now but I've put myself through so much shit and hurt and trouble, cause' some of these people that are here that support you, too, they're here, then they're gone though**,** they're only your support for a week or two, me, it's like I finally start doing what I have to do, I found my support, I'm happy and then they're gone and then I'm like, okay I give up again and then I go back down to square one, that's how it's been, my life, but I gotta stop, that's what I mean, like support, like a helping hand, that does sound like I'm a baby I guess but like I gotta suck it up eventually, it's hard.
>
> Linda, age 22, White youth

Shelters are forms of emergency services, and can make youth continue to feel the instability that led them into homelessness in the first place. It can be difficult for youth to build rapport and trust with shelter staff knowing that their relationship and stay at the shelter is precarious as well.

It takes a very special and compassionate person to really connect with youth who are experiencing the crisis of homelessness, and make them feel truly supported. All of the youth I interviewed were intelligent and self-aware people, who had a strong awareness of whether or not a staff member was displaying sincerity and whether or not they were qualified enough to help them. I saw this in the smallest instances, whereby staff would just "hang out" with youth, despite all they had to do, or in the simplest of exchanges, like taking the time to ask youth about their day. Martin explained the various ways in which youth think of staff:

> More is going on here, the people are more educated, you don't just slip by and get in here [as staff], some people they just take a crappy course … a lot of the people here, they have either minored in psychology or majored in psychology, like I can tell that the staff here have been dedicated, you know, versus just wanting a job. Like I've been to shelters where I just swear they're just there for a paycheque and they sit there and tell me, you know we don't get paid enough to deal with this … So, there are staff at shelters that don't care, I'm not going to believe the lie that they all care, some of them are just there for a job and you can see the difference but in this place, they expect their staff to interact with youth, to be active, and I think that's where the difference comes in.
>
> Martin, age 23, gay, White youth

Shelters – Employment and Education

Most shelters in York Region have rules and regulations stipulating that youth have to work or maintain their schooling in order to secure a spot at the shelter – "otherwise they'll kick you out, either you try to get back in school…or even showing them job hunting and shit, they'll let you stay. Eventually they'll push you to get a job and if you don't, you gotta go, so either you get a job or you go back to school" (Dominic, age 22, Indigenous, White youth). Such conditionalities operate under the guise of eligibility; most youth agreed these rules provide good incentive and motivation, but are difficult to uphold. Of the youth I interviewed, 25% felt there should be more services in York Region to help youth with school and 22.5% felt there should be more services available that help them get back to school. We must remember that the precarious

nature of homelessness does not allow youth to maintain employment and education in the same way as a young person who is permanently and safely housed with adult support. Eligibility criteria and caseworker discretion, which play a role in who gets access to the shelters, point to the gatekeeping affecting young people who are homeless and in desperate need of services.

James provided further insight about institutional barriers. He keeps himself going each day by updating and printing his resume and a map of York Region at the shelter, then dropping resumes off and talking to people. After two hours each day of doing this:

> I come back here and just kind of hang out for the rest of the day, try not to cause trouble and wait for the next day to start, hope someone calls me for work, that kind of thing … the problem is I put in a resume and the response I usually get is *Oh yeah, we'll get back to you in the next two weeks*, and you know that's real helpful when you're in a situation where you're not having money and two weeks could mean the difference between you being alive and you being dead … But it's just the world that everyone lives in.
>
> James, age 24, Indigenous, White youth

He continued to tell me that in order to no longer be homeless, he would need a job market that offered opportunities to people who did not finish school: "There seems to be an age gap where they want a certain age or amount of experience, but how do they expect people to get that experience if they're not offering jobs to them to get the experience, it's like how do you get those years' experience if no one is hiring you?"

Being homeless presents numerous barriers to education and employment. What happens to those who do not have consistent employment and are not in school? Should the right to a safe place to stay be intertwined with education and employment? What supports are offered by teachers and shelter staff, as well as employers, to make sure that youth who are homeless are able to maintain employment and education? Where do youth who cannot maintain this standard go? Knowing youths' desires to continue with their education, I asked how shelters across York

Region can prioritize school. Louisa mentioned that she “would have liked to finish school,” but told me about her experience trying to finish her GED:

> I wanted to meet with somebody here to get my GED and I was supposed to meet with him two weeks ago and I came down to meet him and he was just talking to a group of people, I had to be at work in like a half an hour and I had to leave, I didn’t get the chance to meet with him and he told me like be awake at 9 AM, come down here and I’ll be here, we can meet and he was just like chit chatting … if I’m asking about something like that, they should want to help me more, you know what I mean? Like I’m trying to better myself, and I’m asking you for your help, so why aren’t you helping me? And I also wanted to get my Smart Serve from him and things like that so I can like get a part-time job on top of my full-time job so I have enough money and … oh and he said he just needed to give me a code so he could’ve left it at front line and he didn’t do that, so …
>
> Louisa, age 23, White youth

Having to work and make money is important for this youth to move forward, but so is school. Unfortunately, having to prioritize work over waiting for the person who would give her information about the GED did not allow Louisa to figure things out, despite her wanting to. There are many overlapping issues at play here. This youth needed individual time with the GED information session staff, but did not receive it due to having to rush to work on time in order to be able to stay employed and make money. Even when all she required was a simple code, it was not provided for her. The issue then is not just about her being able to access information to finish school; her pursuits here are being prolonged because the service provider forgot to leave her with the information she needed to move forward.

Having to do all of this while trying to make ends meet is not an easy feat. Due to institutional barriers, healthy pathways into adulthood and out of homelessness often become derailed. At times, even when youth want to engage with the employment and education services that are made available through the shelter system, their individual needs are not met. Each time that youth have difficulty gaining access because of a failed system, this population becomes

more entrenched in homelessness and street life, and are at risk of remaining there (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Noble et al., 2014; Kidd et al., 2018). Such examples also demonstrate how youth who are homeless are not seen in the same light as their housed peers.

The ways in which education and employment are deemed essential for some youth are not extended in the same way to homeless youth. Schools in York Region are crucial centers of contact for young people, families, and services providers. According to Noble et al.'s (2014) study, "the school systems (York Region District School Board, and the York Catholic District School Board) are perhaps the only social services that are relatively evenly dispersed and accessible throughout the region" (p. 25). Enhancing the role of schools as "community hubs," integrating community centers and resources in the structure of schools, is essential to aid in the prevention of youth homelessness (Noble et al., 2014).

One particular shelter offered youth an educational program so that they could acquire their high school credits, at their own pace; the program was not dependent on youth being residents of the shelter. Martin was inspired by the director of operations at [X Shelter] when she spoke about youth homelessness, and wished all shelters would follow the lead of this one:

> Yeah, because I was listening on the radio … she inspired me way more than I inspired myself, like I could hear it in her voice, like she's like kids don't thrive in institutions, they thrive in families and I've never heard that from people in this environment, it's never been that we want you to feel at home here, or we want you to feel comfortable, or we want you to be happy, it's always like, just get a job and get out, you know, and I think that's why I'm thriving so much, because there's actual support, there isn't just a push out the door. Um, and when Miss came, you know, it was the perfect opportunity to get educated because it was flexible, I had a teacher that really cared, um, and I really hope that we continue to build places like this so that it can be more accessible to more people. You know, there's only so much space here, and there's only one location and it's not accessible to everyone and it makes me sad to think that people in Sutton or King City or Stouffville … Yeah, and it's like, what do those people do, and I think that might be the goal of this place, to expand beyond this building, which is fantastic in my mind.

Martin, age 23, gay, White youth

The institutions themselves are flawed, and Martin provided a critical and comprehensive outlook of how this keeps youth in a state of homelessness. He added that "it's not always about the services, but about having the right mindset and knowing what to prioritize and focus on." He values the importance of being able to pursue education while residing at a shelter, and explains how the availability of such options is important when choosing which shelter to go to:

> That's the reason I've stayed here, because I don't want to just go out and try and fail, I want to go out and succeed, so I'm taking my time, I'm getting educated, I'm going to try and use, because crown wards get bursaries and connections with OSAP that other people don't, I'm going to be using that to live off of when I go to University next year.

Sometimes, however, due to the stigma and social exclusion associated with being homeless, the education that homeless youth are able to achieve is not viewed in the same light as students who are not homeless. Through the voices of the youth I interviewed, it seemed that homeless youth (in so many ways) are seen as "not worthy" of an education. They are unconsciously pushed into dead-end jobs. They become part of the "mass" of low-skilled workers always available for capitalist economics to exploit.[38] Alesha spoke about the ways in which she is perceived, regardless of her acquired education:

> Yeah, it's really annoying, it's really annoying and when you try to tell them [staff members], hey guys, I have a psych degree, they almost look at you like, okay hunnie, that's fine, but you're living here so you're psych degree is null and void, so I feel like even though I may know a little bit more than they do or respectfully have a bit of a shared experience [educationally], they don't want to hear it because I'm a client, they don't want to hear it because I'm living here.

Alesha, age 25, gender fluid, bisexual, pansexual, White youth

If the education that young people are pursuing or have attained is not valued by the shelter staff, then what message is being given to the youth about education in general by the people who work there, and who the youth they look towards for motivation and support? While there is a

[38] Personal communication with Dr. Amber Gazso, March 2020.

growing awareness of the problem of youth homelessness in York Region, and there are positive, progressive, and supportive developments across the region (Noble et al., 2014), the interviews make it clear that finding solutions to prevent youth homelessness still needs to be improved.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we have learned about how the experience of becoming homeless for young people was shaped by some incredibly difficult family situations and home environments. The lived realities of homeless youth in this study point to the need to develop of a more comprehensive response to youth homelessness. Such a response should be integrated and designed to support families and help young people stay connected to their communities and inspired to stay in school, in order to grow into an adulthood characterized by happiness, hope, well-being, and opportunity (Malenfant, 2020; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). This chapter has also focused on youths' use of shelters as temporary accommodations when they can no longer live at home. The narratives reveal that while shelters across York region do support youth to positively move forward, there are institutional and structural barriers at play.

Sometimes shelters contributed to the harmful consequences of allowing youth to remain in an extended state of homelessness, because there was no specific plan in place to help them to transition quickly into housing (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Malcolm, a 17-year-old, disabled, White youth reminisced back on life outside of the confines of the shelter system, when he was not institutionalized by homelessness, to regain hope in the face of despair: "Can we go back to when I was five and I had no idea what was going on … it was a lot simpler then … now I'm 17 and I'm like holy shit, where is my life going and what's happening?! But I keep trying to

remember that this is the … I think … the lowest you can go, and it can only go up from here" –

a profound statement, which can be analyzed and understood as resilience at its best!

Chapter 6: The Health and Mental Health of Homeless Youth

I sat in the basement of one of the shelters, trying to decompress after completing another interview. As I listened to the previous interviewee drag his feet back up the stairs, I heard the quick and flighty footsteps of another youth coming down the stairs. As Michael walked towards me, I took note of the teardrop tattoos on his face and saw that he was shaking. We shook hands and introduced ourselves. He chose to sit down in the farthest chair from me. Making minimal eye contact, he rocked back and forth uncontrollably; this continued throughout the entire interview. While this was the shortest interview amidst the 40, it felt like one of the longest. Despite his efforts to participate, I ended the interview much faster than others, as his mental health and addiction issues were apparent and evidently crippling for him, and difficult for me to watch. After he spoke to me about his severe addictions and all the ways in which addiction has taken over his life, giving him the $20 incentive to participate at the end of the interview was difficult.[39] *With this exchange, I am torn, confused, and overcome with sadness.* (Field Notes, January 2017)

During my visits to shelters, I was exposed to the complex health challenges of youth like Michael, a 19-year-old bisexual, White youth. Given the widespread problem of homelessness in

[39] As an interviewer, I tried to be as unbiased as possible, which is nearly impossible. My field notes above might sound judgmental, especially in the context of substance use, but it did cross my mind that the incentive would be contributing to his addiction and that I was being implicated in that exchange. There is a lot to consider here, however; for instance, it is not for me to decide where and how this youth spends his money. Also, the youth in this study taught me that often substances are what help youth cope and survive the many complex problems they face. Through our interaction, I was learning about withdrawal. For example, if this youth cannot maintain their use of drugs, he may get sick and need his drug to feel normal. Moreover, people need extensive family/friend supports to go through withdrawal or to get into detox, which can be hard to access, and all of this is especially hard when youth are homeless and have lost many of the connections that would lead one to healthfully recovery from drug use.

Canada and in York Region specifically, it was sad but not surprising that most youth in the study reported significant negative determinants of poor health related to social exclusion, discrimination, violence, and trauma. In fact, severe forms of pre-street adversity abound for this population, including situations of poverty, neglect, abuse, bullying, and marginalization (National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness, 2012; Kidd, 2013; Kidd et al., 2018a; Toolis & Hammack, 2015). In the first section of this chapter, I will demonstrate how homeless and street-involved youth who took part in my study faced multiple health-related challenges. Forced to endure unstable living conditions, each youth's story presented a range of issues.

Some of these health issues were already present before youth became homeless; for others, the circumstance of homelessness created or exacerbated health issues. Addressing such challenges is made more complex by frequent public perception that homeless youth are mentally ill and/or drug addicted and dangerous (Toolis & Hammack, 2015; Kidd et al., 2018a; Gaetz et al., 2013; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). The interviews reaffirmed that homeless youth *do have* disproportionately higher rates of health and mental health problems, when compared to their housed peers (Kidd et al., 2018a). Although not every homeless person develops a serious mental health condition during their lifetime, they are at higher risks for doing so (Edidin et al., 2012; Kidd et al., 2017). And due to youths' vulnerability, their prospects of healing are bleak, something I became aware of through conversations and observations.

Spending countless hours at shelters exposes a person to a great deal of adversity; in my time spent there, I took note of all of the youth sleeping on couches, completely under the covers for hours. Some were even lying on the cold floors in the hallways of shelters, because of the lack of space in relation to the number of homeless youth, and others were noticeably unwell, "dazed," tired, and unable to take part in coherent conversation. The interviews revealed how

homeless youth are subjected to nutritional vulnerability as well as psychophysical issues such as anxiety, trauma, and depression and more complicated conditions like learning disabilities, ADD, ADHD, developmental delays, cerebral palsy, psychosis, schizophrenia, bi-polar disorders, borderline personality disorder, or multiple concurrent disorders (Kidd et al., 2018a). There are immediate social and functional consequences - for instance, how do homeless youth keep up with school, or continue schooling in any form, alongside so many health-related issues? How do youth go to school when they do not 'feel good', mentally and/or physically?

Nutritional Vulnerability – "I'm Fucking Hungry!"

In exploring the specifics of health and mental health deterioration in homeless youth, I think it is important to review the effects of reduced food access. Nutritional vulnerability in Canada is alarming; problems of food access and food insecurity are widespread, and homeless youth are greatly impacted (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2002, 2013; Tarasuk et al., 2005, 2009, 2014; Li et al., 2009). The food insecurity of youth participants was disturbing and difficult to learn about. David, a 24-year-old Black youth, commented on starvation and mind control by saying: "When you don't eat, that's like one of, that's like the first step to like mind control, mind controlling someone, starvation, so once somebody is starving now, they're like victim to the first person that feeds them." Not only does he point to how homeless youth are victimized and "othered," his words exemplify how food insecurity and homelessness have serious human rights implications, layered with issues of social exclusion, discrimination, power, and control. In a wealthy first world country (Canada), it is unconscionable that people are nutritionally deprived, especially when food is consumed, and wasted, in excess (Tarasuk et al., 2005). For people who are housed and financially secure, eating wholesome, nutritious meals daily is challenging;

imagine the added challenges for someone who is young, homeless, without adult support, and unable to make ends meet.

Most study participants (over 50%) described being deprived of well-balanced nutritious meals and the majority mentioned hunger and food insecurity as a major mental and physical stressor, because “just mentally knowing, like where am I going to sleep tonight, I can’t focus, you know, I’m fucking hungry!” (David, age 24, Black youth). Poor nutrition during adolescence can-negatively impact health over the lifespan, increase risk for infections, and can also worsen conditions such as depression and substance abuse (Dachner & Tarasuk, 2013). Such factors inevitably hinder employment and education opportunities and pathways out of homelessness (Dachner et al., 2009; Tarasuk et al., 2005, 2010; Karabanow et al., 2007, 2010; Gaetz et al., 2006). Imagine trying to accomplish all you do in a day without any food or water.

Denisha, a 22-year-old Indigenous, Algonquin, First Nations, French Canadian youth, told her college instructor: “I don’t have energy for this and I’m too hungry and … I’m pulling myself out of the program, I’m dropping out like right now!” How does one maintain concentration and energy without a sufficient meal, or remain emotionally stable when shelter and food are limited or inaccessible? Many youth discussed their nutritional vulnerability in relation to having to stay at a shelter and having to eat whatever is provided. It was a common understanding that the food provided in shelters was not the tastiest or healthiest, but they felt fortunate whenever they had access to a meal, in contrast to the suffering of food deprivation. One youth’s comments are vivid. Based on her experiences at a shelter for three months, Alesha sarcastically conveyed to me what she eats for breakfast, lunch, and dinner:

> Well, they produce the same donated materials every day so they just try to come up with fun little ways to cook it, so frozen eggs, frozen bacon, frozen lettuce, frozen everything, everything’s frozen, everything’s stale, so they just try to “juge” it up and see what they

can make with it, which is … interesting sometimes, other times its very creative …so, by the end of the day, I'm usually exhausted and a level of eight on the "stress-ometer."

Alesha, age 25, gender fluid, bisexual, pansexual, White youth

There's redundancy in the meals donated, despite staff attempts to make frozen foods interesting and creative. Alesha's emphasis on "frozen everything" and staleness, alongside her use of slang such as "juge it up"[40] establishes the lesser quality of the foods provided and the dominance of un-fresh, frozen foods. Her words indicate the ongoing anxiety and stress of food deprivation, the minimal autonomy involved in what is eaten daily, and the low quality, particularly in terms of the absence of "fresh" foods and therefore the dominance of exposure to certain types of chemical and procedural processing.

Similarly, Joanne felt very passionate about the goal of being able to eat healthfully. As her interview crossed over lunch time, I suggested we take a break, as I was sensitive to the fact that if we interviewed longer than the allocated shelter lunchtime, she might miss out on the opportunity to have a meal. She responded by telling me how "shitty" shelter food can be:

> They're not going to give me lunch! … they cannot cater to my diet and … I'm not asking for them to put out three cakes of a choice for me, but like if you have meat and … sautéed vegetables and clearly the meat goes with the sautéed vegetables and you've made absolutely nothing for me, like, they literally just offered me sautéed vegetables so instead of getting like really upset, I was like take me the pantry, he took me the pantry so I could get another canned soup, the canned soup tastes like shit so I just threw it all out. I'm not even kidding you; eating is the biggest, it's one of the biggest problems here.

Joanne, age 23, mixed race; Spanish, Haitian, French youth

After four months of residency at this shelter, and seven years of being homeless, she started experiencing "serious stomach problems," which she attributed to eating shelter foods.

[40] Alesha used the words "juge it up" a lot to describe and define how frozen and processed foods would be made more flavorful or appealing. The word "juge" came alongside a hand gesture that she kept using in order to emphasize the word. Simply put, the word "juge" is equated with making stale food more interesting and creative.

When she was living with her boyfriend, they were both attempting to eat healthy and buying what they judged as quality foods, such that, "If we only had $20, we wouldn't go and buy shit food, like we'd go get stuff that was of quality because we know that's something that we need." However, when they returned to the shelter system, she said daily donations of fruits and vegetables would often be served after the visible expiration date, the date after which the quality of food is debatable.[41]

Eating nutritious meals was a priority when choosing shelters because not doing so, puts overall well being at stake, and like anyone would, youth need to feel healthy to function in order to find pathways out of homelessness. Martin stressed the value of having nutritious meals:

> It feels like a crack shack. The food was expired, moldy breads, moldy muffins, all the food was donated and it was old by the time it got there, they were feeding you food that was literally carbs [x5] … I don't mean to be picky as a homeless person, but when you are not having well rounded nutrition and you are using drugs and alcohol, that creates a very foggy unhealthy mind and I don't care if people think I'm being picky, I'm sorry, nutrition is far more valuable than people stress, so I was very malnourished, and I was using at the time, molly … I never got into cocaine, I couldn't put anything up my nose or in my veins ever, but I was using molly, weed, smoking cigarettes, drinking still … from there … I ended up at [X Shelter] because ... I had 2 months; I had stayed 2 months

Martin, age 23, gay, White youth

The youth were well aware of the kinds of factors mentioned above regarding donations, visible expiration dates, and low-quality foods resulting in deteriorating health. These added to the existing stigma, otherness, and alienation they felt. Participants discussed a "beggars can't be choosers" mentality, exemplified by Martin's saying: "I don't mean to be picky *as a homeless person* …," as if homeless people should be grateful for whatever comes their way, without

[41] According to the Government of Canada website, foods may not have the same nutrient content declared on the label after the expiration date. As such, foods should not be bought, sold, or eaten after the expiration date and should be thrown out. This information can be found at: https://www.inspection.gc.ca/food-safety-for-industry/information-for-consumers/fact-sheets-and-infographics/date-labelling/eng/1332357469487/1332357545633

autonomous choice. Homeless people are often dehumanized, and due to neoliberal underpinnings are perceived as individually responsible for their own circumstances, despite the systemic barriers and constraints that abound for this population:

> I don't really have a choice and even then, what I put into my body, I want to care for myself … I've had this long seven years of being homeless, like after that, I deserve to eat good meat so like, they'll make jokes with me and be like *oh like it's high quality though* and it pisses me off because it's actually not funny to me when my appetite is finally back … since I've been here, I've actually lost 25 pounds. The doctor has actually recorded it, I've lost so much weight, I wear size 0 jeans and I can't even fit into them anymore, like my size 2's are baggy. Like … fall down baggy so it's just like a lot of these things are what make me very upset with the shelter system in particular because food is really important, if I can't eat, I get grumpy, if I get grumpy, I can't function, if I can't function, I will snap on anybody, I don't care who you are, I don't care what you're doing for me, it's just, it's nature, so, that was why I got really pissed off with them …
>
> Joanne, age 23, mixed race, Spanish, Haitian, and French youth

Through the participants' stories, we learn that homelessness brings forth food insecurity and limits choices. Like Alesha, Joanne emphasized the importance of food in relation to health and mood, while she had to eat whatever was available to stay alive and function. The confined set of choices available was reinforced to me one Friday. While I had intended to engage in more interviews at Sutton Youth Shelter, the day was instead taken up with sorting food donations at a nearby church. Afterwards, the church allowed youth to fill two plastic bags each of whatever foods were available. Youth scattered and competed to fill bags, with mostly canned foods. They later asked the shelter staff to store their items in a safe and secret space, as the items were too heavy to carry around and because they were afraid of having food stolen or eaten by other youth, an additional problem that added to the anxiety and stress they already confronted.

Along these lines, food and hunger could also be conceptualized through a "survival of the fittest" lens, as youth were forced to navigate institutions and engage in "frowned upon" and dangerous behaviours to gain food access (e.g., stealing food from nearby grocery stores to

“survive,” or selling drugs). When discussing homelessness, hunger, and survival, Ryan conjured up an image of his violent struggle for survival and food security, discussing how sometimes, being the best camouflaged or the cleverest is often required to meet basic needs:

> Like maybe I’ll sell [drugs], but the thing is the difference between me and them [other gang members] is that they’re selling drugs to withhold a reputation, I’m selling drugs because I’m fucking hungry! If I can turn that $300 into $600, why wouldn’t I do that? ... Like I have to do what I have to do … somebody sticks a gun in your face and takes all your money and now, what you are going to eat, like you’re not going to eat fuck all because you have no money left. You got too into it … started fucking with the wrong people … and now you have nothing and don’t even know how you’re going to eat or fucking afford shelter tonight and … that’s how you end up here, right, for some cases.
>
> Ryan, age 20, White youth

The situation of homelessness and the lack of resources leave this youth feeling helpless, and choice-less, such that selling drugs to “make ends meet” is a worthwhile opportunity. Ryan, who was slightly intoxicated during the interview, also told me that he was selling drugs, alongside taking drugs, and drinking alcohol, which appeared to be a way to self-calm amidst the chronically uncomfortable, over-stimulating environments of homelessness.[42] Undoubtedly, homelessness exposes youth to violence and adversity, with harmful effects on mental health (Kidd et al., 2017). All of the situational and contextual barriers that homelessness brings forth are undesired and have severe impacts on the physical, mental, and overall health of youth.

Physical Health Issues

Research demonstrates that the longer a young person remains homeless, the more their physical and mental health deteriorates; as a result, youth are also more likely to experience

[42] There was an LCBO located just steps away from the shelter this youth was staying at, and he told me that he was trying really hard to resist going there but that drinking helps him cope with the struggles he is currently facing. He also told me that he wanted to save the incentive from the interview, but that he would most likely use it for alcohol.

exploitation, trauma, and addictions, drop out of school, and become entrenched in street life (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). The physical health issues of the youth in my study were extensive, and homelessness exacerbated pre-existing health problems. When I asked Craig, who used a cane to assist with walking, what a typical day looks like, he says: "A typical day for me is not that of a typical homeless person, I sadly do have a physical disability as you have seen, I have nerve damage which makes it even harder to get on my feet and do what I need to do to get out of this situation" (Craig, age 23, Indigenous youth).

At a previous time, when he was housed, his girlfriend had "cheated," engaging in a sexual liaison with his best friend. He decided to smoke marijuana and climb his roof to reflect on life and stargaze. Unfortunately, he slipped and fell off a ladder right onto his tailbone, causing a permanent, chronic nerve disorder: "I'll get like full body spasms, weakness in the legs, so it makes it harder to be on the go as you need to in life." His chronic pain had been impacted by chronic homelessness. Even though he described his situation as atypical, health deterioration and encroaching disability were in fact common amongst the youth I interviewed.

In a similar way, Martin started the interview by telling me, "to be honest with you, these last few days, I've felt very unhealthy," as he complained of intense pains in his body and feeling "light, like if I were to be lightheaded, feels like I'm carrying around … ugh" (Martin, age 23, gay, White youth). Our discussions around his health were not detailed, but he felt burdened emotionally. In fact, 80% of youth in this study reported feeling tired or having little energy. Complex health detriments were prevalent. Another youth, Daniel, who was 26 and Indigenous, had been in an accident years ago, and was having to re-learn basic motor skills after major brain injuries resulting in memory loss and impairment; "I was hit by two-three cars, over one, under another, and dragged by a third, I got road rash, under carriage, stomach tubes, throat tubes, brain

tube. There was rehabilitation, mental houses, uh, learn how to walk, learn how to talk again …” It was also required that he take daily medication to maintain his health. With his story in mind, try to imagine the difficulty of taking medication to maintain health amidst the instability and precarity of homelessness. Amongst other issues, it is difficult to have medications sent or picked up, resulting in dose instabilities that can put young people's lives at risk:

> I haven't been on my medication in the longest … because I've been going from house to house, places like this, moved all around and my medication goes to one spot, *oh he's in a different town ... we can't give him any more meds because he has to go back to the city ...* they're spending money from here to Newmarket to … 26 extra bucks for a bus ticket and then getting to Toronto and then walking how far in Toronto to get to wherever and then get my medication and then more money for a bus to get to Union Station, then from Union to wherever I will be staying and then to Newmarket and then uh Northern where I am. Um, so that right there is just in busses alone is like 75 bucks.
>
> Daniel, age 26, Indigenous, Inuit youth

When asked about school alongside his current physical and mental health concerns, Daniel explained: “School does not even enter the forefront of my mind, as health takes priority”; his has deteriorated due to the precarity brought forth by homelessness, and his perception is that brain damage keeps him “mentally stuck in the age of a 19-year-old.” Physical health issues, in combination with anxiety and depressive ideation, continued to surface as I interviewed more youth. Malcolm, aged 17, who was introduced earlier and identified as disabled and homeless, explained multiple physical barriers after I asked him how he ended up in a wheelchair. He told me about his “rare condition” of cerebral palsy as “a physical disability caused by a brain bleed, before, during, or after birth,” one of the physical barriers that he saw as connected to his homelessness: “In my case, the doctor was a resident and inexperienced in delivering children and there was no suction or oxygen available when I was born, which caused

my injury." He further described how the lack of services for disabled and homeless people resulted in an ongoing struggle to find resources and support.

Fatigue and sleep loss were also prevalent issues, contributing to vulnerability and producing negative mental and physical effects. Many youth (70%) also spoke about having trouble falling asleep, not being able to sleep for consecutive days, sleeping too much, and not having consistent or restful sleep due to the anxiety and stresses of homelessness and feeling depressed, even with a warm bed or place to stay. Interviews revealed layers of marginalization, victimization, trauma, stigmatization, poverty, poor health, chronic stress, and fatigue, with certain ethnically identified and equity-seeking groups impacted further due to prejudice (e.g., sexual and gender minority, Indigenous and other racialized youth) (Kidd et al., 2017, 2018a).

Mental Health: Depression and Anxiety - "Fighting Your Own Mind"

Youth who are homeless experience a high degree of emotional distress (Noble & Howes, 2018). The interviews made apparent that for the majority of youth in this study, various social, situational, and contextual factors had negatively impacted their mental health, and they had faced severe forms of adversity. Unfortunately, and of major concern, is that 80% of the youth described feeling down, depressed, or hopeless on several days of the week. Mental health adversities such as depression, anxiety, and self-harm are often linked with difficulties regulating daily emotions (McCay & Aiello, 2018). There is considerable evidence that these impacts begin well before individuals experience homelessness (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Kidd et al., 2018a). When asked about his overall health and mental health, discussions around depression and anxiety unfold for Kamran:

> I guess I grew as time progressed, as I got older, I got pretty good at controlling things mentally … but like when the whole chaos was unfolding with that girl and all that like, getting into harder drugs and failing and the feeling of all that combined, yeah, I guess like you get some depression from that, and like anxiety just like comes with it I guess.
>
> Kamran, age 21, White youth

Evidently, discussing mental health issues was difficult, because admissions carried with them stigma and feelings of exclusion. As such, some youth would not be as blatant about their anxiety and depression, as the combined stigma of homelessness and mental health issues can be overwhelming. Other youths' disclosures were more explicit; when sharing his experience of street life and how he stayed warm, Ryan told me about how he had "slept outside many times," and gotten into many fights, "so it's like imagine like your face fucking hurts and then you have to like sleep on bench, like that's shitty, like it doesn't get any worse than that." He further shared a profound statement related to stigma and mental health in relation to survival:

> Well like, it's not even about staying warm; it's like, how do you stay alive? Like you have to fight, right? Like you have to fight your own mind … it's not your body, it's your mind, your mind starts to give up … like you don't have communication 'cause nobody wants to fucking talk to you, like even if I was to walk up to you on the street and I was dressed with like ripped clothes … maybe not … it depends on your heart right, maybe you just want to talk to me because you see in my eyes that I just need someone to talk to, but like most people, if I try to go up to you and talk to you, you're going to be like, what the fuck?! I'm all like, my clothes are all ripped, I smell like shit, you know like all this time I've been sleeping outside but what if I need that one person to talk to, just to reinstate my mind and realize that I'm not fucking crazy, right? Because I'm starting to tell myself like, oh I should just kill myself, like I should just jump in front of a bus, like fuck it, it cannot get any worse than this, right? But then you have to like find it in yourself to be like no! I have to fight! Like it can't get any fucking worse than this and even if it does, eventually it will be better, right? But you have to find that within you and like some people don't, like look how many people die of like depression and shit, right?
>
> Ryan, age 20, White youth

Ryan provided a lens into the deep ambivalence he sometimes feels while navigating the harsh realities of homelessness. He reminds us that certain behaviours of homeless people are

often mistaken as signs of failed will or adherence to moral codes of behaviour that we may typically consider as "normative" in "civilized" society. Despite his resilience, situational and contextual factors are overwhelming when homeless. For example, being socially excluded and treated as invisible significantly impacts mental health. Being homeless means cold nights, an unfriendly world, pain and discomfort. Overwhelmed with these challenges, "the mind starts to give up," having to sleep outside, to "reinstate the mind," and to "fight" the mindset that takes over and leads one to feel "fucking crazy." Considering his story, it is no wonder then, that many youth (63%) often feel bad about themselves, feel like a failure, and as if they have let themselves or their family down. After being in and out of foster care and homelessness, Linda shared that, although she knows she is smart and strong enough to move forward, she often fights with her past and her own mind during acutely anxious and depressive states:

> Sometimes you won't see me for like two weeks cause I'm just going to be depressed in my room … time is ticking, we're getting older and no offense, I don't want to be like half the people around here because they've accepted that this is their life and how they want to live and it's not a happy life so I don't want to do that. I've never had support so I've never cared to do anything to fix my life but I'm trying to change that, I'm trying to fix that in my head now and be like … it's a selfish world out there, not a lot of people are going to care … you're 22, stop thinking like that. And then I'll be good like that for two-three days and then I'll get back into the cycle of me being in that stupid element.

Linda, age 22, White youth

Some youth explained that seasonal changes (colder and shorter days) can have a huge mood impact. Linda also shared that she ended up in the hospital "psych" ward three times over three consecutive years, as November–December are difficult months for her due to the holidays and feeling isolated and alone. These months are difficult for housed people with familial support and strong connections to mainstream communities. But for homeless youth, these months can readily trigger anxiety and depression. All of these encounters with the "psych" ward

and having unresolved anxiety-depression episodes affect school and employment. After a four-month depression, she returned to school and was recovering at the shelter, but the impacts of her experiences were evident; she was sad, angered, frustrated, and emotionally volatile.

Substance Use and Addictions

Substance use issues were also very prevalent in the lives of research participants. Youth who experience homelessness report challenging life histories, which puts them at exponentially higher risks in terms of exposure to violence and crime, as well as traumatic experiences (e.g., sexual, and physical assaults), in comparison to housed youth (Gaetz et al., 2010; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Kidd et al., 2018a; Stewart et al., 2004). Traumatic experiences often propel youth down paths of substance use and abuse, in reaction to the trauma they endured. Such issues became evident through stories of people like Sofia, who we met early in Chapter 5.

As she recollected her experiences of growing up, Sofia talked to me about her anxiety, depression, and addictions to cocaine, crystal meth, and alcohol as related to past and present traumas: "just like neglect from childhood, verbal and sexual abuse from childhood, um that they [parents] didn't protect me from that I am very angry about … they weren't the parents in that situation and so I did a lot of blaming through my addiction" (Sofia, age 23, White youth). She also described the experience of becoming homeless as "traumatic." Although a teacher by profession, she was unable to continue on to a graduate program she was accepted to, due to her addictions taking over. Without proper resources and supports, she relapsed often.

When she tried to quit, she replaced one addiction with another, which was compounded by her having been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (BPD). She explained to me how people with BPD find it extremely difficult to regulate emotions and can be very impulsive:

> It just acts more on emotion regulation, people with borderline or personality disorder, they have extreme difficultly regulating emotions, they're extremely impulsive … if I get a thought in my head, I will try to stop it with my whole willpower but it just takes over.

Sofia was highly articulate and reflective regarding how her addictions had impacted herself and her family. After years of couch surfing and a near-death experience due to drug abuse and overdosing that resulted in her being rushed to the hospital, she expressed herself in more real and genuine ways than I had expected based on how distraught she felt. In contrast to being in a fog or in a hallucinatory state, her words demonstrated otherwise:

> I never want to be in that moment again [overdose], so there's a new level of urgency, it's kind of like weird, like I really cried last night just knowing how serious this illness is and like for so long I've been kind of like yeah, like whatever but I really almost died or lost, like my heart was so ugh, and my um, or I could've never come back mentally.

Many youth I interviewed had desires and goals to move forward with their lives on many fronts, but lacked resources and needed supports. Substance abuse might have buffered their traumatic reactions at first, but it zapped their motivations and initiatives towards education, employment, and stability; it can be argued that homelessness alongside substance use can decrease motivation and make it more difficult to exit homelessness (Kidd et al., 2018a).

The majority of youth cited using marijuana as part of their daily routine, without openly discussing other drugs they had tried or were using. Some stated that marijuana dependencies made it difficult to focus in school while homeless because they were unable to take marijuana (or cigarette) breaks, which would provide relief from uncomfortable stress at the time. As homeless youth have limited access to healthy coping mechanisms (Kidd et al., 2018a), using substances like marijuana, alcohol, "meth," and cocaine were some of the "tools" used to cope with mental health problems and the challenges of homelessness. After she told me about the extreme abuse she faced at home, which had resulted in her becoming homeless and depressed, I

asked Alesha how she got through school, as she was enrolled in a College program, to which she replied: “Marijuana and mushrooms … is the only way you can, in the safest way I know, re-center yourself, on a daily/annual basis, when you have to deal with that on a daily/lifelong situation” (Alesha, age 25, gender fluid youth). Many youth used substances to cope with their circumstances as they face repeated trauma (Davies & Allen, 2017; Hopper et al., 2018).

For some youth, substance use may be the only way to warm up after being out in the freezing cold, or to sleep or kill hunger pains (Price, 2018). For instance, in an emotion-filled interview with James, he told me that he and his friends would “find abandoned homes” and just “stay there and get high like for days on end” to cope with the adversities of being homeless:

> Ahh, it started off with weed and shrooms primarily, then uh meth, coke, which was not fun … It hurts, it’s not, it’s, everyone says it’s a party drug but it’s like, I’d say after the first time I got a nosebleed from it, it lost it’s fun and on top of that like, it feels like, when it hits you, it feels like you’re getting kicked in the face by a horse … We had guys that would come in with heroin, which I only tried heroine once but uh and luckily, I was not hooked but I had a friend who was hooked. Um, still is, I believe. But you know, we did all this shit because we felt like, in a way, nobody cared because it’s like society had forgotten about us and everyone else that we had known had moved on and they don’t want to accept that this way of life exists because everyone, something that we realized is that everyone’s so dead set on school and work and working their nine to five and stuff and all this but if there was something tragic that would happen, like a war or something, all of that would go out the window, none of that would matter or if there was some big epidemic,[43] then what’s school going to do for you then, like maybe you went to school to be a nurse but if you went to school to be a computer technician, then what are you supposed to do, so it’s kind of like, that was another thing for us, was the hopelessness that developed from not really having any life skills. We felt like school kind of failed us in that way cause we, we grew up in, we could tell you 17 different facts about Shakespeare, but we couldn’t tell you how to pay a mortgage or we couldn’t tell you like, how to cook a decent meal, like all these basic life skills that you’d expect should be taught to you are just swept under the rug and are just left for your parents to teach you.
>
> James, age 24, Indigenous youth

[43] As I sit here revising the final draft of my dissertation during an unprecedented time in history, due to the Corona Virus pandemic (Covid19), and become more aware each day of how this time has affected the most vulnerable, including those who are homeless, what this youth’s words demonstrate to me is that unfortunately, those who are forced into such adverse circumstances had already thought about what a time like this would mean for them.

James felt that nobody cared, as if friends, family, and society had forgotten about him because they do not want to accept that this way of life, or that homelessness, exists. It is unfortunate to say this, but we often find comfort, despite the injustices of the world, through complacency. In contrast, a deeper analysis of his words reveals the importance of peer group support for homeless youth. James and his friends seemed to also see their way of homelessness as anarchistic, revolutionary, and as "counterculture" – all protective factors, too.

While not all youth in this study were drug-addicted, many were in different stages of dependency and/or addiction. Even so, some youth who did not initially want to do drugs were invited, tempted, and/or forced into the drug scene as a result of being exploited and trafficked. Joanne discussed her use of cocaine and said that despite "having the opportunity to do heavier drugs," she knew "in my heart that this wasn't me and that I could escape but did not know when it would be appropriate or when I would be able to," having been only 21 at the time. Her story of human trafficking, exploitation, and victimization on the streets is sad, compelling, and heavy:

> It was really scary and that was the thing … I never got addicted or anything, I just got so scared … when you go from being a normal person who is so innocent to being exploited and then having everything taken from you including your pride, your dignity, your head, they start to breed you, they start to make you understand that humans are only good for currency, and it was messed up because I would start to go out and I would be high … I didn't like to listen, I didn't understand why I was being exploited in the first place and then after that, I went on sanctuary at [X Shelter] and I kind of escaped from everything that I was going through except … it wasn't an escape, it was more of just like those people's people would come to me and be like you're a snitch, you're a rat, you're going to go to hell, somebody should kill you, we should stab you … just nonsense … like I was never ever done with it, like I was trapped ... I didn't know how to be normal, like literally when I turned 22 is when I went to [X Shelter] and like I was like, oh my God, I'm going to be normal, everything's going to be fine, you finally escaped, like you're out of this world, you left [X Shelter] so nobody knows where you are. I did a really good job to make sure I was hidden, I threw away a lot of my stuff, I got rid of all my social media accounts, I just wanted to be gone so I went to [X Shelter] and it got worse, like I just, I literally started drinking everyday … I can't even tell you where four months of my life went because … I was just that girl where, drinking just made me happy because I couldn't remember anything on drinking so I knew that if I was drinking, what I tried to

> do was I tried to compensate for the months that I had like been exploited, I figured if I drink so much now, I would forget all of what happened before and that never happened
>
> Joanne, age 23, mixed race; Spanish, Haitian, French youth

Her pride, dignity, and connections to the mainstream community were impacted by homelessness; substance use issues were prevalent due to declining self-esteem, being dehumanized, and depressive symptoms. Her story echoes the research about how street youth are often victimized due to the vulnerabilities they face when homeless. Joanne's story shows how she was exploited, traumatized, victimized, abused, and treated like "currency," making her feel further devalued and lost. Survival became centered on "making yourself invisible" and "fitting in." While she never became addicted, she did use substances, as she described.

Self-Harm and Suicide Attempts – "I Actually Wanted To Kill Myself"

Homeless and street-involved youth experience high rates of suicidal ideation, and suicide rates are elevated compared to the general population (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Kidd & Carroll, 2007; Kidd, 2013). Research shows that rates of suicide attempts among homeless youth far exceed those of housed youth in Canada, with between 27% and 46% having attempted suicide (Frederick et al., 2012; Gaetz et al., 2013; Kidd, 2004; Kirst et al., 2011; McCarthy & Hagan, 1992), and the younger the age of the first episode of homelessness, the greater the likelihood of having attempted suicide. LGBTQ2S youth who are homeless also report a much greater degree of mental health concerns, including suicide attempts (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Kidd et al., 2018a). Approximately 25% of the youth in this study expressed having suicidal ideations on several days of the week. They shared how isolated, excluded, and alone an individual must feel in order to self-harm, attempt suicide, and/or rationalize suicide as their only

option. Even one youth is too many.[44] The homeless youth in this study broadened my understanding of suicide and suicidal ideation, particularly as an envisioned escape from depression and anxiety. The alarmingly high rates of anxiety and depression amongst this population create the conditions for youth to feel that self-harm and suicide are their last resort or symptom relief. Approximations of suicide were evident in "risky behaviour" that strongly raised mortality risk and thus fit under the umbrella of suicide attempts.

An example of such unpredictable ideations was exposed during my conversation with Timothy. At the age of six, Timothy moved out with his dad. While he didn't understand at that time, he remembered wanting to jump in front of a moving car. In hindsight, he felt that the instability of his family life while growing up "could have been a big reason as to why … I did try to run in front of a car at the age of six" and tried to harm himself. Risk seems to equal effective distraction or relief from symptoms. Thus, deliberately putting the self in danger when dominated by anxiety and depression can be seen as relief-seeking. Negative impacts on mental health often precede homelessness. Timothy disclosed that he attempted to self-harm again, identifying the need to make someone notice through cries for help: "I've harmed myself after that twice, but not where I actually wanted to kill myself, it was just like I wanted to, but I didn't want to at the same time. I knew that I didn't want to die but I knew that I wanted someone to notice that I was going through a hard time" (Timothy, age 20, Indigenous, Black youth).

Similarly, other youth spoke about suicide attempts and how homelessness leads to feeling worthless, isolated, and ambivalent about whether to continue living. While not all those

[44] Included in the survey that youth filled out was the PHQ9 (Patient Health Questionnaire), which is a multipurpose instrument used to screen, diagnose, monitor, and measure major depressive disorder. One of the columns asks youth to score how often they have been bothered over the last 2 weeks by, for example, *thoughts that you would be better off dead or hurting yourself in some way* (Not at all; several days; more than half the days; nearly every day).

who self-harm commit suicide, there seems to be a continuum, as harm appears equivalent to a partial suicide, both aimed at escaping unbearable symptoms. When Craig told me about his five-year depression, feeling broken and worthless, I asked if he felt comfortable to share more:

> It was self-harm depression and suicidal … yeah, I'm an open book, yeah, I'm an open book, like, first like, with the depression, it wasn't for like, it was to make myself feel pain, I would bash my head on stuff, anything, just so I *wouldn't feel emotional* and *then I wouldn't start feeling that pain anymore* so I just … I would just bash body parts and then it got to the point where *I wouldn't feel it*, so I started cutting and at first, I was deathly afraid because I didn't want to die when I first started doing it but I also *didn't want to feel the pain* so it was challenging and then a year after I started cutting, I started attempting suicide, which seems to always fail, thank God, obviously, because I'm here.
>
> Craig, age 23, Indigenous youth

The multiple options and resources available to support these youth somehow do not connect with them at these times of extremity. It was sad to think that homelessness had contributed to them feeling this extreme. At the same time, these extremities were not unusual. Amongst the youth interviewed, many shared self-harm events, either provoked by hopelessness or intended as a cry for help. A few of the youth also discussed their post-traumatic stress, attributed to the extreme abuse they faced in their home environment and in foster care. When discussing her desires to do a Master's degree and her excellent previous opportunity to do so, Sofia also shared her experience of self-harm and suicidal ideations and attempts:

> So, okay … I was going to do a Masters in New York City in nonprofit management and at the new school, I got a job too as a residence don there so I would've been living rent free and eating food for free … like it was amazing, um but, I, that's when I was starting to spiral and that's when cocaine was used on a daily basis and I did end up in the ER once, it wasn't from cocaine necessarily but it was from coming down. Before I knew how to come down properly, like now I know like what to do, like using other drugs like THB and other drugs to balance it out, I used to have the worst come downs and I would cut myself, like self-harm because I just felt so depressed so once, I guess it was kind of like a suicide attempt, um, I ended up in the ER and one of my friends was so scared, she was like I have to tell your parents, I just can't, this just can't be on me … so she told my parents, my parents were like okay yeah, you have to straighten up by September, no more cocaine, you can't have the loan to go to New York City and I was crushed.

Sofia, age 23, White youth

Sofia's narrative clarifies how an apparently good opportunity was disrupted by depression, substance abuse, self-harm, and suicide attempts. In turn, these impacted her former desires and abilities to engage in educational advancement. This combination of opportunity and its loss reveals some of the complexities that at-risk and homeless youth face in terms of schooling.

While sharing his experiences of homelessness and street life, Ryan disclosed suicide attempts. I had asked him how he finds the strength for self-talk, to remind himself that this is just temporary and it is going to get better. His reply was, "Well, *you* attempt a couple times, realistically, like it's not, it's not a fucking happy story." His distancing from his self made me ask, "Have you?" Wanting to know more, I provide a pause and allow the space for him to respond if he wanted to:

> Yeah, I've tried to hang myself; I've tried bare shit, but like you'd never know by talking to me … it took me a long time to become like this … it's a mental thing, nothing's changed, yeah you're thinking that way but like your mind's telling you that, [even though] like the world's still spinning … like you have to reconnect yourself and remember that you're telling yourself to do something, like you have to remind yourself, like what am I really telling myself to do, right? Because if you do it and you succeed, then that's it, right?! Like you can never be happy, you can never make your like, your family happy or anything like that … it's like you are giving up, everything. And like it is hard, like it sucks, it's like you're going to fight or you're going to die, like one of the two. Like my dad, *my own dad*, when I told my dad I was depressed, he told me to kill myself, he said you should kill yourself because like if you're going to feel like that, if you're going to have that mindset in this world, you're going to die, like people are going to eat you alive. But I didn't understand what he meant for the longest time and then I realized like yeah, people are fucking savage … Like my best friends, my day one friends don't even know that I tried to kill myself, it's just shit that I don't share because then I'd bring them down because then every time they'd look at me, they'd think about that, they'd be like wow, at one point in your life, you actually tried to kill yourself.

Ryan, age 20, White youth

Ryan points to various reasons for homelessness including family poverty, abuse and interpersonal violence, housing instability, and mental health and addiction. The interviews also revealed that some youth were caregivers for their parents due to the parents' mental health disorders, which prevented youth from fully focusing on school and hindered healthy transitions to adulthood, and potential for pathways out of homelessness.

Connor shared some of the factors that make it difficult to go to school while homeless and then shared how this is especially difficult when compounded by suicidal ideations:

> ... food, feeling good, because you feel like shit, like you're depressed, like most people are like the end of the line, you know what I mean, they just want to die. Like the only thing they have left is that they feel like a human and a lot of people don't even feel that way because they are so fucking caught up with the drugs that they don't even feel human anymore. So they're literally just zombies walking … and it's a system thing … they've been given cards by something and they played those cards shitty, but how can you blame someone for playing a game badly, you know what I mean, they just didn't know how to play it. Like if the cards were shit … like you can't blame the people.

Connor, age 22, White youth

From the narratives shared by Joanne, who was trafficked, we see that being exposed to other people's suicides can provide perspective and deter some youth from suicide, as they find resilience in continuing to fight. Anger, even chronic anger, can sometimes be a resilience resource:

> All I keep thinking is fight, fight, fight, fight and so … as tiring as this is, it's more tiring to know that I went through it and then to want to end my life, like I know a lot of people that have gone through what I've gone through, I know a lot of people that have killed themselves because they were in the whole human trafficking world and it seems like I'm the only one who's still standing and I use these guards, I use these tactics, I am a bitch at times, but it keeps me on my grind like you know …

Joanne, age 23, mixed race, Spanish, Haitian, French youth

Despite hardship and abuse, Joanne has demonstrated extreme resilience and resourcefulness in the face of shaming messages, as well as adversity, exploitation, and trauma.

Health and School – “Being Homeless, I Could Never Do School”

Health adversities had a profound impact on the participants’ ability to remain engaged in school and continue education. Considering the complex survival and health-related struggles these youth face – resulting in the majority of them (70%) reporting little interest or pleasure in doing things. As a researcher, I had assumed that for most homeless youth, school would be de-prioritized and not even an “afterthought,” given what they were dealing with. Louisa and Linda explained that basic needs for food and shelter take precedence over school, outlining just how many things youth must think about while homeless related to food, shelter, and making ends meet. All these factors must be prioritized, which makes it virtually impossible “to do school”:

> For the first like couple of weeks of being homeless, I was like trying to go to school, maybe like three days out of the week, two days out of the week but even then, like sometimes I would just leave throughout the day because like I’d either be hungry or a friend would say like *hey you can stay at my place, but you have to come right now*!

Louisa, age 23, White youth

> We have so much other stuff on our mind. That’s another thing, being homeless, I just lost it because I didn’t have a bed, I was homeless, I was couch surfing [with friends] … when I was in high school, I could never do school ‘cause I never had my own bed and I wasn’t able to concentrate … you can’t do your best in what you have to do because you don’t have somewhere to come home to calm down, you don’t have somewhere to rest your eyes, you don’t have your place, that place becomes in your head.

Linda, age 22, White youth

Alongside the need for a bed, (e.g., to not be couch-surfing and to have more stability), Linda pointed towards wanting a place to come home to, somewhere to calm down and rest her eyes. Imposing on others willing to lend a couch to sleep on is stressful. She described the details of her mental health by sharing her inability to concentrate and by using words such as “I just lost it”. Furthermore, she pointed out, without a safe place to call home, we seek that place

within our own heads, showing further layers of impact that homelessness can have on physical and mental health.

Many youth also felt their learning disabilities did not allow them to excel in school, and felt that they could have succeeded in school if provided with more individual accommodations and supports for their unique learning processes. Consistent with findings from Gaetz and O'Grady et al. (2016), a high percentage of homeless youth in this study (80%) had been diagnosed with learning disabilities, in addition to Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). Some youth were given an IEP: "So it's an individual education plan so it just pretty much tells me that I have a learning disability and what my strengths and needs are," which enabled Amanda, a 25-year-old youth, to always have the opportunity to sit at the front of the class due to hearing impairments and struggles in class. While her school did attempt to support individual needs, it was rarely enough to enable an effective continuation with mainstream schooling. Similar to other studies, youth felt their homelessness was a central obstruction that educators did not understand sufficiently to integrate into a comprehensive plan (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018).

Denisha, an Indigenous youth, explained that hunger and having no time and money are some of the main barriers to her being able to stay in school, despite having started a college program of her choice. In addition, she told me, "I knew I had ADD, depression and anxiety, but I didn't get diagnosed with this until I was in the hospital being treated last year. I've been in the hospital five times in the last two and a half years." Not being able to focus on what the teacher was saying and what the lesson was about was difficult enough, due to hunger and fatigue, but learning disabilities compounded the lack of focus further. Steven says: "I'm surprised I actually passed because I have a learning disability to the point where … say I'm in class and … the

teacher asks you a question … say that I'm looking that way, the teacher's still talking to me and I still, I still can't focus (Steven, age 22, bisexual, Indigenous youth).

Some youth were medicated for learning disabilities, with Ritalin or assorted sedatives. For several youth in this study, along with neglect, trauma, family adversities, and not eating or sleeping properly due to homelessness, school was a lesser priority than the complex health issues they faced. Undoubtedly, homeless youth confront a range of issues that could overwhelm any experience of well-being (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Kidd et al., 2018a; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). Alesha, who we met earlier, explained that when youth are labeled as learning disabled or developmentally delayed it creates psychological issues related to self-esteem, which can make a person question their own intelligence and hinder their true potential. As such, some youth were resistant to being diagnosed. Alesha, who identified as bisexual, said her sexual identity was not accepted in her household. LGBTQ2S+ youth are amongst the highest populations of homeless youth due to discrimination and stigmatization; this creates further difficulties with anxiety and depression (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Kidd et al., 2018a).

These are just some of the ways in which the youth I spoke to shared how the complexities of homelessness impacted their physical and mental health, resulting in diminished educational aspirations and many of their talents going unnoticed and wasted. Youth faced extreme stress, addiction, and mental and physical health detriments that were overlapping and varied. Although many youths' stories display resilience, that does not detract from the fact that it is difficult for homeless youth to navigate a stigmatized, low-status social identity (Toolis & Hammack, 2015). This is clear in the helplessness and despair the youth expressed, and in how health detriments led to homelessness, and then reflexively homelessness further denigrated their physical and mental health. Since leaving home, 73.5% of the youth in the study had used Health

Services and 58% had used mental health/addiction services, which points to the dire need for such resources for homeless youth. Feelings related to being misunderstood, loneliness, alienation, isolation, and despair, alongside the loss of family and community, further compounded the health issues the youth faced. These issues can translate into greater and long-lasting mental health challenges and harms, especially as health service systems and providers in most settings are poorly equipped and resourced to meet their mental and physical health needs (Kidd et al., 2018a). So then, how can we help young people who are homeless find positive solutions towards better mental health, in order for them to be able to healthfully pursue their education aspirations?

Homeless Youth, Education and Schooling

This section more closely examines my specialized focus: the immense impact of homelessness on school engagement and achievement for youth, emphasizing the role of schools and teachers in supporting young people at risk of being, or currently homeless. As I listened to young people talk about their education and schooling, their experiences revealed complexities in the education system itself – many youth felt misunderstood by teachers and peers, or had stifled and lost aspirations, difficulties staying engaged in class, and school dropout. Consequently, the harsh realities of episodes of homelessness alongside a lack of supports in school did not permit the continuation of educational pursuits for many youth.

Of the 40 youth I interviewed, 30 (75%) were ***not*** attending school at the time of interview, and of those attending, 42% reported difficulties being able to remain in school. These numbers become more significant if we consider that for those who reported still being in school, most were not in *mainstream* schooling but in adult learning programs, completing independent

learning credits, or in alternative education. While all of these young people had previously been in school, the pathways that led them into homelessness and/or the experience of being homeless, coupled with educational barriers and inadequate supports along the way, made it impossible for them to continue. Some of the scholarly work I reference in this section regarding how the education system, schools, and teachers can support youth to stay in school was reviewed *after* my data collection phase. While that work informs my analysis here, this more current and emerging literature, along with some of the potential avenues forward, will be discussed in more detail in the discussion chapter and concluding chapter.

School Before Homeless / School While Homeless

The youth in this study emphasized that without stable, safe, affordable housing, and with experiences of extreme poverty and neglect and abuse at home, it can be very difficult to remain in school. In fact, without income and food and strong adult support, remaining in school in often not a realistic possibility (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018; Noble et al., 2014). For many youth who drop out of school prematurely, academic progress and school engagement were already disrupted before homelessness began. Facing family violence, CAS involvement, health, mental health and/or addictions issues, learning disabilities, bullying, social exclusion, racism, and discrimination, young people's academic efforts and desires are attenuated.

The factors that make young people vulnerable to homelessness also reduce educational engagement and student success and lead to drop out. Although reasons for leaving school vary, the most common causes involved a loss of basic necessities. Malcolm, a 17-year-old, who identified as disabled and is homeless, reinforced this point when he shared that "I can't come to school because I don't have anything in my stomach." He emphasized the importance of schools

offering services and programs to youth at risk, because as youth from other studies mention, young people who experience homelessness cannot attend school or prioritize attendance unless their basic needs of food, water and shelter are met (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018).[45]

Craig, a 23-year-old Indigenous youth, also spoke of basic necessities taking priority over school when he told me that going to school while homeless is difficult due to "inconsistent sleep patterns, and the stress and anxiety of trying to find a house," stressing that youth are "thinking of finding a place more than the frickin' assignment you're giving them, like let's be real!" It is also "just impossible to go to class and focus on that when you're thinking – *hey where am I going to sleep tonight, what am I going to eat today* … it's just not a priority, you know? (Louisa, age 23, White youth). Unfortunately, for most youth, dropping out of school was inevitable once they became homeless, as "there are more important things to worry about than going back to school if I have nowhere to live, right?" (Michael, age 19, bisexual, White youth).

Understandably, for over 50% of the youth surveyed, the experience of homelessness results in school becoming a lesser priority, as efforts to continue are disrupted by homelessness. Also, Gaetz and O'Grady et al. (2016) mention that 43.2% of housed youth in Canada (aged 20–29) continue to live at home due to unaffordable housing and precarious employment, relying on parents for financial, material, and emotional support (Liljedahl et al., 2013), but homeless youth like Malcolm are at the other extreme, having little or no support and left on their own:

> It's stressful to try and keep up with school and be homeless at the same time because all of a sudden, you're responsible for what your parents should have done, on top of your

[45] Since January 2018: Sir William Mulock Secondary School, in Newmarket in York Region, started a free breakfast and snack program for students. Teachers realized that a large number of students were not having breakfast. As s result, students are provided with a full breakfast, and on two of the five days of school, volunteer teachers cook a hot meal for students. Snacks are also available in the office, the library, and various classrooms. The school has named one room "The Roost," an area where students can grab a hot chocolate or tea. In order to support youth, programs like these are necessary in every school across the region and beyond the community.

> education, so education's hard enough but then when you add in having to be homeless and trying to find housing, making sure that you have food, clothing, all this [disability] equipment, that the debt is paid off and the legal services have all the information needed to start your application, then changing doctors; just being homeless is a full time job!
>
> Malcolm, age 17, disabled, White youth

The lack of supports inevitably impacts school, as seen in Malcolm's description of homelessness as "a full-time job." Malcolm added that if someone told him "*we can give you an accessible house to live in but you can't go to school anymore*," he would give up his education, "because getting a roof over my head is more important than my education at this point."

Many youth cited stigma as one of the major obstacles to remaining in school while homeless: "people can be really judgmental so if someone were to find out that you're homeless…" (Aisha, age 23, White youth). In fact, about 70% of the youth had faced bullying as a result. Denisha, a 22-year-old, Indigenous youth, said that she dropped out because "going to school hungry, not having enough time to put your hair together and feel good about yourself, and not having enough money" were major barriers to being able to continue. Without vital necessities, youth are unable to focus in class amidst constant worries about where their next meal will come from and where they will sleep at night. Having to attend school while hungry, with unwashed hair and clothing, and knowing there are unattractive body odours is embarrassing. When peers and teachers notice, youth feel further stigmatized and misunderstood.

Joanne's words captured various educational barriers faced by homeless youth, which significantly and negatively impact educational engagement and achievement:

> Oh God, school is so bad, that's like the one thing I'm so mad about, if I was who I am today when I was in high school, I would not be in this situation at all, like if I had no insecurities and shit the way I do now. School was impossible, like how are you supposed to go to school when you have no home? Or … get a backpack if you have no resources? Or … get a laptop if you have no money? And how are you supposed to go to school when you have no food? … A lot of the schools I went to had a lot of wealthy kids so I

> felt like if I were in the program and they weren't in the lunch program, they would look at me differently and … I got made fun of in school [a lot] because girls would be like *oh why do you wear like the same outfit*, I would change my outfits, like I have a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday outfit and I would scramble them but like I couldn't afford clothes and there's only so much I can deal with and like a lot of them would bully me and be like *oh why are you wearing the same stuff* and I'm just like what the fuck do you want from me, I'm fucking, I'm 13 years old, I'm 16 years old, you know? You guys are just bullying me because I don't have money, you know?
>
> Joanne, age 23, mixed Race, Spanish, Haitian, French youth

As I continued speaking to youth about their experiences in school, it became apparent that their deep and layered experiences of poverty and homelessness made staying in school feel impossible and cast them as different and apart from their peers despite their efforts to blend in (Dhillon, 2011). This is exemplified by Joanne's contrast between her own life experience and that of her peers. Contrasted against their housed peers, who are perceived as "normal," homeless youth are de-humanized in comparison with their societal peers and comparatively deemed as "uncivilized" and unfit (Kidd, 2013).

Additionally, while dropout rates have reduced across Canada, sadly the dropout rates for homeless youth are very high (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Many youth who dropped out (about 50% of those surveyed) said they did very well in school growing up, and recently (mostly getting As and Bs). Despite the remarkable achievements of the youth I spoke with, prevalent public myths about why youth drop out say they are unintelligent, lazy, disengaged, and lack the desire to continue their education. This troubling narrative locates the "problem" within the bodies of particular students, attributing it as an individual failure rather than a systemic problem – further normalizing and hiding the ways in which social exclusion and neoliberalism deceptively operate within institutions to oppress and fail people (Dhillon, 2011; Karabanow et al., 2010).

Like other studies, the youth I interviewed disrupted this narrative, stressing the importance of mainstream schooling while also discussing the institutional barriers that produce boundaries of social exclusion in schools, which contribute to disconnection (Dhillon, 2011, p. 112; Noble et al, 2014). Most youth I interviewed (70%) had strong desire to go back to school after dropping out or had attempted to stay in school while homeless, but their school attainment was compounded further by their homelessness. Importantly, for some youth, disengaging from school was a process that started before they left home, due to trying to "do school" amidst complex home or foster care environments and often being at impending risk for homelessness, as in some narratives cited earlier. For others, "it is the *experience* of homelessness that leads to dropping out" (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016, p. 51).

This perspective is verified in the data from my study, whereby 43% of youth self-reported having left school before homelessness and 48% left after becoming homeless, while the others answered vaguely. The question of when a young person becomes disengaged from school is just as important as why they disengage, especially to prevent drop-out and homelessness. Firstly, we should not assume all youth were in the process of disengagement before they became homeless. Being at risk of homelessness or homeless makes the problem of engagement, disengagement, and dropping out structurally different in comparison to those who drop out for other reasons, because struggling to have basic necessities met hinders engagement in school. As a result, many young people are forced to drop out *whether they are disengaged or not*, because they do not have what any of us would need to excel in life and in school; that being, a safe and permanent home, money, stability, support, and connections to community.

Furthermore, if some youth were in fact disengaging *before* becoming homeless and the signs of disengagement were detectable, then the retention of school engagement may be an

important factor in preventing homelessness, with schools as the obvious place to quickly provide supports to youth that can include stabilizing housing; enhancing natural supports, assets, and resilience; and staying connected to community (Gaetz et al., 2018). In addition, for those who leave school *after* they became homeless, prevention is important, because if educators and schools are committed to school engagement, student success and maintaining a home-school continuum, then we should care about youth homelessness and ensure that youth stay in school and remain housed and connected to their families and communities.

While their narrative accounts of schooling revealed that homelessness was the major barrier to school participation, the young people also explained how schools play a major role in creating disengagement and dropping out, implicating the schools themselves in the high dropout rates traditionally associated with homeless youth. Schools often influence patterns of dropping out, by creating conditions that impact engagement (Dhillon, 2011), and often doing very little to provide opportunities for change or prevent homelessness (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). Relatedly, 46% of the youth in the study felt that having more individual support for personal needs could have made it possible for them to stay in school. Martin emphasized this point; he felt like he could not even disclose his personal struggles at school because "the school environment was very intimidating to me, to even talk to anybody about [my homelessness]" (Martin, age 23, gay, White youth) Like Martin, many youth (41%) felt the experience of homelessness made going to school difficult, because no one understood what they were going through, and they felt isolated / alone. Like the experience of becoming homeless, dropping out of school was more process-oriented than attributable to one single event. Youth often showed various patterns of disengagement, which eventually led them to give up or be pushed out, suggesting the urgent need for preventative school-based early interventions (Gaetz et al., 2018).

Conversely, some schools intervened more when youth were transparent about their homelessness. Malcolm discussed school while being homeless: “I come from a place that’s really interesting because the school’s not very supportive, I mean, they’re more supportive [now] and it’s interesting because it’s like now that you’re homeless, we’ll give you what you need”. For all of these reasons, Malcolm believes that “education has to come to the educators first to realize that sometimes, it’s what the school does that leads to homelessness. It is challenging for a youth if they are being badly bullied in both their home environment and in school, and they also have to move from school to school.” At the time of the interview, Malcolm, a disabled youth, was 17 and in grade 12, and had lived in multiple foster homes and bounced between 15 different schools since childhood – which “was really stressful!”:

> The school discriminated against me, actually, the province discriminated against me; I was in multiple schools across the region or across the province because I lived in [x city], which is not even part of York Region, when I lived in foster care and I wasn’t able to get the credits that are required to graduate because … I was put into a specialized program that only allowed me to get two credits per semester or no credits, so because of that, I had to fight with the school board for about a year to put me into mainstream programming where I could get the credits that I need so should I be graduating at the end of this year? Yeah … I should be in grade 12, like my classmates are but I have another three years because they screwed up! So, on top of doing this [being homeless], I’m trying to battle with the school administration that hasn’t been very receptive to me because they feel that they are … more entitled to their paycheque than the students.

Malcolm, age 17, disabled, White youth

Despite wanting to go back to school, not being in school and lacking the resources to complete school made Paul, a 20-year-old White youth, “feel upset; I should have my education, I wish I was in school.” Not being in school also makes Timothy feel: “not good, it doesn’t make me feel accomplished. And that’s what I want in life, because then I’m accomplishing my school at least and that would at least make me feel better” (Timothy, age 20, Indigenous, White, Black youth). Being in school provided youth with value and purpose, even when other aspects of life

were tough and confusing. As such, the need for schools to intervene with youth who are at risk, or currently homeless is essential.[46] Isaac said not that being in school makes him "feel like I'm wasting my life because … I have the intelligence to be successful in school, not everyone is blessed like that so then I feel like I'm just wasting my intelligence" (Isaac, age 26, Black youth).

When I use such examples, I am not suggesting that those who forego formal education are not intelligent. Most of the youth I interviewed felt that mainstream education was important in order to secure future employment and to find avenues to exit homelessness. Craig also told me that it was not his lack of desire or intelligence that led him to leave school; rather, it was personal problems and social exclusion that affected his school attendance and participation:

> I always did high-end academics like physics, chemistry, math, algebra; I was really good academically up until grade 10 and then the emotional problems started coming in and I significantly dropped, started skipping, you know the typical depressive behaviour of a teenager, so … just ah, between parents, school, people, how they treated me growing up, I just didn't feel like I was worthy anymore, I broke completely.
>
> Craig, age 23, Indigenous, White youth

Interestingly, disclosures of school disengagement often made youth feel the need to speak about their intellectual ability, due to the stigma associated with dropping out. Such internalized feelings of difference only serve to exclude youth further, in and out of school. Malcolm points to exclusionary processes and institutional barriers when he explained:

> There needs to be a better system for special education in the province and country because it really isn't tailored to individual needs. A lot of the school boards grouped people together in classrooms who have multiple diagnoses and then nobody gets the support they require because they are understaffed and underpaid and too many kids, we are sort of stuck in this fishbowl and nobody seems to figure out what's going on here.
>
> Malcolm, age 17, White youth

[46] The lifetime cost of one person dropping out of high school is over $300,000 (Noble et al., 2014). With regards to services for youth, "in Toronto, for example, it costs more than $20,000 to keep a young person in a homeless shelter for a year, without consideration of the added costs of health care, mental health and addiction supports, and corrections that are a direct result of the experience of being homeless" (Shapcott, 2007; Winland, 2013, p. 34).

Another factor that hindered school engagement and participation was that most youth in the study had attended three or more schools since Kindergarten, with some having attended over 10. With every new school, friends, connections to their community, and their dignity was all lost. Homeless youth have higher mobility than housed and poor children (Liljedahl et al., 2013), which presents a significant barrier to academic participation. The findings from my research echo what homeless youth in focus groups across Canada revealed in the *What Would it Take?* study, where youth explicitly linked their homelessness and academic engagement to the challenges they faced trying to receive support from public systems, one key issue being mobility and transportation challenges (Gaetz et al., 2018; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). Moving around a lot leads to youth facing a loss of school time, which is then followed by a period of adjustment at a new school (Liljedahl, et al., 2013; Noble et al., 2014).

Due to the multiple absences youth accumulate while homeless and moving between schools, many youth feel "super, super embarrassed to go to school after missing a couple days because I'd be like *wow my class has probably forgotten about me* … you know" (Paul, age 20, White youth). Sixty percent of youth in this study stated irregular attendance as a barrier to staying in school while homeless. They made it clear that the more visibly homeless you are, the more you are bound to experience discrimination and social exclusion on numerous fronts, with 60% claiming to have experienced social exclusion when they were in school. During my interview with Malcolm, who identified as disabled and was homeless, he told me about feeling excluded and isolated at school while growing up and now, due to homelessness:

> That's why I left [school] and went to a co-op environment, because I was offered the co-op in my MPP's office … I was forced to grow up so quickly because of my mom's abuse and having to be around doctors and adults for the majority of my childhood, there is a physical barrier in that I can't do a lot of the things that my able-bodied friends want to do because I can't get there, the transportation is not good enough or I physically can't

> do what they want to do, but then you also add in the fact that … you tell somebody, one of your friends, your sort of, your life story, you're like *hey, I'm homeless and I was in foster care when I was…* you walk them through that and they go, *my God, I can't hear that* and they walk away, right. So yeah, there's the exclusion part because of the accessibility or just people get scared because they don't realize, and they don't know.
>
> Malcolm, age 17, Disabled, White youth

Malcolm's words reminded me that education privileges "certain" students in schools and that young people who are homeless are often judged and questioned and their lives misunderstood.

The youths' words make it evident that educational institutions have the power to provide avenues that either advance or hinder social opportunities related to educational attainment (and otherwise), and that these are inextricably linked to "policies, practices and constructions of homelessness embedded within the education system and related social institutions" (Dhillon, 2011, p. 121). When Denisha, an Indigenous youth, was about to start college, she was staying at a shelter and unable to rely on her father for financial support: "I could've spent my money a little bit better but the books and everything and the transportation kept adding up and the shelter wasn't giving me transportation because I had OSAP which was only $2,000 per semester and that's not very much. That's not going to cover the cost of living, or cover anything" (Denisha, age 22, Indigenous youth). For her, it was hard to budget $2,000 for food, tuition, books, and transportation. For her and others, going to school while living at a shelter means wearing the same clothes every day. All of these are factors that ultimately impacted her decision to drop out. Mobility and transportation barriers are also especially considerable when residing at shelters that may be far away in proximity from schools, and youth may not have money for bus fare.[47]

[47] Youth in this study consistently told me that transportation is a major issue across York Region, especially with regards to where shelters are located in proximity to their schools, making it difficult to go to school while homeless.

Again, when homeless, the desire to continue with school is replaced by other priorities that others often take for granted and do not consider in this context.

Alesha felt that she was only able to continue with her education because her college professors were understanding of her situation, and therefore provided her with accommodations:

> So, I've got another year [in school] … I just go once a week, I've made an arrangement with my teachers because they were quite aware with what was going on beforehand and I was telling them what was up because I was sleeping in my car and shit, like that's pretty obvious, you know, I hadn't bathed in like three days and they were like, are you okay? And I'm like, no I'm living in my car but it's cool, you know, stuff like that, so they were aware and so I've orchestrated a schedule where every Wednesday, I get together with them and for, I'd say, each class lasts about an hour, I go to their office, I sit with them, they give me the papers and a brief little lecture, which they are totally cool with doing by the way. They have accommodated me in ways that I didn't even know were possible, but its 'cause the program is so small, it's only like 30 kids there, so they're willing to, to do that, plus, I was one of the kids who was getting As all the time so they were like … you're not coming back? That's not cool, because I was debating dropping out entirely … I'm going part-time now so I just go once a week and I just meet with four of my teachers [back-to-back] … I just have an online class that I take care of…

Alesha, age 25, gender fluid, bisexual, pansexual, White youth

Despite the arrangements her professors made for her, it was still difficult to go to school and be homeless: "The hardest part is the constant lies that I have to keep telling people, which sucks … The hardest thing is having to keep my homelessness a secret from my classmates, making up lies for why I can't get together for group work, it's tough." Youth often had to lie or hide to protect themselves, because they faced different challenges than their peers. Such decisions can be equated with protective factors, resilience, and "street smarts" in that help them navigate their struggles to survive, which need to be enhanced through school-based early intervention strategies (Gaetz et al, 2018). These issues are further intensified when considering race, class, sexuality, and ability in relation to youth homelessness. For instance, Jessie mentioned, discussing homophobia in schools: "Honestly, you know who I feel sorry for the

most, the LGBTQ community and homelessness, you wouldn't believe how much they get bullied…and they have to fucking hide … fuck I feel sorry for them" (Jessie, age 24, Indigenous youth). Some youth felt bullied by teachers, too, despite teaching being a profession of care.

Similar to the study by Gaetz and O'Grady et al. (2016), learning disabilities, ADD, and ADHD were also widespread (80%) amongst the youth in this study, and many were aware of such problems since childhood. Combined with homelessness, such factors made being in school, and remaining in school, impossible. Experience's youth shared show that certain populations of students are increasingly victimized and harassed in schools. From the youth I spoke with, I learned that LGBTQ2S+, Indigenous and other racialized youth, and disabled youth are deeply marginalized. Importantly, such intersecting forms of oppression impact how homeless youth experience education. As such, it is essential that we understand school as one of the most likely settings for youth to experience exclusion, and to understand ways in which we can intervene as caring members of society and as lifelong educators and students ourselves.

As homelessness experiences all differ, so do educational experiences while at risk or homeless. The process of disengagement did not look the same for all young people. For some, struggles with personal issues, depression, and anxiety, or turning to substances (typically marijuana) further contributed to disengagement from school (Noble et al., 2014). In terms of the experience of education while homeless, however, about 50% reported that staying in school would be possible if they were not homeless. The consensus amongst the majority of youth was that "it is impossible to be on the street and go to school at the same time" (Adam, age 17, Indigenous youth) – an experience many of their classmates, teachers, and society cannot grasp (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). And, because revealing the truth can evoke differential treatment, these youth taught me that maintaining an ordinary, normal student identity is connected to their

decisions to disclose their realities and life circumstances (Järkestig et al., 2016). This means that youth did not always share that they were homeless, impoverished, or staying in a shelter at school, for fear of further exclusion and judgment. I analyzed these as protective factors, coping, and resilience displayed in the face of extreme adversity.

The Paradoxes of Education: Lost Dreams and Desires / School as an Escape

The exclusion and embarrassment youth experienced while homeless made them feel isolated and impacted their self-esteem. The negative and self-pejorative thoughts brought on by homelessness and social exclusion can have severe and long-term impacts. Alesha explained:

> Believe me, it was tough, I felt the temptation to drop out when I was like 16 or 17. I kind of see myself as like an underprivileged stoner and this sexually confused person, I kind of saw myself as the bottom of the barrel basically, that's kind of how I always saw myself so I always wanted to surround myself with other people who were bottom of the barrel because they wouldn't possibly judge, or steer you in the wrong direction right?

Alesha, age 25, gender fluid, bisexual, pansexual, White youth

Many youth in this study had lost hope as a result of episodic and chronic homelessness, which forced them to reduce their personal goals and expectations. For example, Connor spoke about having to sideline school and accept "a lower standard of life" as a result of the often difficult and multiple steps required to survive when a young person becomes homeless:

> I'm kind of teaching myself through everything. Life has become my teacher … instead of school being my school because school's not good right now. I want to go to school, it's just there's so many more steps to get there. I need to save money to get the apartment … get the furniture and the food, then I gotta … stay employed to keep all that going and then at the same time, I want to go to school … there's no time for school when it's just like all life consists of is paying rent to live. Like I basically came to the terms of like you know, a lower standard of life is the best way to do things because like all I want is like small one-bedroom house, pay the bills and that and just do what I want.

Connor, age 22, White youth

James also spoke of reducing dreams and aspirations when he told me he: “always wanted to be in film but as I’ve gotten older and all this stuff starts happening … the dream becomes nothing but a dream and it’s like no matter how hard you try, no matter how hard you want it, it’s not going to happen and like you have to give up on it because you have to focus on what’s going to help you survive right now” (James, age 24, Indigenous youth). For many youth, like James, despite strong desires to continue, due to the harsh realities of homelessness future educational pursuits were lost. Similarly, when Sofia’s issues at home became too difficult, her addictions and eating disorder took over. During her B.Ed. program, she “wasn’t able to totally engage with the professors and with the material.” As mentioned earlier, she was accepted into a Masters program in New York but could not pursue it, as she felt she required “solid time without using” and time to “work on herself before going to school.” She no longer felt equipped with the skills to go to school, as she “would just feel so stressed; when I go back to school, I want to be in a healthy place. I couldn’t handle school right now. I still desire to go back” (Sofia, age 23, White youth). For her, rehabilitation is more important than school right now: “I need to learn how to live, I don’t know how to function in society anymore. At this point, I am not capable of it, so I just needed to learn how to like be in society again because drug use really cuts you off from society.” For her and several others, mental health, and substance use issues, alongside homelessness, compounded aspirations, decisions, and desires to continue with school, the rebuilding of her relationships and rebuilding of herself.

Though some youth leave home at a young age, they still desire to remain in school, but face numerous challenges and barriers because of their involvement with foster care and Children’s Aid. For instance, David mentioned being apprehended and feeling forced to leave school so that no one would find him, because he wanted to escape a negative foster home.

Despite having no issues at school, he left. While we started to unravel his childhood and foster care experience, he told me about "when things started to go downhill":

> … when I ran away from my foster home because they apprehend you, right? So if I went back to school, they would apprehend me, like one time I ran away and when I went to school, the next day, and the police apprehended me and brought me back, so then the next time I ran away, I was like fuck, I guess I'm going to just have to drop out of school.
>
> David, age 24, mixed race, Black, Indian and Spanish youth

While truancy officers can track down youth who have multiple school absences, for homeless youth the situation is drastically different. For instance, Louisa mentioned that her school was unable to track her down because she did not have an address once homeless. Even though she says the school noticed and attempted to show care regarding her school attendance,

> they can't like send a truancy officer because … they don't know where I live, right? Like I'm not living anywhere, so, um, I can't remember if I had gotten any phone calls up until the point where they basically called me and told me I was retired … I remember getting the phone call telling me like you're retired from school and like you're no longer like here, like don't come to school because you're not enrolled here anymore.
>
> Louisa, age 23, White youth

No interventions were possible because she "just stopped going completely." Understandably, schools cannot help a student who is not present; but this example shows that the struggles of homelessness experienced by this youth were not recognized by the school as a barrier to maintaining regular attendance. At times, the situation of homelessness becomes demarcated as an individual problem, even by schools. Louisa's story shows that homeless youth are rendered invisible in comparison to their housed peers just by virtue of their homeless status, and that the same rules do not apply to them when it comes to mandatory attendance at school.

For successful preventative solutions and early interventions, then, we need to "catch kids when they are in school and before they become homeless," with the support of the education

system and school, teachers, and administration (Noble et al., 2014, p. 7). This is especially vital for those youth who conceptualize school as a positive focal point, central to their lives and identities, a place that keeps youth focused and away from what they perceive as trouble (i.e., substance use, involvement with the wrong crowd). For some, school was a positive place – and this is why they did well – or a place to escape to, a reprieve from their unsafe households.

School was a place to meet up with friends, and a community of people that fostered resilience, as demonstrated by some youth's experiences in school despite being homeless. After David, a 24-year-old mixed race youth, told me about life being homeless, he said that "school was a breeze, like I always looked at school as somewhere to get away … have fun, clear my mind, like I was always the class clown. My marks were up [good] … I liked school!" After being expelled for chronic absences, Megan stopped going to classes but would still go to school each morning to meet up with best friends and "go put my stuff in the locker" for storage. Even amidst the challenges of being homeless, school was a social place "like a little hang out, we'll meet up, a group of people, where are we going to meet up tomorrow, okay meet up at the school or [a coffee shop]" (Megan, age 19, White youth). While she did not attend classes, school was still a positive place where she was able to maintain connections to her social networks.

Another way in which school becomes an escape from homelessness is when youth are able to channel their troubles into their education. In this way, school is very important in terms of coping with life while homeless. For Joanne, school may have saved her life, because it was her escape while she was homeless and being trafficked:

> I never ended up dropping out … I've always been so persistent throughout my school year, I went from normal schooling to … alternative schooling, because I found that they would work for me more, where I would have to go to school until like 12 o' clock and then after … I could work or do whatever, so I switched over to alternative schooling and that helped me a lot … The teachers were way more supportive actually now that I think

> back about all that. I never stopped going to school, I always wanted my diploma and I thought if I finish my schooling, it is a gateway to more success. So … I always had to go to school, I finished school unfortunately though just when I was 20, just hitting 21, because I couldn't focus, as much as alternative helped me, I was still so broke, I was still struggling so badly and the fact that I was also being trafficked and I was also going to school, like I wanted to go to school because it was my escape, it was my runaway but at the same time, there were just parts of me that gave up and like I couldn't focus and … it was really hard. I finished a lot slower than I should have, I finished uh, not as good as I could have been, like my GPA could have been a 90 and I only have a 75%.
>
> Joanne, age 23, mixed race, Spanish, Haitian, French youth

While a small portion of youth in this study were able to remain in school while homeless, it is important to highlight that Joanne displays incredible resilience with regards to education, despite being homeless and trafficked. For her, school – even alternative schooling – was a lifeline and therefore a place where resilience, assets, and protective factors should be fostered. Strong research findings demonstrate that quality of life improves with increased education, and that not completing high school, alongside a history of being homeless, places youth at greater risk of long-term social exclusion and social, political, and economic forms of deprivation (Dhillon, 2011; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016; Noble et al., 2014; Statistics Canada, 2007).

Having a high school diploma allows for greater opportunities in terms of access to continuing education (college / university) and increasing future employability (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016), and finding pathways out of homelessness. Youth I interviewed were aware of such factors, and expressed a wish to return to school, but had to work to "make ends meet." School was rough for James, a 24-year-old Indigenous youth: "The reason I ended up leaving was not so much because of school itself but because I wasn't going to be able to feed myself unless I worked 24/7, not 24/7 but like 8–12 hours a day; school is such a painful experience for me that I doubt I'd be able to go back." When Laila, a 17-year-old White youth, became homeless, her "logic back then was I'm going to school to get a good job but I already had a good job so I

needed money at that time, I was kicked out so I just worked full time because work was more a priority." Regretfully, she told me that she really wished that she could go back to school.

Most of the youth (44%) were working precarious, low-paying jobs, trapped by a system that required them to work very long hours or to travel far in order to make money. Even though Tyler wanted to go back to school, "it's just timing and … with the little one (kid), it's not a lot of energy left, by the time I finish work, eat breakfast …" Right now, schooling for this youth

> is so difficult because it's either you gotta go to Toronto …or somewhere else or you gotta go to this classroom and stuff, it's based on government hours so you have to work, either do your school nine to five or you do it at night time, well none of those options are really good for me, these school things aren't open on Saturdays so I can't say I want to go do schooling for an hour or the other scenario is where you end up having to pay for it.
>
> Tyler, age 25, White youth

It is unfortunate, but important to address, that homelessness can be favourable to capitalism and neoliberalism, while perpetuating precarious work and keeping youth poor and homeless; this is especially evident in the ways that young people are accelerated into adult roles when they enter the shelter system, and pushed into finding a job to earn an income. Alternative and individual supports need to be available for at-risk or homeless youth so they can participate on a more equal footing, so we can work towards eliminating homelessness in Canada completely. Youth felt as if they were perceived as lazy by employers or those who are "more successful." James, who would go and drop off resumes each day, frustratingly tells me:

> I'd like to see them be put in a position where they have no hope for the future, where they have no support from their family, where they have no money in their pocket, where they're living day to day trying to figure out if they're going to have food in their mouths the next day and then see if they have the will to get up and apply to 17 different places and act happy and act like they're so full of energy and stuff to employers …

Furthermore, when youth become homeless, opportunities related to education and employment become limited, especially because employers want to see multiple years of experience. Youth feel hopeless knowing that without education and employment experience, doors begin to shut:

> You know already, the door's been shut, whereas if you had grade 12, then maybe they would say, oh yeah, you can, here, let's go talk but if you don't, if you didn't meet that standard, as ridiculous as it is, you're immediately shut out from the rest of what life has to offer. And that's one of the things that I have felt the hardest and one of the reasons why I kept going back to drugs or back to drinking that I feel like I'm still here instead of somewhere more successful because I feel like life has kind of shut the door on me and decided, nope, you're not good enough. And that's like one of the worst feelings.
>
> James, age 24 Indigenous Youth

Clearly, youths' educational and employment experiences also become damaged due to the stigma they face while being homeless. Additionally, when is a young person who is working full-time hours or multiple jobs and staying at a shelter or on the streets going to find time to complete homework, assignments, and study for upcoming tests? As we talked, Linda, a 22-year-old youth told me about the ways in which schools and teachers can be more supportive and consider "Where does a home-less kid do their home-work?" Perhaps teachers could help youth by allowing them some extra time during the day to complete homework. While this defeats the purpose of "home-work," homeless youth need different supports so that when they leave school and have to look for home, they have one less thing to worry about, and yet still don't fall behind or become disadvantaged academically. With "so much stuff on our minds," Linda shared how school was less of a priority, and why even keeping her full-time job at Tim Hortons was hard:

> I could never keep a job because it's hard not knowing where you're going to sleep the next day and then go to work, be fine, and having your head on your shoulders, giving your full potential at work, you can't cause you're thinking where am I going to sleep … even if it's this small, but it's your own, it needs to be your own, that you know no one's going to hurt you, no one's going to touch you … so all those personal issues, they may not go away but you could set them aside for when you come back home because you know you have a home, you know you can close your eyes and be okay, then go to work,

> and worrying about it at work … that's why I would come late to work or … do like mistakes or whatever because I'm thinking about *Fuck! Where am I going to sleep tonight* and then the next thing you know, you lose your job or you're out of school, so now guess what? You're homeless and you don't have a job and you don't have money, and then now you're just totally fucked!
>
> Linda, age 22, White youth

Not having a home means inadequate sleep, nutrition, overall health and safety, and losing connections to the mainstream community (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Linda's words show how these factors inevitably impact and disrupt employment and educational attainment. The experiences of these youth, alongside consistent research about the importance of education and employment for homeless youth, make clear that it is essential to find ways to support young people who are homeless to continue with schooling, especially because of how closely this is tied with future prospects for employability and overall health and quality of life.

Alternative Views on Education and Academic Resilience

Interviews reinforced that education comes in many different forms and is not only acquired through mainstream schooling. In attempts to reframe their homelessness experience, some youth claimed, "I'm more street smart than I am book smart" (Megan, age 19, White youth), emphasizing the knowledge and skills acquired as a result of the unfortunate circumstance of homelessness, such as how to be self-sufficient, start their own bank account, create a resume, find work, and find housing. While this displays resilience, courage, maturity and intelligence, the "street smarts" Megan spoke of also point to how quickly homeless youth are pushed into adulthood and have to navigate homelessness at a young age, without the help of supportive adults. As such, being "street smart" also meant hiding one's homeless status due to stigma and the associated barriers. Joanne, who was working and looking for housing, explains

the struggles: “it’s really hard for me, I can’t go to an apartment and say *hey I was human trafficked*, because then they’re like, oh she’s a high-risk person, we definitely don’t want her here, yeah I can’t go and say, hi I’m just coming from a shelter, *oh she’s lazy, she’s not going to pay her rent.* (Joanne, age 23, mixed race, Spanish, Haitian, French youth)

Alternative education options were helpful in overcoming the barriers that homelessness brings forth in terms of schooling, employment, and housing. For instance, due to addiction-related issues, Denisha, a 22-year-old, Indigenous youth, wanted to do harm reduction work on the days when she did not have school, so she enrolled in an alternative education program, which only required her to be at school two days a week. However, at this time she was staying at a shelter, where “It was hard because there was no Wi-Fi at the shelter, and I didn’t have a data plan and I was only 16 so I couldn’t even get anything in my name at that time.” She was always an honour roll student in high school and “the actual schoolwork has never been the problem, it was the fact that I had no stability, and like clean clothes and not feeling good about myself when I do go in school, going in pajamas and stuff just to stay warm. Transportation can also be very far away; I just felt like I didn’t fit in, I felt like I stuck out too much” (Denisha, age 22, Indigenous, Algonquin First Nations, French Canadian youth). For her, alternative education options helped alleviate those issues. But alternative programs, while positive, can also be alienating, as they stigmatize youth who already bear the weight of multiple forms of social exclusion and marginalization. Alternative education programs are structured to support students who fall outside of mainstream education, but the right resources and approaches should be used to prevent youth from dropping out in the first place, and schools should consider what went wrong. Alternative programs have their limits, such that they can further reinforce and enable the

dominant stereotypes around these youth by suggesting that they need accommodations or alternative spaces, taking responsibility away from the education system altogether.

Some youth who had dropped out of school were working through Independent Learning Credit (ILC) booklets. When giving youth ILCs, we cannot forget that these youth have already expressed frustration with being able to stay engaged in school, feeling unmotivated, disengaged, and bored, yet we hand them a book to complete independently, feeding into crushing neoliberal ideologies that are individualistic and isolating. This can sometimes be unhelpful and shows little compassion for the many complex layers that encompass the lives of these youth:

> I'm working on ILCs but even that is irritating because I heard that I have two credits left and I have my transcript and they are saying that now I need six and that's another thing that I'm like fuck it, I don't even want to do it anymore. It's so irritating. They send in booklets [to the shelter] … It takes as long as I like. Each booklet is like five sessions of a course and in a course, there are four booklets and an exam … these guys all supervise it and they sit down with me if I ask them to but I just do it on my own. I'm trying to get them to send me all of it … so I can just do it and send it all back because this way it's going to take forever, because they send one booklet, then I finish it, then I send it in and then I have to wait three weeks … I just want them to send it all in. I can finish it in like four days if I actually want to, but like, I'm cheating though because they have like practice shit and then like the shit that like they're actually counting, and I just do that.

Matthew, age 26, White youth.

Despite these considerations, alternative approaches to education also support homeless youth. A very progressive example of alternative education for youth has been established at a shelter in York Region called 360 Kids. The program offered is called iGrad; it helps young people attain their high school credits online, at their own pace, which is especially important because the transient nature of homeless does not allow most youth to continue with mainstream education. The program works with specific schools across the region. After spending countless hours at 360 Kids and speaking to multiple youth who had spent many hours in the program, I was able to better understand how beneficial this alternative program is for youth. In terms of

educational achievement, it supports them to either pursue higher education and provides greater career prospects, and a sense of hopefulness and resilience.

A few youth who were a part of iGrad helped me learn more. Lauryn says:

> So iGrad is just like this online schooling, I'm taking philosophy there … it's very independent, you can do this online at home [shelter/transitional = home] … there's no time limit but obviously, if you are applying to universities and have to get those marks submitted before like a certain deadline, but they simplify it a lot for you, um so it's not like your average full on course, like for example, philosophy has been cut into 20 days and so it's do-able instead of like, so that's like what's very helpful about iGrad in itself, they just make it very do-able for people who are, you know, who don't have a lot of time on their hands, but they also give you that help, um, of like teacher support if you need it cause there's somebody here … yeah, she just like teaches the class for you and answers your questions that you may have, she looks over your work like, so … sometimes they have actual classes where like everyone does take one course together would come and we would have actual discussions like an actual classroom … everyone doing the same course at the same time, or you could just do it independently, there's no rule to it.
>
> Lauryn, age 19, Black youth

Similar to Lauryn, Martin, a 23-year-old gay, White youth felt very strongly about the iGrad program. As he tells me, "I'm doing very well right now but in a regular school setting, I probably would not succeed". With a strong desire to complete a post-secondary degree in Kinesiology, Life Sciences, or Psychology, Lauryn discusses how iGrad has helped inspire and further her desires to want to give back to the community and to others who may have experienced similar struggles to hers related to instability, homelessness, and education:

> Essentially, I want to be able to start my own company that's kind of like 360 Kids [to provide] more options out there for people who are like me … the end goal is just to be able to help somebody else, like me! Right? Cause I'm in a really shitty situation and I feel like yeah, like even though there are so many people who are here who say they are here to help me, I don't feel like I'm fully supported, I feel like a lot more abandoned and not listened to and not cared for and it's frustrating because like I have hopes and I know I have that potential … and I have that capability and like that drive to complete it.
>
> Lauryn, age 19, Black youth

She continued to tell me that iGrad is connected to certain schools across York Region, so when applying to universities youth can get proof of enrolment and official transcripts to provide to post-secondary institutions through those schools, in association with the shelter. Martin provides insight when he says transcripts are judged like “a normal student, whereby you don’t get looked at any different by universities”; feeling like a “normal” and “mainstream” student is important for youth, in light of the social exclusion and alienation when homeless.

However, Lauryn said the iGrad classroom is not for everyone; the location of the shelter “is not the best,” and the classroom is full of people from difficult walks of life:

> It depends on the person ‘cause like someone like me, who has had like already a lot of exposure to people who were in drugs … or prostituting just by like the group home that I was in … you have to be mentally prepared ... If you do decide to start coming here and try to get supports, you wanna do it online and … have … that motivation … you can stay on top of your work, then definitely do it online, it’s very doable and fast. If you’re coming here, it’s a different situation cause … you have to have like a lot of … will power … resiliency, self awareness for you to not fall into the cracks. Um the program, the idea in itself is great, the area is not the best, but that’s not by anyone’s fault, right, we are here to help, we’re not here to judge. It’s just, if you haven’t been surrounded by that before, you have to make sure that you’re not going to allow it to affect you.
>
> Lauryn, age 19, Black youth

Martin also shares his positive experience in the iGrad program with me:

> I was enrolled in September and for the first several months, I didn’t do any work, I was still struggling … it’s online, but she has the classroom, so you can work there, or in your room, it doesn’t really matter where, all that’s asked is that you sign in a few times a week so that you’re an active student. Day-to-day is a rollercoaster for sure. I’ll have one day where I’ll hand in three or four assignments, and English is my strong suit, I’m very good at articulating myself so I’ll hand an essay in one day and then the next day, I’m like oh miss, I’m sorry, I’m not feeling it today, I’m feeling a bit down, something’s you know ah, and what’s great about that is that I’m not tied into nine to three, I’m not punished for taking a day off, I’m not punished for needing to focus on me. That’s the good thing about iGrad. Obviously, the teacher is still working on some of the kinks but that’s with any program. I mean, I don’t expect her to be perfect but her approach in general is more positive in the sense that she works with each student individually.
>
> Martin, age 23, gay, White youth

Because these youth have found the program to be such a positive experience, Martin told me, "there's a youth council starting" whereby youth can come together and advocate for more programs like iGrad, especially because "education should be accessible in every way possible because if you don't know, then you have nothing to start with. If you have no education…we've been talking, she's [the teacher at the time] been getting a couple people in financial literacy courses, life skills courses, stuff like that's really important, too, and those are credits." iGrad students gave various examples of helpful accommodations that were provided. Martin says it's difficult to go to school while homeless because "there is no consistency, a lot of kids don't get enough sleep because they don't have a bed, or maybe they are having addiction issues." He tells the compelling story of one youth whom the iGrad program and teacher hugely supported:

> We're all so proud of her because she was a heroin addict and struggled with that while she was here but … she still got her diploma and there were so many barriers for her, but Miss took her by the hand and each barrier, they worked through one at a time … she's in a treatment centre right now, but she got a frickin' diploma, didn't stop her.
>
> Martin, age 23, gay, White youth

iGrad is a progressive example aimed to de-stigmatize youth through an alternative classroom.

The Role of Educators

It can be difficult for educators to identify when a student is impoverished, or at risk of homelessness or currently homeless. Therefore, it is very important for educators to know as much as possible about each student's unique needs. Candid comments from youth regarding struggles with educational attainment can provide insights, awareness, and motivation for teachers faced with the complexities of assisting young people who are homeless; these youth

provide the best advice concerning their own needs. Given the prevalent stigmas and social exclusions that homeless youth experience, this can be a special focus for enhanced awareness.

As conscientious educators, we don't want to risk incorrect assumptions based on ill-informed biases around a youth's experience. Many youth in focus groups across Canada stated that this was a major problem in schools that contributed to their marginalization (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). Many of the youth I interviewed described how they negotiated their homelessness with their relationship with teachers, and mentioned not telling teachers or administrators about their homelessness, and feeling as if no one noticed or cared; this is problematic and concerning. Joanne shared her experience at school while homeless:

> Nobody was supportive at all, I never got help from any of the teachers, I would go shopping in the lost and found most of the time, especially if it was a nice school, like when I went to [X School], if I saw something in there, I would wait one week, I would go back and just take it because it was nice and then like that was like my biggest resource in my school and as far as like counseling goes, I didn't really get counseled, I never got help. I tried to explain to them a lot of the time, or like when I enrolled in school, I would bring a letter, when I was in high school most of the time…I was in [X Shelter], so I would bring a letter, like I had to state my address and they would just take it and they would be like oh okay and they never really cared, they would never be like is there anything we can do to be supportive because we can see that you're in this situation and I was just, I never got any of that. The teachers would drill me for my assignments and stuff and I would tell them like I don't have a computer, I would get in trouble a lot because I could never type my assignments. Like I couldn't afford to print them, like I didn't even have five cents to go to the library, like I was broke as shit, it was scary.
>
> Joanne, age 23, mixed race, Spanish, Haitian, French youth

It was embarrassing for me to face Joanne, whose personal struggles and needs were overlooked at school. As an educator, I remember each kid who came to the breakfast club or aimlessly roamed around the school yard after school, and those who could not afford school trips. It was not difficult to locate which students were struggling more in terms of coming from unstable or impoverished families and home environments, especially when students are were

digging through the lost and found or giving a shelter as their place of residence. Common themes were evident when youth told me their stories. They described wearing the same clothes to school each day and being aware of having unusual body odors. Their parents rarely came in to meet with teachers. Due to homelessness-related challenges, they often did not complete homework, and were rarely able to focus or concentrate for an equivalent time as peers. Historically, they had attended multiple schools, accrued absences, and often handed assignments in late or not at all.

Some "tell-tale" signs of youth homelessness are apparent in the interviews with Louisa, Sofia, and Malcolm, when they were sharing advice for educators: "If you see that somebody is like not coming in very often, because I know kids skip school … but some kids aren't doing it because they want to, they have no other choice right?" (Louisa, age 23, White youth)

> In terms of educators … it's sometimes so beneath the surface … you just might never expect who's homeless … like a lot of educators that I see, it's like, why can't this kid get this and this person's late all the time, and she's dopey and like, she's not present and things like that … it goes to like a defensive anger, I think that just like more of a compassionate approach from educators would make a big difference. I actually did have a professor who kind of, you know, she just saw something and she really came alongside me and encouraged me, like even if an educator is not ready to ask the student how they are, like just coming alongside and encouraging them does way more.
>
> Sofia, age 23, White youth

I also understand that the state of being homeless is not *always* detectable to teachers. In observing that educators may not be ready to ask a student how they really are (and whether they are homeless), Sofia displayed a heightened awareness about educators' difficult and demanding jobs. This includes a consciousness of them as people who make mistakes and face daunting and conflictive challenges (Britzman, 2003). With her advice, she is demonstrating the kind of human compassion and understanding she desired from her educators. Fortunately, Sofia actually

holds a Bachelor of Education herself. She suggests that educators have a unique responsibility to collaborate with and stand by students to help them feel supported. Support can be unspoken and communicated through actions and messages of active encouraging body language.

It can be difficult for youth to be transparent about their current circumstances, due to fear or embarrassment of being judged and receiving biased, differential treatment. In using phrases such as "beneath the surface" and "you might never expect who's homeless," Sofia reinforced the perception that de-stigmatization towards homelessness is required. By doing this, teachers may be able to look beyond superficial views, and rather than personalize tardiness and lost focus in class, teachers could implement alternative approaches and accommodations, which "would make a big difference." For these reasons, Malcolm advised educators:

> Not to judge based on what you see, or even what you read. Judge the person based on, you know, how they present and even if they present not the way you'd expect, realize that there's probably an underlying reason. If you're late for school / not showing up on time / struggle in the classroom, it's not likely because you don't want to, it's that you have so much else going on that school is not less a priority for you, or for me anyways, because I want to finish school, it's that I'm doing the job of you know, two people.
>
> Malcolm, age 17, disabled, White youth

These youth point to the ways in which the intimacies of student/teacher relationships become directly linked to student success and failure. Youth from the *What Would It Take?* study spoke broadly about how school staff do not understand the social environments in which young people live, and that without this understanding, teachers might interpret a youth's fatigue and drug use as behavioural problems, rather than coping mechanisms to stay engaged in school despite the extreme adversities of being homeless (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). Being understood by a teacher can determine whether homeless youth feel supported, welcome, or (un)safe at school.

When young people experience homelessness, they need specific accommodations. It is important for educators to be aware of the complex issue of youth homelessness, so that early interventions can be made (Liljedahl et al., 2013) and it can be possible to "create a system driven by youth's self-identified educational needs and desires, enabling youth with different learning styles to learn in ways that work for them" (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 71). An interesting example is the case of Denisha, a 22-year-old Indigenous youth, who spoke of needing additional time to complete assignments; she was sent to the disability room to receive an accommodation letter for this purpose. While this might be a standard college and university protocol, it should be noted that she did not have a standard exceptional condition for why she required additional time. Her precarious living situation allowed her neither to focus nor to concentrate. It did not leave her enough time and resources to complete her assignments on time. Her need for extra time was not a reflection of her intellect or her ability to comprehend or complete assignments; it was related to her being exhausted or severely challenged by circumstances largely beyond the imagination of most teachers.

When teachers lack understanding, youth feel disempowered and anxious. Such factors make it very difficult to go to school while homeless – an already anxiety-inducing state:

> I feel like teachers don't fully understand … you can make them aware but that in itself gives you a lot of anxiety, there's just so much anxiety everywhere … talking to teachers about your situation or … getting extra time on tests and on assignments and it's like I'm asking you questions, but I feel like you're not giving me answers and just going to them and approaching them about anything is too nerve-wracking for me. I just don't do it, and then that becomes problematic and then I also put too much pressure on myself as well.
>
> Lauryn, age 19, Black youth

In past school experiences, 53% of the youth in the study felt there was an influential person at school (teacher, admin person, or guidance counselor) who had supported them and

enhanced their school experience. Active outreach to youth who show signs of being at risk of, or homeless, is necessary (Liljedahl et al., 2013); such efforts can enhance youths' resilience and help them stay connected. James, a 24-year-old Indigenous youth, shared the importance of this; although he was forced to drop out of school due to homelessness, he kept in touch with teachers at his old high school, and told me: "In 2016, I was actually staying with an old teacher of mine, for quite a few months, she offered me the guest room in her house." Even when offered a place to stay, it can be "ridiculously stressful" because youth know their stay will be short-lived, leaving them with the constant feeling of fear and anxiety related to having nowhere to go, rather than moving forward like their privileged and housed counterparts.

> You have no time to worry about what career do I want, what kind of house do I want, do I want a house or an apartment, kind of thing, you have no time to worry about that because you're worried about where am I gonna' be like the next month and so something that I noticed from that was that days went from … high school felt like a day started and then it was over and it felt like there was not enough time in the days, but when you're living in that mindset of like the survival mindset, the days drag…and it feels like each day lasts like a lifetime. But so, that was, that was pretty rough.
>
> James, age 24, Indigenous Youth

Educators are already doing so much for our youth; so how can we ensure that homeless youth are taken care of, and how can we involve educators in youth homelessness prevention without overburdening them more than they already are? As my discussion chapter and concluding chapter will argue, we – in Canada - need to learn from other jurisdictions.

Chapter Summary

The narrative accounts of youth reveal how difficult it is to maintain health, mental health, and overall well-being once homeless. Without food, adequate housing, and strong adult support, the health and mental health of homeless youth is of major concern (Kidd et al., 2018).

Also, without supports in place, attempting to remain in school while homeless, while facing such overwhelming and complex concerns, is next to impossible. While the harsh realities of homelessness make it difficult to remain engaged in school, there are also various ways by which the education system itself contributes to expelling young people into homelessness. The prevailing response to youth homelessness in Canada has been for youth to seek supports from individual service providers, rather than a more sensible approach, a collaboration between the youth homelessness sector, the education system, and communities (Gaetz et al., 2018).

With this confusion, youth face social exclusion and invisibility, and are unable to exit homelessness and also unable to stay in school. A more coordinated response using school-based early interventions is necessary, as schools have a vital role to play in preventing and ending youth homelessness (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018). Malcolm, a 17-year-old, disabled youth, reinforced this when he said that “the education system and the province need to really look into it as a multi-disciplinary approach” for homeless youth who require support with school and other services. The causes and conditions of homelessness are overwhelming and varied; public systems and societal intuitions such as healthcare, housing, education, and child protection, to name a few, contribute to youths’ pathways into homelessness. Early interventions are essential to prevent youth from “falling through the cracks” of home and school (Gaetz et al., 2018; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018), as indicated by the difficult stories that youth shared about their day-to-day lives. This conversation will be detailed in the concluding chapters, coming up next!

Chapter 7: Discussion

This research has explored many of the reasons why it is nearly impossible for young people to remain in school when they become homeless. In this chapter, I reconsider some of the major issues I traced throughout my discussions with young people who have faced the hardships of homelessness. I frame these issues in terms of how they might inform or influence direct action, and address pathways forward as well as future research (Nichols, 2019). Homelessness continues to be a reality for many young people, and the education levels of homeless and street youth are very low; knowing this should concern us, as this situation poses multiple risks, including shorter life expectancies (Montez et al., 2012). So, what can we do next?

To answer this question, I shift our attention back to the practical and preventative response offered by Gaetz et al. (2018; 2020), Schwan and Gaetz et al. (2018) and Sohn & Gaetz, (2020), with a focus on the potential role of schools. I address how and why schools should play a key part alongside the homelessness sector and community-based services to help youth stay in school and prevent homelessness. Here, I include the voices of young people from my study who spoke about early interventions, long-term supports, prevention, and homelessness in Canada and how this issue can be better understood and resolved. I believe that if the education system focuses efforts on educational attainment for at-risk and homeless youth through school-based early interventions, we may be able to see a hopeful way forward.

Encounters with Homelessness - *What Have We Learned?*

Listening to young people talk about their struggles with homelessness was a profound educational experience for me. It was difficult and not something I was prepared for. Each life

story of homelessness shared was unique, and despite common themes arising, the diversity in demographics and circumstances that ultimately forced young people into homelessness was overwhelming for me when I thought of how to best respond. The number of youth in shelters confirmed the continuous struggle to meet their needs, and showed that in order for us to prevent this problem we will have to do things differently (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Through my genuine attempts to learn more and "do things differently," my research set out to examine the relationships between social exclusion, educational engagement, and youth homelessness.

Curious to explore the experience of being young and homeless in York Region and how homelessness impacts a young person's education and schooling, I aimed to understand the educational experiences and needs of homeless youth. My research also aimed to explore whether education could play an essential role in reducing and preventing homelessness, and to learn more about how this could become a reality through interviews with youth. My own life experience and this research have reminded me that education is central in terms of it being an equalizer or gateway to opportunity and in our understanding of what can lead to happiness and success (individually defined by each person), better overall quality of life, healthful transitions towards adulthood and a promising and engaged future full of possibilities and opportunities.

Unfortunately, a high percentage of youth who took part in this study revealed that they were forced to turn to the streets and shelters and were left with no choice but to drop out of formal schooling. Through observation and from surveys and interviews, I learned that the homelessness sector is not structured to support youth to continue their education. The common response to youth homelessness in Canada is one where the concern for the role of education in promoting a healthy, happy, and engaged future is largely forgotten. Responses to homeless youth, including shelters and drop-ins, and the education system both often ignore education as

significant in the lives of homeless youth (Gaetz et al., 2018; Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018), although there are some exceptions, for instance the 360 Kids program IGrad.

Like many of us, these young people have dreams for their future, and strong desires and motivations to complete their education; but all of this is lost in the wake of homelessness. Youth had difficult experiences in school, further impacted by their pathways into homelessness and then its grip. Though all youth were once in school, sadly, the transient nature of homelessness keeps them out of the education system. What this points to is that basic necessities are provided when youth enter the shelter system, but the emphasis on the other equally important aspects of a young person's life are not; this means that homeless youth are in some way stripped of the experiences of being youth, unlike others their age who are housed and have supports in place[48].

Youth described many complex reasons that contributed to their increased risk of homelessness and school disengagement (abusive home environments, CAS involvement, mental health issues, substance use, poverty, and precarious employment), which often began a process of stigmatization and exclusion, inevitably impacting school, too. Thinking that I would simply learn about educational experiences was short sighted. Narrative accounts revealed very complex and challenging home and family lives, serious and severe health concerns, and difficulties in school, all of which were compounded further by being young and homeless. The pathways that led to becoming homeless, and the dire experience of homelessness, disrupted and negatively impacted their educational experiences, while stifling many other opportunities along the way.

For these youth especially, the role and priority of education changed when faced with other challenges. They are often unable to depend on family members for support, so they must focus on earning an income in order to obtain basic necessities to stay alive. The shelters where I

[48] Personal Communication with Dr. Amber Gaetz, March 2021.

did my research also mainly responded to emergency needs for these youth not in terms of learning or helping them get back to school, but rather in terms of training young people with “life skills” and for a precarious job market. Being able to earn a high school diploma and pursue post-secondary education can provide further future prospects for employment. Without viable opportunities to generate income, these youth risk spending a longer time on the streets, which can also pose risks for becoming entrenched in chronic homelessness, and, in the process, facing a lot of loss related to well-being, ties to community, and dignity (Karabanow et al., 2010)

While the education system is built on the value that every young person deserves the right to a good education, my research shows that homeless youth face severe forms of social exclusion from a very young age, which ultimately impedes their education – and that the education system is not meeting the needs of at-risk and currently homeless youth. Analysis of qualitative (interview transcripts included throughout) and quantitative (percentages used in the results sections) findings revealed that there are many social, structural, institutional, and systemic barriers that force youth into homelessness, and there is a high correlation between homelessness and early school leaving, which is further impacted by restricted access to housing, employment, and important community and social supports (Gaetz et al., 2018).

Thus, addressing issues at the intersection of education and youth homelessness is important, as low levels of educational attainment for youth become a barrier to achieving other forms of social success and stability to move forward (Gaetz et al., 2018). Knowing all of this helps us consider that homelessness is not only about housing, but also about the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, culture, diversity, social class, gender, sexuality, access, education, and families, and how all of these factors differently impact the experience of homelessness and of education. Certain youth are overrepresented in the youth homelessness population. For instance,

11 of the forty youth interviewed, identified as Indigenous, and experiences (for these youth and others) were also the result of and compounded by stigma, racism, sexism, and homophobia within families, schools, and foster or group homes. Such intersecting forms of marginalization, discrimination, and oppression add additional burdens, and exclusions, impacting a youth's pathways into homelessness and their educational experiences prior to, and once homelessness.

Some youth left school before becoming homeless and disclosures of home and family lives while growing up revealed that youth were already living in unstable and adverse conditions, all evident factors in them dropping out despite not being homeless at the time. Though I could appreciate that trying to stay focused in school or maintain schooling while homeless would be difficult for anyone, when youth began sharing about what led them to become homeless and what their day-to-day lives encompassed, school just did not seem like a realistic possibility at all, alongside their many challenges. Without vital necessities, instrumental and expressive support from kin or others (Gazso & McDaniel, 2015), and a safe and affordable place to live, school "takes a back seat" to survival. Those who were in school were struggling to stay engaged and barely able to continue. The harsh realities that come with survival and living on the streets are conditions that affect health, overall well-being, focus and concentration, motivation, regular school attendance, engagement, and access in class. For these youth, school is difficult to prioritize, especially if proper supports are not in place from peers and supportive adults such as parents, teachers, and other school personnel (Malenfant et al., 2020).

Without a safe and permanent home and individualized accommodations, youth are deprived of basic necessities and school; this puts them at risk of poverty and becoming entrenched in street life, and at even greater risk for violence and exploitation – evidenced by so many of the stories youth shared about their extended and chronic homelessness, exposure to

trafficking, having to steal tents in order to secure shelter, and to sell drugs to make money in order to, eat, survive and live. Youth were also using various substances (e.g., drugs and alcohol) to cope with the pain of their lived realities and suffering from serious mental health issues, some leading to suicidal ideations and multiple suicide attempts. We must question why human beings, such as the young people in my study, feel this is their only option and we must do what is necessary to make suicide prevention a central goal of mental health surveillance and care.

Youth also disclosed how having to navigate the system demonstrated system failures that impede the health and overall well-being of youth, which also limits the ability to continue with education. The challenges that lead youth to become homeless begin very early on when young people are still in school, and this is why it is so important not to lose sight of the importance of education in addressing youth homelessness. The education system should be a critical partner with regards to early intervention strategies and prevention (Noble et al., 2014). More specifically, the education system needs to find solutions towards keeping youth and their families connected, before youth leave home and after, and building stronger alliances with other emergency services and aid agencies that provide support to homeless youth.

We desperately need schools to intervene early with youth who they believe are at risk. For example, youth told me that having individualized mental health services in schools would help them to stay in school. Such interventions include ensuring that necessary supports are in place for those youth who are marginalized because of learning disabilities or bullying, which many in my study struggled with, and were factors related to early school leaving. If we want healthy, caring, and long-term solutions for our youth, we have to help them succeed in the school system, exit homelessness, and get back to school if they left (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). Although the responsibility is collective, youth made clear that they are often blamed for

their circumstances; this reminds us that most systems are underscored with neoliberal ideologies and the stereotypical lenses through which we view dropping out of school. Seeing homelessness as a "choice" is inaccurate, insensitive, and lacks awareness of individuals and their lives.

When a societal or systemic problem is located within individuals rather than oppressive systems, we uphold and advance the deceptive power relations that give meaning to these narrow discourses and representations (Dhillon, 2011, p. 112). In this case, doing so also overlooks that the mainstream education system can be discriminatory, Eurocentric, and "othering," entangled in exclusionary hierarchical structures– a system where only certain students have the ability to succeed. This suggests the need to better understand what leads youth to the streets and the circumstances that keep them there. The life experiences of the youth I interviewed point to very complex processes of social exclusion and neoliberalism that demonstrate the failure of public systems and our society to provide youth and their families with the necessary and adequate supports they need in order to move forward in life (Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 14; Reza, 2018).

My research also exposed stories of homelessness in York Region, where youth homelessness is widespread, often hidden, and sometimes undetectable. Addressing poverty is more difficult in the suburbs than in urban areas; this makes the need for intervening early that much more important, especially through the education system. Emergency services are far away and transportation issues are widespread, resulting in youth being forced to travel to Toronto to access services. These barriers all force youth to lose connections to their families, schools, and communities, making them more vulnerable to victimization. The more entrenched they become in homelessness; it is harder to find pathways out of homelessness. In the process, youth often feel isolated and lose their hope and aspirations for the future – educational, or otherwise.

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks I used, and my research methods and design, were created in hopes to examine the lived experiences of youth through multiple lenses, to understand what causes educational disengagement for them and to disrupt the normative ways society conceptualizes why youth become homeless and are often forced to drop out. While social exclusion, as a framework, can help us explore marginality and deprivation, to truly understand "dropping out" or "disengaging" from school, and the complex ways homelessness excludes people, we need to explore such ideas from the standpoints or "positional lenses" of youth themselves (Glazier, 2005 as cited in Smyth, 2006, p. 288). Only then can we begin to construct possible education reform in terms of school organization, culture, and leadership that acknowledge those important realities (Smyth, 2006, p. 288). This is why the surveys and interviews that resulted from this research provided rich source of data and learning.

The theoretical frame of psychoanalysis helped me gain new insights and possibilities and contributed to the ways in which I listened to what youth had to say. Youth pushed me to being more critical of a society in which certain people are dehumanized and rendered invisible, and showed me how I am also complacent and complicit in the makings of that society. While extremely difficult to hear, "stories of suffering call upon us; they involve us in a response to an other, they hail us and demand, in the moment of their telling – or more precisely in the moment of our listening – that we say, do, or feel something in return" (Todd, 2003, p. 98).

As we listen, "this tension is felt as a process of awakening and wrenching apart, guilt involves the subject in an often-painful recognition of another's pain" (Todd, 2003, p. 98). Despite the pain we feel in hearing stories of suffering, we need to remind ourselves that there is hope in this learning, and guilt can facilitate such learning (Todd, 2003). A psychoanalytic frame

adds to our listening of youth voices and suffering[49] by shattering our complacency and re-awakening us towards the collective responsibility, action, and advocacy needed to create a mode of relationality and connectedness, in order to reduce the distance and disconnect between ourselves and our youth, between educators and their homeless students.

Rather than "imagined, theorized or abstracted" views (Nichols, 2019, p. 190), the actual accounts of young people's daily realities helped me further think through the prevention of these conditions, as well as the conditions themselves. Youth remind us of the importance of thinking deeply about institutional barriers and educational reform. Their words teach us important life lessons about resilience, courage and survival, and the risks required to face very adverse circumstances; youth displayed remarkable resources and hope, assets that must be fostered through promoting social inclusion to alleviate the risks related to physical and mental health and exploitation, and trauma that are posed by life on the streets (Gaetz et al., 2018) – all of which can possibly be alleviated through prevention and school-based early interventions.

Prevention Through Education – *What Can We Do About It*?

Engaging in conversations with young people who are homeless helped me understand what one's needs are, educationally and otherwise, when one is at risk of becoming or currently homeless – and the potential role of teachers and the education system in homelessness prevention. Echoing other scholars in the field who work tirelessly to find solutions, in this section, I consider my research findings in relation to emerging literature and action towards prevention. Given that prevention has many fundamental aspects, in this section I have chosen to focus on a few of the many key points – prevention being rights-based and housing-led, and the

[49] Personal Communication with Dr. Aparna Mishra-Tarc, November 2019

importance of intervening early and why school based early interventions are necessary. I refer to the words of youth who provided valuable wisdom and insights about how to help young people continue with school and reduce their chances of becoming homeless.

In their definition of prevention in *The Roadmap to Prevention*, Gaetz et al. (2018) reinforce that "youth homelessness prevention must be applied using a rights-based approach" and must address the unique needs of adolescents (p. 20). Such efforts must be grounded in equity and anti-discrimination work to support groups that are overrepresented in this population (women, LGBTQ2S+, Indigenous and other racialized youth) (Abramovich & Shelton, 2017; Gaetz et al., 2018; Stewart, 2018; Thistle, 2017). This is a vital starting point, as most study youth felt dehumanized and isolated from mainstream society and in schools and communities they once belonged to - as if society no longer cared about them. Being conscientious of the lack of belonging that homeless youth feel is important to address. Youth felt such factors kept them in states of homelessness. It is hard for young people to escape poverty and homelessness when they do not feel seen, heard, and understood (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018) and are shut out due to lack of access and multiple barriers. Craig frustratingly emphasized this point when he shared how different levels of government in Canada can prevent youth homelessness:

> Stop trying to put friggin roadblocks on everything we do in life, from getting a job, from trying to get school, from anything, the government has put barricades in our path, so we have an 85% [high] chance of failing because they know that once someone fails, their total self confidence [is gone]. We need people to finally start genuinely caring.
>
> Craig, age 23, Indigenous; White youth

The problems of youth homelessness feel challenging to address, but this is why we have to explore what prevention can look like in practice through expertise of youth from my study.

We can also learn more if we consider how different fields conceptualize prevention and how different jurisdictions implement it. As mentioned throughout this dissertation, homelessness prevention efforts are evident in places such as the UK and Australia. And, equivalent 'housing first' models of prevention for homeless adults can be found elsewhere internationally, where this model of service delivery has been part of a broader discourse and movement - largely in Europe – suggesting an emerging engagement with prevention initiations (Atherton & McNaughton-Nicholls, 2008; Culhane, Metraux & Bryne, 2011; Shelter, 2008; Steen and Mackenzie, 2017; Tainio & Fredriksson, 2009), but not all of them are youth centered.

Gaetz et al. (2018) use the public health model to illustrate how we can think about homelessness prevention for youth, highlighting the importance of minimizing harm to individuals and communities through lowering risk of disease, illness, and injury, and identifying risk and protective factors (p. 21). Such models demonstrate why we must intervene earlier than we are, because intervening later evidently has dire consequences for young people, which we want to minimize and eliminate (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020); intervening earlier could prevent the *occurrence* of homelessness – which is a main component of youth homelessness prevention. Also, any preventative intervention must also be housing-led and have *immediate access to housing* as part of the response (Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 22).

It is important for prevention to be housing led for various reasons. Firstly, having a home is a human right and prevention must be rights based. Allowing youth to remain homeless is to deny them of basic human rights, and therefore solutions must be grounded in young people having a fundamental legal right to be free of homelessness and to have access to a safe and permanent home (Farha, 2016; Gaetz et al., 2020, p. 12). Also, many youth in this study told me that once they were forced to make the difficult decision to leave home or were kicked out, they

had to leave their communities in order to access shelters and services that were far away – this is especially the case for youth from York Region, as services are far apart, and so youth end up travelling to Toronto where services are more accessible and varied. This disconnection from home, family, friends, and community can put youths' safety at risk; for example, if housing is not stabilized quickly, youth may end up remaining homeless for a longer period of time – and we need to ensure that if a homelessness episode does occur, the experience is brief.

The longer youth have nowhere to go may also potentially force them to live on the streets, disengage from school, and expose them to exploitation, victimization, violence, and crime (Gaetz et al., 2018; 2020; Malenfant et al., 2020). Also, rehousing youth as quickly as possible is vital because "housing is the base for success," as 17-year-old Malcom said. Housing-led approaches are especially important because a home is a safe place where a person can calm down, concentrate, rest their eyes, have a bed, sleep, know they are protected, gain reassurance and just know they'll be okay, and it would be difficult to keep a job or go to school without having a home; all shared by 22-year-old Linda. If youth homelessness prevention is rights based, and having a home is a human right, then the approach must be housing led (Farha, 2016).

As mentioned, the most common responses to youth homelessness in Canada are not working for youth. These "solutions" are reactive crisis responses, and are temporary, and we are intervening *after* the problem occurs; this is far too late and poses potential risks (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). For example, when a youth enters the shelter system, as told to me by youth, emergency supports such as food, counseling, and other forms of care are provided, and required to survive. Yet, quickly thereafter, youth are pushed towards self-sufficiency, independence, and training for jobs that are often precarious, part time, and low paying (Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016), and neither prevention nor school is the focus. The underpinnings of such approaches favour social

exclusion and neoliberalism, which are tangled within institutions that aim to support youth, despite research showing change is necessary in order for long-term, planned out, and healthful solutions to eventually stop the problem from happening in the first place (Gaetz et al., 2018). The advice of intelligent experts like Malcolm, whose perspectives are in line with prevention being housing-led and individualized to youth and their families, can help us learn more:

> I think you need to first solve the problem of why it occurred in the first place, which means helping families remain in their homes and by remain in their homes, I don't only mean in a financial sense, if you've got emotional abuse going on, then addressing those and the mental health issues of the parents and the children through more services and finding long term mental health services. I don't mean short term, six weeks and away you go, no! If it takes a year, it takes a year, if it takes two years, it takes two years.

We met Malcolm in Chapters 5 and 6; he was 17 at the time of the interview and identified as disabled and homeless. He suggested prevention efforts need be multidimensional, addressing system failures that contribute to family breakdown and ensuring efforts to keep young people in place, connected to schools, and able to access individualized supports (Gaetz et al., 2018). To be clear, prevention does not entail eliminating emergency services and temporary housing, as such supports are still required for those who cannot safely return home. However, while the homelessness sector (shelters and drop-ins) prevents dire consequences such as starvation or exposure to harsh weather (Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 22), the long-term goal of prevention is to make sure that even those dire situations are prevented. As such, emergency supports do not fall under the umbrella of prevention in the progressive way Gaetz et al. (2018), Schwan and Gaetz et al., (2018), and other scholars have conceptualized.

Malcolm also remarked that the education system and other institutions often work in isolation from one another, which is evidently not working to keep young people off the streets. He provided a powerful snapshot of why it is essential for institutions that are responsible for the

care and support of youth to come together, respond through prevention, and intervene early. In the summer of 2016, after he left his abusive foster home to go live with his father, Malcolm realized he could not stay there either. At this point, he went to a nearby hospital: "I don't know what to do and I don't know where to go," he told the staff, only to hear, "Well you can't stay here and we have no more room, so you have to come back." The message being given to him was, "We know you are being abused but we have nowhere else to put you, so you have to go back to being abused." Still, the doctor at the hospital "turned his back" on Malcolm, as he had:

> 300–400 kids to see that night and more patients … [so] he cannot deal with a lack of housing support issue, as he's got somebody in the next bed who just cut their wrists, so between a young person going back to an abusive environment versus a youth who has cut their wrists, that youth takes priority over the issue of abuse and housing instability.

Malcolm's response was only natural; he told the doctor, "I will be the next person in here to cut my wrists because I have nowhere else to go." He felt the response being given to him was that unless he was visibly dying, no one at the hospital would help him. He continued to tell me: "I'm trying to come in here for a preventative step and your answer is, unless you cut your wrists, don't come back; what a very cruel thing to say, it's the message that was sent and has been sent to me repeatedly." Youth are struggling to navigate multiple systems that are often exclusionary and stigmatizing. Malcolm's problems are treated as worthless unless he is near death; his words point to the importance of strengthening collaborative relationships between the government, schools, and community organizations to collectively prevent these problems before they happen (Schwan, Gaetz et al., 2018), not when it is already too late.

Based on youth like Malcolm's lived experiences and proposed solutions, early intervention is vital, as many youth in my study left home and school at very young ages. Early intervention approaches recognize that many students have difficult experiences at home and

negative experiences at school; the goal is not to work on issues in isolation, but to stabilize living situations and improve the young person's level of engagement with their families, training, school, and the local community (Gaetz et al., 2018). Malcolm felt the education system has a responsibility to figure out:

> what impacts education is having on the child and figure out how to best suit the needs of the child … the school has a central role to play, [but] they need to clean their own house, no pun intended, before they start poking around in other services and that's what the school does a lot, they go, well, that's [homelessness or other issues a young person may be having] is their [someone else's] responsibility but then actually, you sit down and go, no, no, it's everybody's responsibility, it's a collective responsibility and it's your job, if you identify with the issue and the problem, to address it. Schools do play a significant role and there needs to be an attitudinal shift within the educational system.

Malcolm believed schools need to take accountability for helping youth who may be at risk of school disengagement, drop out, and homelessness, and that instead of "poking around in other services," the "school has a central role to play" and needs to quickly provide services to youth in school by collectively working with other services, rather than putting the problem elsewhere – as argued by scholars who use a prevention lens. The attitudinal shift Malcolm was advocating for is important to the discussion on prevention and school-based early interventions.

When young people drop out of school early they face social exclusion, difficulties in the labour force, and have shorter life expectancies – especially when dropping out is undesired and they lack supports and face social stigma (Gaetz et al., 2013, 2018, p. 52; Liljedahl et al., 2013; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). Many youth in the study said that their school disengagement began before they became homeless. This tells us that we need to intervene earlier than we are – and the most obvious place to intervene is schools, because all of these youth had been in school at some point and spent substantial time there (Gaetz et al., 2018). If the priorities of the education system are based on values of student engagement, student success, well-being, and "how to best

suit the needs of the child," as Malcolm said, then schools should "play a significant role." "It's a collective responsibility" to care for the lives of every youth, "and it's your job if you identify with the issue and the problem" that your students are facing, "to address it" – which should include action towards homelessness prevention. This research is evidence that many youth are suffering in silence at school, with no one to turn to, not even school personnel.

Given the negative consequences of early school leaving, a failure to shift to a prevention approach would signal contradictions in the values of the education system, and a double standard such that the emphasis on education is not as strong for at-risk or currently homeless youth – implying that educational attainment is only meant for certain youth and not all. The goals of youth homelessness prevention – better quality of life, fostering social inclusion and resilience, stabilizing housing, fortifying natural supports within families and community, school engagement, student success, and overall well-being (Gaetz et al., 2018) – are directly linked to the priorities of education and schooling too. The education system should care about youth homelessness and play a key role alongside the homelessness sector and community agencies by adopting a school-based prevention approach (Gaetz et al., 2018).

At the time of the interview, Malcolm told me that efforts across Canada have not yet reached their full potential. Having faced many barriers, he said "we still have a long way to go":

> There needs to be a lot of thought into the investment that's been made into housing, it's one thing to throw a billion dollars at housing, it's another to make sure that money is getting to where it really needs to go, so if we identify that a lack of accessible housing in terms of disability, but I'm also talking about it financially, then we need to address that problem. The fact that in York Region alone, there is a 15-year wait list for subsidized housing, that's crazy! So, what do they expect people to do for the next 15 years, the next 15–30 years, what, just bounce around from shelter to shelter that's not accessible?

Furthermore, "youth are the next generation and if you aren't able to support them now and leave them to flounder, they won't be able to support the country later … but we have to start with

housing because that's the base for success needed." Malcolm faced many obstacles and system failures, but he still had high aspirations to complete high school, with additional goals for post-secondary education, and said: "if I can get there, which is my goal, I'd like to be a lawyer advocating for children and youth, because somebody needs to do something!"

While I agree with Malcolm, there *is* hope – "school-based early interventions have been a core feature of youth homelessness prevention in many countries" such as Australia and the United Kingdom (Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 77; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). These places have Reconnect programs, which are examples of school-community partnerships. Such programs focus on "responding quickly when a young person or family is referred, including a 'toolbox' of approaches that include counseling, mediation and practical support," and are designed to prevent homelessness by keeping young people in place in their communities, stabilizing their housing, enhancing family and natural supports, and keeping them engaged in school. (Gaetz et al. 2018, 2020, p. 20), These programs are holistic in their approach to service delivery, youth centred, and accessible (Gaetz et al., 2018) – similar to what Malcolm suggested was necessary.

In both countries, schools are central to the identification of youth at risk and play an important role in keeping youth connected to their community and helping them move forward (Gaetz et al., 2018). A local adaptation of the program called RAFT can be found in Southern Ontario in the Niagara region. Partnering with local schools, "RAFT developed an early intervention program model similar to the Australia's Reconnect program"; it is community-led, and aims to keep young people in school, stabilize housing, and link youth to mental health and counseling services (Gaetz et al., 2020, p. 24). Reconnect programs like RAFT focus on reflecting diverse and intersecting identities and supporting the diverse populations that are overrepresented in this population (e.g., Indigenous youth, Black youth, LBGTQ2S+, newcomer

youth, young parents, youth with disabilities, and youth in rural or remote communities). Such programs consider the importance of relevant, equitable, and culturally appropriate forms of support and service delivery, and includes Indigenous leadership and worldviews to ensure that the supports in place consider the impacts of colonization, racism, and intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous youth (Gaetz et al., 2018; Gaetz et al., 2020; Thistle, 2017).

Recently, I have also learned more about the Geelong Project in Australia (since renamed Upstream Australia), a ground-breaking model of early intervention for young people at risk of dropping out and becoming homeless. Remarkably, just three years after its implementation, Upstream Australia has demonstrated a 40% reduction in youth homelessness (Mackenzie, 2018a; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020, p. 4). This model is now being adapted in the Canadian context as the Upstream Project or Upstream Canada. As discussed in the literature review, this model is unique for a few reasons: it employs a "community of schools and youth services" model, a strategic and multidisciplinary service response in which schools and key youth service agencies come together to focus on keeping at-risk youth engaged in school, family, and community so that they do not become disengaged from education or mired in homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2018, p. 84). Upstream is an equity-focused, early intervention program that works to prevent youth homelessness and early school leaving (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020, p. 4)

The ultimate goal of Upstream Canada is to prevent youth homelessness and to support students who may be at risk of homelessness to continue with their education, with a service delivery model that aligns with Youth Reconnect (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020, p.7). However, this early intervention model is different than Reconnect because it identifies young people at risk starting from age 12 all the way until high school, using a confidential student needs assessment (Gaetz et al., 2018; Gaetz et al., 2020). Gathering information related to gender and cultural/ethnic

identity is also part of the assessment, in order to collect data about systemic and structural biases to ensure that supports are culturally appropriate for those who are disproportionately affected by youth homelessness due to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). With hopes to foster change and prevent youth homelessness, what was once Geelong will now be adapted and implemented in Australia, the United States, Wales, and here in Canada as the Upstream Project, through the efforts of the Upstream International Living Lab, a social research and development consortium (Gaetz et al., 2018).

As mentioned in the introduction, these progressive ground-up efforts are being implemented through collaborations with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, A Way Home Canada, and Making the Shift – the last one a social innovation lab that designs, tests, and evaluates innovations in the prevention youth homelessness through demonstration projects that blend experimental program delivery with research and evaluation (Gaetz et al., 2018). Demonstration projects being implemented in Ontario and Alberta through Making the Shift Demonstration Lab – which include Upstream, Youth Reconnect, Enhancing Family and Natural Supports and Housing First For Youth – help young people engage in school as a social inclusionary strategy meant to reduce the risk of their return to homelessness and focus on enhancing natural supports (e.g. family) and stabilizing housing (see https://www.homelesshub.ca/MtSDEMS/demonstration-projects). The early results of the demonstration projects are promising and hopeful (Gaetz et al., 2018, 2020).

Notably, in Canada, researchers, advocates, and international collaborators are currently working hard to operationalize demonstration projects to deliver and evaluate youth reconnect in Hamilton (Gaetz et al., 2020), and the Upstream model in Kelowna and Newfoundland (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). The purpose and intention behind such initiatives is to engage in social innovation

in order to prototype the interventions, assess their effectiveness, build resources to assist in community implementation, and finally to provide training and technical assistance to ensure such implementation retains the fidelity of the model (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020; Gaetz et al., 2020). Youth Reconnect programs and Upstream Canada are unique examples of social innovation in action, and points to how we might transform how we respond to youth homelessness in Canada, through school-based early intervention (Sohn & Gaetz, 2020).[50]

My hope is that such determined efforts will continue, as they will positively shape the lives of youth and represent much needed and hopeful shifts forward. As Malcolm explained it:

> We [in Canada] are a progressive nation and we've moved in a great direction but it's not over. If I can't even figure out how I'm going to get on a bus to go to school every day, there's a problem. If I can't figure out where I'm going to get my next meal from, there's a problem. If I can't leave an emotionally abusive environment, we've got a problem.

He reminds us of how desperately different service providers and public systems need to work in order to keep young from becoming homeless and help them stay in school (Malenfant et al., 2020). I hope that we in Canada can continue working towards preventative approaches to youth homelessness that support young people at risk and engage the education system as partners in the process. I hope that my research work can also be a part of those progressive and preventative steps, so that I can help to make changes in the lives of youth.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a summary and discussion of what I learned through all of my conversations with young people who have experienced homelessness, with a focus on how the complexities of being young and homeless greatly impacted their ability to continue their

[50] Personal Communication with Dr. Stephen Gaetz, December 2020

educational pursuits and desires. Importantly, this chapter also explores and outlines the preventative lens of various scholars, who, through multiple coalitions and unconventional cross sector and international partnerships, are working very hard to demonstrate how early intervention programs that engage the education system have the potential to transform our response to youth homelessness in Canada through social innovation and ground up efforts that are prevention focused solutions (Gaetz et al., 2018; Gaetz et al., 2020; Sohn & Gaetz, 2020). This conversation takes place alongside the voices of youth I interviewed who provided their perspectives on prevention – all of these valuable insights are ones which can provide a promising and hopeful way forward.

Chapter 8: Concluding Thoughts

It is unacceptable that homelessness continues to be a reality for so many young people across York Region, throughout Canada and globally. In this final chapter of the dissertation, I (re)think through the process of doing this research and include recommendations for future research that I hope to pursue; importantly, these recommendations result from my conversations with young participants from this study. This conclusion will also address some of the limitations, as well as the research contributions I believe that this work has to offer. Taking part in research with young people who have experienced homelessness has provided me with invaluable learning and an opportunity to better understand the important role that research with those who have lived experience can play in terms of imagining new possibilities to prevent and end youth homelessness, especially through engaging schools and the education system.

The "So What-Ness? of Research – *Where Do We Go From Here?*

The recommendations that follow reflect my desire to move forward with this work. In my early days of graduate school, when I was getting to know my supervisor (Stephen Gaetz), he would always emphasize the "so what-ness' of research." I understood this as the importance of being aware of and evaluating our intentions in doing research, particularly if we are working with marginalized populations. It also forces us to face and think through the purpose of our research and whether we will find a place for it in the "real world." Simply put, the question is asking: "What is my research for"? Although several responses are possible (Mason, 2018, p. 21), I believe our research should not only contribute to increasing awareness or challenging intellectual and theoretical understandings, filling gaps in research, or extending debates and

asking more questions (Mason, 2018); what is learned through the research should also elicit social and political change for the advancement of not only the researcher and their future work, but also those whose voices have been deliberately silenced, oppressed, othered, and lost.

It was during the time I spent interviewing young people and learning about the barriers and exclusions they face that I genuinely understood why Steve always asked this question. Confronting and engaging with the politics of social research, rather than maintaining a safe distance (Mason 2018, p. 21), is essential to advancing work related to social justice. How can this research contribute to our knowledge of homelessness? What role can research play in developing and implementing effective solutions to fixing the problem of youth homelessness? (Gaetz et al., 2013; Gaetz, O'Grady et al., 2016). After hearing what youth have to say, and engaging in research with them, it is clear that homelessness continues to be a serious problem in Canada, and we must use research and the best knowledge we have to act towards solutions (Gaetz et al., 2018). My supervisor inspired me to think deeply about community engaged scholarship, mobilizing knowledge and why research matters. My passion towards these vital aspects of academia, research, and the social worlds amidst which we are all situated are some of my 'take-aways' from doing this work. From here, I hope to continue to think about how we can use research to evoke social change, especially for those who are most marginalized – this will continue to be a central part of my work as I move forward in this field. I hope my research can serve as a catalyst for future research that will aid efforts towards ending youth homelessness.

Research Contributions and Limitations

Contributions and recommendations for future research must be proposed with the understanding that each experience of homelessness is unique. Varied and integrated approaches,

solutions, and interventions are required, as there is no single approach that can be implemented as a solution; rather, individual approaches can be limiting and ignore the diversity in needs and circumstances of those who are homeless. For the education system to prevent homelessness, the responses and supports within that framework will need to be multilayered, tailored and many, to accommodate the variability of situations homeless youth face.

Empowering Youth and Creating Space for Youth's Voices

When I started this project, I wanted to use my privileged position in academia to mobilize knowledge in community engaged scholarship, and one of the ways I felt I could do this was to highlight the voices of youth. It was important to ensure that the perspectives of all of the young people I interviewed were at the forefront of this research and writing, and I believe this to be my work's key contribution to existing literature about youth homelessness, especially in relation to education. I want to clarify that I do not see this as "giving youth a voice." These youth are not voiceless; rather society often deliberately silences them because of how homeless youth are falsely perceived. Admittedly, it was difficult to include the voice of *every* youth, due to the limitations of space; parts of their narratives were chosen and mediated by me, but I tried my best to amplify young peoples' own accounts of their lives. To make the changes proposed throughout, it makes the most sense to involve youth with lived experience and to treat them as the greatest source of insight towards understanding the structural barriers they face in school and across other contexts, and the strategies they use to survive.

Alternative Views on Education and Youth Homelessness

Another contribution of this research is to view the topic through the lens of social exclusion and neoliberalism, highlighting how the education system and schools are implicated in the high drop-out rates of homeless youth. The experiences of homeless youth in York Region make clear that the education system has a significant role to play in addressing youth homelessness, because schools are also part of the problem. The system needs to change; and while educational reform can be difficult, it is possible to fight against powerful institutional barriers if we shift our attention towards homelessness prevention.

Viewing this topic through the lens of social exclusion, neoliberalism and psychoanalysis has also helped to open up new possibilities for thinking and acting. Prevention is no small feat, and the situation will not change immediately. Although it may take multiple pilot projects and years of implementing prevention models before we see changes, however, I think this is far less of a limitation than not taking action on a solution that research in other jurisdictions has proven can work to decrease rates of homelessness. Students, teachers, service providers, and community partners must all continue to work in collaboration and solidarity with one another so that we can continue to share ideas so our youth can "get back on their feet" and move forward.

Doing Research in the Suburbs

Raising awareness about the problem of homelessness in suburban areas like York Region – a place where I grew up, and one most often perceived as affluent – was important to me. Homelessness in the region is often hidden; young people are more likely to be part of the "hidden homeless" population while couch-surfing or living temporarily with friends or relatives because it is unsafe for them to go home (Noble et al., 2014). I consider this York Region–based

research to be a valuable addition to the existing literature about youth homelessness, as most studies focus on homelessness in cities like Toronto or Vancouver. Doing research in the suburbs can be limiting in terms of gathering data that is representative of the youth homelessness populations in other areas of Ontario or Canada. Also, because the population of youth are often hidden, and in York Region homelessness is often hidden, I was only able to interview youth who used emergency services. Regardless, I believe that schools across York Region and the homelessness sector in general can benefit from this research, and that the lived experiences of youth can foster progressive and caring changes to take place here. I acknowledge that progress is being made across York Region regarding youth homelessness (Noble et al., 2014), and I hope this research can inform and advance further changes.

Future Research and Thinking Ahead

The future research recommendations section that follows has been developed a result of formal and informal discussions and analysis with youth; as I have made clear throughout this dissertation, I strongly believe that to be effective in our solutions for youth we must include youth in the process. Readers will notice that some of the suggestions focus on supporting those who are currently homeless, while other future research ideas are more preventative in nature; all of these recommendations are important.

Differing Demographics

We often tend to see youth as a homogenized group, but during this study I learned how diverse the youth homeless population is. Due to the nature and scope of this study, I was unable to complete an in-depth analysis of how the experience of becoming homeless – and having to

prematurely leave school as a result – is different for various groups. In future research, I want to shift my focus to how racial, ethnic, gender, and sexuality differences make the pathways that lead to becoming homeless and the experience of homelessness different for groups that tend to be priority groups and are overrepresented. Specifically, I want to further examine the experiences of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized populations of youth who are homeless and explore this topic through the lens of post-colonial and critical race theories.

My findings revealed that many youth identified as Indigenous, and youth who identified as LGBTQ2S+ and that youth in this study talked openly about how they are often marginalized by racism, sexism, and homophobia. Given this, it is important that my future research explore and analyze how the education system can best respond to the needs of Indigenous and Black and other racialized and marginalized youth, LGBTQS2+ youth, females, males, newcomer, and refugee youth in anti-oppressive ways. This will enable us to better understand and analyze how each group experiences homelessness differently and experiences educational barriers differently by revealing the overlapping social issues, including diversity and issues facing Indigenous youth, that need to be better understood in order to find caring and respectful solutions.

Mindfulness Meditation

During my experience at shelters, I often took part with youth in various workshops that were offered. Different agencies would come to teach youth "life skills" and how to become independent and self-sufficient. Examples of workshops included teaching youth how to create a resume and find employment, or co-creating art through writing or painting. Some youth mentioned that educational workshops on mindfulness meditation would be helpful for them. As a strong advocate of mindfulness meditation, I believe that this practice is an important life skill.

Current research by Brown & Bender (2018) demonstrates that mindfulness approaches can reduce stress and anxiety and alleviate mental health symptoms, especially for vulnerable populations, including youth who are homeless. Implementing stress-reducing techniques like mindfulness in shelters and schools may support youth with regard to overall well-being and engagement. After our interview, one youth suggested that mindfulness meditation may be able to help youth gather their thoughts and calm down, and perhaps to respond rather than react in the face of the adverse circumstances of homelessness. Research in this area is in its early stages, but the existing evidence demonstrates promise (Brown & Bender, 2018).

Alternative Education Options

Future research about the success of alternative education options provided to at-risk and homeless youth is also important. Having a shelter in York Region that provides youth with an alternative classroom (iGrad) associated with the York Region District School Board is a multidimensional and progressive step towards schools and aid agencies working together in order to provide educational supports to homeless youth. Youth I interviewed who were enrolled in this program provided very positive feedback, especially because they are able to work at their own pace, which eliminates stigma and accommodates individual needs. Not only does the program help youth gain their high school credits, but it gives youth hope through a supportive platform where they can fulfil their education aspirations, and resilience can be fostered.

How can alternative and individually paced education programs like iGrad become a realistic possibility in every shelter or at every school? At what point is it relevant and realistic to intervene and focus on education for youth who have become homeless and for those who exit homelessness and are not in school? Further research is needed on the success of the program in

terms of youth completing courses to receive a high school diploma, attrition rates and, whether such options allow youth avenues towards college and university if they desire to further their education. It is also important to determine whether graduates from the iGrad program have gained improved and increased employment opportunities. Better understanding the prospects of alternative education options is vital to better supporting homeless youth to move forward.

Smartphone Interventions

Almost all of the youth I interviewed had an active smartphone, which made me consider how such technology can be used to reduce disparities for youth in accessing resources. For example, alternative education options can be provided online, whereby youth could gain credits online using their smartphone in the same way they do through the iGrad online platform. Research by Barman-Adhikari et al. (2018) aimed to understand the digital lives of homeless youth and described their information and communication technologies (ICT) usage. Due to the transient nature of homelessness, smartphones were found to be a significant resource for this population. One study the authors reviewed, about case managers intervening with homeless youth electronically, revealed that a high number of youth preferred responding to their case managers through their cell phones (especially texting) rather than use email or Facebook to connect. In fact, “70% reported that they preferred texting over any other method because it enabled them to communicate even when school and work obligations prevented them from speaking to the case manager” (Barman-Adhikari et al., 2018, p. 268). Future research about whether smartphones can aid youth by providing ongoing supports (counseling and mediation) would be useful, especially because some youth felt therapy would be beneficial to them.

Chapter Summary and Final Thoughts (For now…)

My research presents an opportunity to contribute both to academic research and to policy development on youth homelessness as it relates to education. I hope that the innovative ideas explored in this dissertation will interest key stakeholders and decision-makers, and lead them to effect changes in policy and practice to provide effective solutions to youth homelessness in Canada that engage the education system. By raising awareness of the role that the education system plays and can play in supporting youth who are homelessness, and by including youth as experts towards solutions for them, I believe we may help youth to stay in school and move forward with their lives, and prevent them from winding up on the streets.

While journeying through this work, I have faced criticism for being too radical, "utopian" or socialist in my wanting to help reduce and eliminate homelessness. This would imply that my desire for every person to be housed and healthy is a bad one, or impossible to imagine. My response: keeping people in a state of poverty and homelessness is dehumanizing, oppressive, violent, and a violation of human rights, and suggests that one person's life is more valuable than another's. Our narrow approaches are unjust, and I hope that the words of young people I was fortunate enough to meet during this study can help incite the changes needed.

I want to end here with the words of Lauryn, a 19-year-old Black youth. As we sat together and approached the end of our interview, I asked her what would have made a difference along the way, and what it would take for her to no longer be homeless. She replied: "For me to finally be somewhere, where there is nothing but love, and a genuine consistent feeling of being protected and cared for … and just like somewhere I can actually call home." As her words brought both of us to tears, I thanked her and turned my recorder off …

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APPENDIX A
Informed Consent Form, Faculty of Education, York University

STUDY TITLE: ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT: EXPLORING SCHOOLING AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT THROUGH THE EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESS YOUTH

The Goal of the Research Study: This research project seeks to understand the educational experiences of young people who are, or have at some point, been homeless. The purpose of this study is to better understand how to improve educational supports for young people who have experienced homelessness. The aim is to also gain insight regarding specific practices, programs and supports that young people who are homeless think might allow them to stay in school, continue their education and move forward with their life.

The research is headed by Sabina Mirza, a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at York University and will be supervised by Professor Stephen Gaetz, the director of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (Homeless Hub) and a professor in the Faculty of Education at York University. Your experiences will help us, and other educators to better understand the complexities of students who are facing homelessness. Only myself (Sabina Mirza) and my supervisor (Stephen Gaetz) will have access to the data from the interviews.

What You Will Be Asked To Do In The Research: You are being invited to take part in a research study, where you will be asked to engage in a survey and short interview for us to get more detailed information. During the interview, you will be asked to talk about your experiences of what it is like to be homeless as a youth and how homelessness may have impacted your engagement and achievement in school. We hope, in soliciting in-depth interviews with youth, to understand how you think about school through the experiences of being homeless, what school means to you, and what your educational needs are. The interview may be taped, but you can refuse this if you want. Overall, the entire process should take no longer than an hour of your time.

Risks and Discomforts: We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research. However, if you do find that the questions we have asked are troubling for you, and you would like to discuss this with a counselor, we have made arrangements with the corresponding agency to provide counseling, alongside a list of support services/resources available in York Region if you need additional supports.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to you: We hope that this research will provide you with the opportunity to share your story and express your views and experiences. In York Region, there is not much of an awareness of the economic vulnerability that exists, and we need more agencies, services and structures in place to support youth in York Region. Therefore, by participating in this research, you will also contribute to the outcomes of the research. Moreover, you will receive $20 at the conclusion of the interview session. If you decide you would like to withdraw or discontinue your participation in the study, or to end the interview at any point in time, you will still receive your compensation, and all data collected will be immediately destroyed.

Voluntary Participation: Should you consent to participate, by signing this form, you will take part in a survey and be interviewed for approximately one hour. The survey/interview will be arranged during a time that is convenient for you and will take place at an office at York University or at one of the corresponding agencies located in York Region. With your permission, the interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. Although your comments may be tape recorded, you can refuse this if you choose to. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw or discontinue your participation in the study at any time, and to decide *not* to participate in any further discussion. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the ongoing relationship you may have with the researcher, agency staff in York Region or York University either now, or in the future. Also, please note that if you find an interview too long or tiring, feel free to tell me, and we can take a break, or re-schedule the remainder of the interview for another time.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you decide to. If you decide to stop participating, you will still be eligible to receive the promised pay for agreeing to be in

the project. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, agency staff in York Region or York University either now, or in the future. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed.

Confidentiality: All interview data derived from this study will be kept confidential, unless you specifically indicate your consent; your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Any information that may reveal your actual identity or the identity of others in the course of the survey or audio-taped interview will be altered in the transcriptions so as to insure anonymity. Confidentiality will be maintained in the following ways: your name will not be known to anyone except for the researcher interviewing you; your name will not be used in the survey or interview, or in any written work; an interview recording will use a pseudonym and/or a participant code. All information derived from this study, in the form of excerpted sections of transcripts from the interviews, will be used only for research and teaching purposes. After the interview, your interview will be safely stored in a locked facility at York University and only research staff will have access to this information. After two years, the interviews will be archived at York University.

Questions about the Research: If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Sabina Mirza (insert email here) or Dr. Stephen Gaetz at York University (insert phone number and extension here), or by e-mail (insert email here). This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

You may also contact the graduate program in Education at York University in Winters College, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3. You may also obtain information about ethical considerations relating to this research by contacting the office of research administration. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics (insert name of Manager), 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone: insert phone number or email: insert email) or the Ethics Committee at York University, (insert phone number here).

Legal Rights and Signatures: I have read this letter about the nature and procedures of the study, have received a copy, and understand the extent of my participation. I agree to participate in this study. I have been assured that Sabina Mirza and Professor Stephen Gaetz will respond appropriately to any questions I may have. I understand that I can refuse to answer any questions and may withdraw my consent to participate at any time without prejudice.

I know that there will be no advantages and disadvantages for me depending upon my decision. I know that the university and those conducting the research subscribe to the ethical code of conduct of research and to the protection, at all times, to the dignity and rights of the participants.

Thank you in advance for your time and kind consideration.

I (___________________________), consent to participate in the research study on youth homelessness in York Region. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian: _________________________________
(If you are under the age of 16, a parent/legal guardian must consent for you to participate in this study)

Signature___________________________ **Date**_______________________
Participant

Signature___________________________ **Date**_______________________
Principal Investigator/Witness (e.g. researcher)

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol
Faculty of Education, York University   No: ______________________

Study Title: ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT: EXPLORING SCHOOLING AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT THROUGH THE EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESS YOUTH

Note: Encourage participants to tell the story in their own way and in their own words

1. What was your day like today? Can you tell me what a typical day is like for you?
- Most people's day includes school and work, what does your day include?

2. I want to learn more about what your day is like. How would you describe your daily routine to me? Where do you live and where do you sleep? What resources do you use?

3. Most young people who are homeless are referred to as 'homeless youth', my first question is how you would like to identify yourself during this interview? My second question is how you feel about the term 'homeless youth' – do you think there is a better way of identifying young homeless people?

4. I want to know more about your experiences of what it is like to be homeless as a youth in Canada.
- How would you describe your experiences of being homeless? How old were you when you first became homeless, and what were the circumstances like?

5. How has homelessness impacted your academic your experience of school, before you became homeless, and after becoming homeless?

6. Would you say that you felt socially excluded when you went to school? Were you ever made to feel worthless or bad or like a failure by the school, administration or other people in school?

7. Were you ever diagnosed with a learning disability by the school, or ADHD, ADD, anxiety or depression? **IF NOT**, were you aware of these potential problems while you were in school?

8. Can you tell me more about school, how far along are you? Can you tell me more about what school is/was like for you? Can you describe what it is like for you to go to school and to be homeless?

9. Can you tell me about some of your favourite times in school? Can you tell me more about what those times were like? Can you give me some examples?

10. Can you tell me about some of your worst memories of school? Can you please describe to me what those times were like? Can you give me some examples?

11. How do you think schools and other institutions like these shelters in York Region can make education and school more of a priority in order to support young people who are homeless more so?

12. Can you tell me more about a time when the school supported you as a student who was homeless? How do you think the school could have been more supportive of you?
- How could the school have done a better job? What would you have liked to see happen?

13. How could have educators better supported you? What advice do you have for educators?

14. In terms of your current situation, can you tell me more about what's keeping you on the streets? What do you think it would take for you to no longer be homeless?

15. **IF NOT IN SCHOOL:** From my understanding, you are no longer in school or have made the decision to leave. Can you tell me all of the factors that made staying in school difficult for you?

16. **IF NOT IN SCHOOL:** How does it make you feel that you are not in school?

17. How did you imagine your life would be when you got older? Can you tell me more about what your childhood dreams were? Do you still feel hopeful about the future?

18. During this interview, or as part of this research, are there any other questions that you think I should have asked you that I did not ask? Is there anything else that we haven't discussed that you would like to add? Is there something important that I missed that you want to say or add, advice, suggestions?

APPENDIX C
SURVEY

This survey is an adaptation of the surveys used for the *Leaving Home* study and the National Youth Homelessness survey used for the *Without a Home* study.

Participants name/code: ________________
Name of Interviewer: __________________
Location of Interview: _________________
Date of Interview: ______________________

ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT: EXPLORING SCHOOLING AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT THROUGH THE EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESS YOUTH

Thank you for helping us with this research. Please feel free to ask for help if there are any questions that are unclear. Remember, you do not have to answer any questions you don't want to answer. Your answers will only be seen by us, and since your name is not required, this is completely confidential; there is no way for you to be linked to your responses.

Some of the questions are very personal, and I will appreciate your honesty. Your answers will help us understand how homelessness impacts young people's academic engagement and school achievement. This research will help service providers, researchers and people in government across York Region develop better responses in your community and across the country.

SOME REMINDERS FOR SABINA

BE SURE TO MATCH SURVEY CODE WITH QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW CODE

BE SURE TO HELP INTERVIEEWS READ THROUGH THE QUESTIONS IF NEEDED

REMIND INTERVIEWEES ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY

BE SURE TO PROVIDE INTERVIEEWS WITH THEIR HONORARIUM

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The experiences of young people, like you, are all unique and different. Because of this, we are interested in learning about your background in order for us to have a better understanding of you. I want to know more about your age, race, ethnicity, mobility and your experiences in shelters, group homes or foster care. Research suggests that some groups of people, differently defined, are over-represented among Canadians who are homeless and/or street involved. Having more information about these various groups can be helpful, in order to better support their particular needs.

BI.1. How old were you on your last birthday? Or, how are old are you? _______yrs/months?

BI.2. Where were you born? _________________________, ________________________
City Country

B1.3. If you were born outside of Canada, in what year did you move to Canada? _____________

BI.4. What do you feel is your hometown?
[ ] York Region (If yes, please tell me where):________________
[ ] Toronto (If yes, please tell me where in the city you feel is home):____________________
[ ] Other ____________________, _____________________
City Country

BI.5. When did you last live at home with your parents or guardian?
______________________________ / ____________________________
Month Year

BI.6. How old were you when you left home/or had to leave home for the first time (because you could not stay there/or were removed)? ________________ *years old*

BI.7. Did you have to leave home more than just once? *Check one*
[ ] Yes
If *yes*, how many times? _____________________________
[ ] No
[ ] Not sure
[ ] Choose not to answer

BI.8. How many times have you been homeless in the past 3 years? ________________________

BI.9. What areas of York Region have you lived in?
[ ] Town of Aurora
[ ] Town of East-Gwillumbury
[ ] Town of Georgina
[ ] Township of King
[ ] City of Markham

[ ] Town of Newmarket
[ ] Town of Richmond Hill
[ ] City of Vaughan
[ ] Town of Witchurch-Stouffville
[ ] Other
If Other, please specify____________________________________

BI.10. How would you describe your **gender identity**? *Check all that apply.*
[ ] Woman
[ ] Man
[ ] Transgender
[ ] Trans woman
[ ] Trans man
[ ] Two-Spirited
[ ] Gender queer
[ ] Gender fluid
[ ] Androgynous
[ ] Non-binary
[ ] Intersex
[ ] Cisgender
[ ] You don't have an option that applies to me
I identify as (please specify): ______________________________

BI.11. How do you describe your **sexual identity**? *Check all that apply.*
[ ] Gay
[ ] Lesbian
[ ] Bisexual
[ ] Queer
[ ] Pansexual
[ ] Questioning
[ ] Straight-Heterosexual
[ ] Asexual
[ ] You don't have an option that applies to me
I identify as (please specify): ____________________________________

BI.12. Do you consider yourself to be Aboriginal, Indian (status Indian, non-status Indian), Indigenous, or First Nations, Inuit or Metis? *Check one.*
[ ] Yes
If **yes,** did you grow up in an Aboriginal community (reserve)?
[ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] Not sure [ ] Choose not to answer
[ ] No
[ ] Not sure
[ ] Choose not to answer

BI.13. Do you consider yourself to be a person of colour? *Please check one*
[ ] Yes
[ ] No
[ ] Not sure
[ ] Choose not to answer

BI.14. Are you; *check all that apply to you*
[ ] Aboriginal, Indian (status Indian, non-status Indian), Indigenous/First Nations/Inuit or Metis
[ ] White
[ ] Black
[ ] Arab
[ ] Filipino
[ ] Latin American
[ ] West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghani, etc.)
[ ] South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankin, etc.)
[ ] Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Malaysian, Laotian, etc.)
[ ] Chinese
[ ] Korean
[ ] Japanese
[ ] Mixed/multiple race (consisting of______________________________)
[ ] You do not offer an option that applies to me.
I identify as (please specify): _______________________________________

BI.15. As a child, were you ever involved with child protection services (also known as CAS, the children's aid or the child welfare system)? *Check one.*
[ ] Yes
[ ] No
[ ] Not sure
[ ] Choose not to answer

SECTION 2: LIFE BEFORE BECOMING HOMELESS – FAMILY LIFE

FL.1. Growing up, whom did you live with for the longest period of time?
[1 or 2 parent family]
[ ] Father (separately)
[ ] Mother (separately)
[ ] Father and Mother (together)
[ ] Father and Mother and Sister(s) (#   )(together)
[ ] Father and Mother and Brother(s) (#   ) (together)
[ ] Father and Mother and Sister(s) (#   ) and (Brother(s) (#   ) (together)
[ ] Father and Sister(s) (#) (together)
[ ] Father and Brother(s) (#) (together)
[ ] Mother and Sister(s) (#) (together)
[ ] Mother and Brother(s) (#) (together)

[Sibling family: led by sister or brother or both]
[ ] Sister (separately)
[ ] Sisters (#) (separately)
[ ] Brother (separately)
[ ] Brother(s) (#) (separately)
[ ] Brother and Sister (separately)
[ ] Brother(s) and Sister(s) (with sisters (#) with brothers (#) (together)

FL.2. Think about your family members and caretakers; who have you had the most positive relationships with? Who have you had the most consistent and longest relationship with?
[ ] Father
[ ] Mother
[ ] Father and Mother (both)
[ ] Father and Mother and Sister(s)
[ ] Father and Mother and Brother(s)
[ ] Father and Mother and Sister(s)
[ ] Father and Sister(s)
[ ] Father and Brother(s)
[ ] Mother and Sister(s)
[ ] Mother and Brother(s)
[ ] Sister(s)
[ ] Brother(s)
[ ] Brother and Sister (both)

FL.3. Did you ever feel neglected by your parents/guardians? [Did you ever feel ignored by your parents/guardian or as if they did not pay attention to you?] *Check one.*
[ ] I never felt neglected
[ ] Sometimes I felt neglected
[ ] I felt neglected most of the time
[ ] I felt neglected all the time

FL.4. Did you ever feel unsafe while living with parents/guardians? *Check one.*
[ ] Never
[ ] Sometimes
[ ] Most of the time
[ ] All the time

FL.5. How would you describe the problems with your family (parents/guardians/siblings)?
[ ] No major problems
[ ] Problems sometimes
[ ] About the same amount of problems as most kids
[ ] More problems than most kids
[ ] Major problems most of the time

FL.6. What kinds of problems did you have, and or do you have with family members?

Check all that apply to you.
[ ] Verbalized conflicts
[ ] Conflicts that were experienced but rarely verbalized
[ ] Physical conflicts (where people could have been hurt)
[ ] Physical conflicts (not severe enough for people to get hurt)
[ ] Conflicts related to your hours of being at home vs. not being at home
[ ] Conflicts related to being at home too much
[ ] Conflicts related to being home too little
[ ] Conflicts related to being at home and away at irregular hours
[ ] All of the above

SECTION 3: EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS

EoH.1. What was the living situation you were in right before your current living situation?
Check one.
[ ] Parents'/caregivers place
[ ] Your own place
[ ] Boyfriend/girlfriend/partner's place
[ ] Someone else's place (friend or family)
[ ] Emergency / domestic violence shelter
[ ] Group home or supervised residence
[ ] Transitional housing
[ ] Public space (e.g. sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, bus shelter)
[ ] Vehicle (car, van, RV, truck)
[ ] Makeshift shelter, tent or shack
[ ] Abandoned or vacant building
[ ] Motel or hotel
[ ]Other
If Other, please specify______________________________________

EoH.2. For how long were you in this living situation?
[ ] About 1 week
[ ] Several weeks
[ ] About 2 months
[ ] About 3-6 months
[ ] Between 6 and 12 months
[ ] Other
If Other, please specify______________________________________

EoH.3. Do you consider yourself to be homeless? *Check one.*
[ ] Yes
[ ] No
[ ] I was in the past, but not now
[ ] I don't know
[ ] Choose not to say

[ ] I don't like the label 'homeless'

EoH.4. Most recently, how many of these situations were reasons why you left home (or were reasons why you were told to leave or were being removed)? What was happening that caused you to leave? *Please check all that apply*
[ ] Couldn't afford living at home
[ ] Left to look for work
[ ] My home wasn't a safe place for me to be
[ ] Couldn't get along with my parents
[ ] Abuse (sexual, physical, mental) or violence
[ ] Your mother / father / caregiver died
[ ] Trouble with the law
[ ] Other
If Other, please specify___________________________________

EoH.5. Most recently, how many of these factors were reasons why you left home? (or were reasons why you were told to leave or were being removed) *Please check all that apply*
[ ] Taken away by child protection services
(also known as children's aid or the child welfare system)
[ ] A bad experience in child protection services
[ ] You were thrown out
[ ] Your mental health issues
[ ] Your parent / guardian's mental health issues
[ ] Your drug or alcohol use
[ ] Your parent / guardian's drug or alcohol use
[ ] Seeking/wanting independence
[ ] Other
If Other, please specify___________________________________

EoH.6. Where in York Region do you currently live?
[ ] Town of Aurora
[ ] Town of East-Gwillumbury
[ ] Town of Georgina
[ ] Township of King
[ ] City of Markham
[ ] Town of Newmarket
[ ] Town of Richmond Hill
[ ] City of Vaughan
[ ] Town of Witchurch-Stouffville
[ ] Other
If Other, please specify___________________________________

EoH.7. Please indicate the places where you have stayed over the past month.
Check all that apply.
[ ] Parents'/caregivers' place

[ ] Your own place
[ ] Boyfriend or girlfriend's place
[ ] Someone else's place (friend or family)
[ ] Emergency / domestic violence shelter
[ ] Group home or supervised residence
[ ] Transitional housing
[ ] Public space (e.g. sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, bus shelter)
[ ] Vehicle (e.g. car, van, RV, truck)
[ ] Makeshift shelter, tent or shack
[ ] Abandoned or vacant building
[ ] Motel or hotel
[ ] Other
If Other, please specify___________________________________

EoH.8. Where have you spent the <u>most</u> nights in the past month? *Check one.*
[ ] Parents'/caregivers' place
[ ] Your own place
[ ] Boyfriend or girlfriend's place
[ ] Someone else's place (friend or family)
[ ] Emergency / domestic violence shelter
[ ] Group home or supervised residence
[ ] Transitional housing
[ ] Public space (e.g. sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, bus shelter)
[ ] Vehicle (e.g. car, van, RV, truck)
[ ] Makeshift shelter, tent or shack
[ ] Abandoned or vacant building
[ ] Motel or hotel
[ ] Other
If Other, please specify___________________________________

EoH.9. Do you currently keep in contact with any family members?
[ ] Yes
If **<u>yes</u>**, who do you keep in touch with? ________________________
[ ] No
[ ] I did in the past, but not now
[ ] I don't know
[ ] Choose not to say

EoH.10. Over the past week, how many times did you want a well-balanced, nutritious, filling meal and you were not able to get it? *Check one.*
[ ] 0 times
[ ] 1-5 times
[ ] 6-10 times
[ ] More than 10 times

SECTION 4: SERVICE NEEDS

The following questions will help me understand the service needs that you have, the services you use across York Region and how you go about using them.

S.1. Since you have left home, which of the following services have you used?
Check one box per line.

	I've used this	I've not used it but I know about it [exists]	I've not used this and I don't know about it
a. Overnight shelters			
b. Housing support (housing advice, getting on waiting lists etc.)			
c. Skills and Employment services			
d. Drop-in or day programs			
e. Health services			
f. Mental Health / Addictions services			
g. Learning Assistance and Tutoring			
h. Family counseling			
i. Legal support			
j. Food bank			
k. Clothing bank			
l. Help getting identification			
m. Other			
If other, please specify:			

S.2. If you have used any of the following, how helpful was the service you received?
Check one box per line.

	Very unhelpful	A little unhelpful	Helpful	Very helpful	Better than nothing	Not applicable
a. Overnight shelters						
b. Housing support (housing advice, getting on waiting lists etc.)						
c. Skills and Employment services						
d. Learning Assistance and tutoring						

e. Drop-in or day programs						
f. Health services						
g. Mental Health / Addictions services						
h. Family counseling						
i. Legal support						
j. Food bank						
k. Clothing bank						
l. Help getting identification						
m. Other						
If other, please specify:						

S.3. Regarding services in York Region, I feel… *Please check all that apply*
[ ] There should be more services and resources available in York Region
[ ] Services in York Region are too far away from me to use them
[ ] It is hard for me to find services in York Region
[ ] There should be more services in York Region that help me with school
[ ] There should be more services in York Region that can help me get back to school
[ ] I feel that the services available in York Region meet all of my needs

SECTION 5: EDUCATION AND SCHOOLING

It is useful to know about your experience with education and school. This will help us understand, in more detail, what types of supports might help young people in your situation.

ES.1 How many different schools have you attended since Kindergarten? [The first year you went to school?] ________________

ES.2. Growing up, how well did you do in school?
[ ] Very well (e.g. A's and B's)
[ ] Average (e.g. C's)
[ ] Below Average (e.g. D's)
[ ] Failing

ES.3 In your most recent experiences of school, how well did you do?
[ ] Very well (e.g. A's and B's)
[ ] Average (e.g. C's)
[ ] Below Average (e.g. D's)
[ ] Failing

ES.4. If you are **not** in school, do you desire to go back to school?
[ ] Yes, a lot of the time
[ ] Yes, every once in a while
[ ] Yes, but only when facing problems in getting along
[ ] I haven't really thought about it much

ES.5. If you are in school, what is your school attendance like?
[ ] I always go to school; my attendance is consistent
[ ] I miss a lot of days of school during the year
[ ] I am able to attend school on most days during the year
[ ] I am not able to attend school most days during the year
[ ] Being homeless makes it hard to attend school consistently

ES.6. If you are currently **not** in school, what was your school attendance like?
[ ] I always went to school, my attendance was consistent.
[ ] I missed a lot of days of school throughout the year.
[ ] I was able to attend school on most days during the year.
[ ] I was not able to attend school most days during the year.
[ ] Being homeless made it hard to attend school consistently.

ES.7. Was there an influential person at school who enhanced your school experience for you? For example, was there a teacher, admin person or guidance counselor who influenced you or supported you?
[ ] Yes
[ ] No
[ ] I did not feel supported at school
[ ] I would have liked more support at school from these people

ES.8. Are you currently attending school? *(Check one)*
[ ] Yes (If **yes**, move to **ES8a** and **ES8b**)
[ ] No (If **no**, move to **ES8c** and **ES8d**)
[ ] Choose not to answer

ES.8a. **If yes**, what level of school are you currently attending?
[ ] Up to or including grade 8
[ ] Grade 9-12
[ ] High School Equivalency Certified (GED)
[ ] College
[ ] University
[ ] Other
If Other, please specify: ___________________________

ES.8b. If yes, are you finding it difficult to remain in school?
[ ] Yes

[ ] No
[ ] I don't know/not sure
[ ] Choose not to answer

ES.8c. If you are currently **not** attending school, would you like to return some day? *(Check one)*
[ ] Yes
[ ] No
[ ] I don't know/not sure
[ ] Choose not to answer

ES.8d. If you are currently **not** attending school, what were the main reasons why you left?
Check all that apply
[ ] The school, teachers and admin staff did not give me individual help for my personal needs
[ ] Feeling bored and not interested at school
[ ] Problems at home
[ ] Friends or family
[ ] Personal issues
[ ] Learning disability
[ ] Physical disability
[ ] Mental Illness
[ ] Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
[ ] Problems with teachers/principals
[ ] Problems with other students/peers
[ ] Being bullied
[ ] Waiting for special needs programming
[ ] Not having enough to eat
[ ] Problems at home
[ ] Other
If Other, please specify: ____

ES.9. How did you feel when you were in elementary school?
[ ] Unhappy or awkward most of the time
[ ] Happy or comfortable some of the time
[ ] Happy or comfortable a little of the time
[ ] Happy or comfortable most of the time
[ ] I prefer not to say

ES.10. How did you feel when you were in high school?
[ ] Unhappy or awkward most of the time
[ ] Happy or comfortable some of the time
[ ] Happy or comfortable a little of the time
[ ] Happy or comfortable most of the time
[ ] I prefer not to say

ES.11. When growing up, were you ever bullied at school? *Check one.*

[ ] Never
[ ] Sometimes
[ ] Often
[ ] Choose not to answer

ES.12. Do you feel socially excluded (as if you do not fit in or belong) when you are at school? If you are **not** in school, did you ever feel socially excluded (as if you did not fit in or belong) when you were in school?
[ ] Never
[ ] Sometimes
[ ] Often
[ ] All the time, every single day
[ ] Choose not to answer

ES.13. Did any of the following make it difficult for you to do well in school?
Check all that apply
[ ] The school, teachers and admin staff did not give me individual help for my personal needs
[ ] Feeling bored and not interested at school
[ ] Learning disability
[ ] Physical disability
[ ] Mental Illness
[ ] Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
[ ] Problems with teachers/principals
[ ] Problems with other students/peers
[ ] Being bullied
[ ] Waiting for special needs programming
[ ] Not having enough to eat
[ ] Problems at home
[ ] Other
If Other, please specify: ____

ES.14. Did you leave school before or after you became homeless? _______________________

ES.15. How did/does the experience of homelessness make school hard for a young person?
Check all that apply to you.
[ ] Becoming homeless is the reason why I had to leave school
[ ] School wasn't the problem, I was forced to leave because of being homeless
[ ] I could not focus and concentrate because of being homeless
[ ] No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone
[ ] Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority

ES. 16. What kinds of problems do you have/or did you have when you were in school?
[ ] Problems because of irregular attendance
[ ] Problems because of poor grades
[ ] Problems because of conflicts I had at school with other students

[ ] Problems because of conflicts I had at school with teachers and/or staff
[ ] All of the above

ES.17. What makes staying in school hard for you? *Please check all that apply*
[ ] The school, teachers and admin staff did not give me individual help for my personal needs
[ ] Feeling bored and not interested at school
[ ] Problems at home
[ ] Friends or family
[ ] Personal issues
[ ] Learning disability
[ ] Physical disability
[ ] Mental Illness
[ ] Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
[ ] Problems with teachers/principals
[ ] Problems with other students/peers
[ ] Being bullied
[ ] Waiting for special needs programming
[ ] Not having enough to eat
[ ] Problems at home
[ ] Other
If Other, please specify: ____

ES.18. Do you plan on going back to school at some point?
[ ] Yes, I think about it a lot of the time
[ ] Yes, I think about it every once in awhile
[ ] Yes, but I only think about it when facing problems in getting along
[ ] I haven't really thought about it much
[ ] When I think about it, I don't feel I *can* go back

ES.19. What would have made it possible for you to stay in school?
[ ] More individual help for my personal needs
[ ] More support from teachers, guidance counsellors and admin staff
[ ] Not being homeless
[ ] Feeling more engaged

ES.20. At school, were you tested for any of the following (Learning disabilities, special needs, gifted program, attention deficit hyperactive disorder aka ADHD, mental health, depression, anxiety)?
[ ] Yes
If **yes**, please specify which one_________________________
[ ] No, I was never tested, but I knew that I had a learning disability of some sort.
[ ] No
[ ] I don't know

ES.21. At school, were you ever told that you had a learning disability, attention deficit problems or any other learning problems which prevented regular learning processes?
[ ] Yes
If **yes**, please specify which one________________________
[ ] No, I wasn't told, but I was aware that I had a learning problem of some kind.
[ ] No
[ ] I don't know

ES.22. From what age or grade in school have you been aware of having a learning problem?
[ ] Elementary school
If **yes,** please specify what grade______________
[ ] High school
If **yes,** please specify what grade______________
[ ] Between the ages of 5-10
[ ] Between he ages of 10-18
[ ] After the age of 18

ES.23. Did that awareness stop you from putting efforts into studying?
[ ] Yes
[ ] Yes, most of the time
[ ] No
[ ] I don't know

SECTION 6: INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT

IE.1. Do you currently have a paying job (with salaray or hourly wage)? *Check on.*
[ ] Yes
If **yes,** what is the job?____
About how many hours a week do you spend working there?_________________________
[ ] No
[ ] Not sure
[ ] Choose not to say

IE.2. In the past 30 days, have you receieved money from? *Check all that apply.*
[ ] Money or salary from paid work
[ ] Welfare (social assistance, income support)
[ ] Family or disability benefits
[ ] EI (employment insurance)
[ ] Personal/basic needs allowance (from a shelter)
[ ] Money from parents, caregivers or family members
[ ] Money from friends
[ ] Money from your partner (girlfriend or boyfriend)
[ ] Pan handling
[ ] Squeegeeing
[ ] Sex/ performed sexual acts

[ ] Theft
[ ] Breaking and Entering
[ ] Selling drugs
[ ] Other
If Other, please specify: ____

IE.3. Do you have a bank account? *Check one.*
[ ] Yes
[ ] No
[ ] I don't know/not sure
[ ] Choose not to answer

IE.4. How hard is it/has it been for you to find paid work? *Check one.*
[ ] Very hard
[ ] Hard
[ ] Not so hard
[ ] It's easy for me to find paid work
[ ] It's been okay
[ ] I don't know/not sure

SECTION 7: HEALTH AND WELLNESS

HW.1. Over the past 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems? *Check one box per line.*

	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
a. *Little interest or pleasure in doing things*	0	1	2	3
b. *Feeling down, depressed or hopeless.*	0	1	2	3
c. *Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or sleeping too much*	0	1	2	3
d. *Feeling tired or having little energy*	0	1	2	3
e. *Poor appetite or over- eating*	0	1	2	3
f. *Feeling bad about yourself- or that you're a failure and have let yourself or your family down*	0	1	2	3
g. *Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching TV*	0	1	2	3
h. *Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed. Or, the opposite – being so fidgety or restless that you*	0	1	2	3

have been moving around a lot more than usual.				
i. Thoughts that you would be better off dead or hurting yourself in some way.	0	1	2	3

COLUMN TOTALS ____________ + _____________+__________

ADD TOTALS TOGETHER _______________________________________

HW.2. If you checked off any problems, how difficult have those problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things you need to take care of or get along with people?
[ ] Not difficult at all
[ ] Somewhat difficult
[ ] Very difficult
[ ] Extremely difficult

FINAL MESSAGES, FOR NOW...

Thank you for the time you spent filling out this survey and for sharing your experiences with us. Your responses are important as they will be used to help develop new programs and will also help contribute to making changes across York Region. We appreciate your comments.

Is there anything else you want to share with Canadians about being a young person who may share similar experiences as you? This could be a short or long message, a poem, a drawing or a quote. If you have something you would like to include, please include it below and if there is a message you'd like to include, please also feel free to write it in the space below.

FM.1. Is there anything else that you want to share/write/or say? You can write that below.

FM.2. Thinking about the circumstances that led to your current living situation, what in the past would have made a positive difference for you? *Share as much detail as you want*

FM.3. Is there anything you want to share with Canadians about being a young person in your living situation? This could be a message, a poem, a drawing etc. If you have something you would like to include, please include it below. If there is a message you'd like to include, please write it in the space below. If you do not want to share anything, that is okay too ☺

APPENDIX D
Research Package for Shelters Pre-Data Collection

RESEARCH STUDY:

HOMELESS YOUTH AND EDUCATION

ARE YOU BETWEEN THE AGES OF 16 AND 24?

ARE YOU EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS?

If you answered YES to these questions, you can take part in an interview with me!

My name is Sabina Mirza and I am a student at York University. I want to know more about your life experiences and get your advice on how young people like **YOU** can be supported with education and school.

The interview will last about one hour, and your responses will remain completely confidential. Please let staff know if you want to participate.

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Sabina Mirza
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education, York University

Dear Faculty and Staff at 360 Kids,

My name is Sabina Mirza and I am a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Education at York University, working under the supervision of Dr. Stephen Gaetz, Director of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (Homeless Hub) and Professor in the Faculty of Education at York University. My research examines the impacts of homelessness on academic engagement and school achievement; more specifically, the project seeks insight into the perspectives of homeless youth in York region to better understand their experiences of school while homeless, or at risk of homelessness.

In the summer of 2013, I spent time at your agency and various others across York Region, interviewing young people to ask them about housing and economic vulnerability. Our research team focused on youth homelessness to better understanding the growing income gap and affordability issues across York Region. Building on the success of this previous research, I would like to return to your agency to interview young people to specifically ask them about their academic experiences. The aim of the project is to interview approximately 30-40 youth across the region. Research participants will be asked to sit for a one-to-one interview, which will last approximately one hour. Each youth who chooses to participate will receive a $20 honorarium.

A key objective of my project is to further develop the connection between academic researchers and community research partners so that research and evidence from the project can inform decisions about public policy and professional practice. Youth homelessness is a growing issue in York Region, and improved academic supports for homeless youth represent an important area for development of public policy, social programming, professional practice. With my findings, I hope to be able to maximize the impact of academic research and expertise at the intersection of education and youth homelessness.

The specific goals of the research project are:

1) To explore the experiences of young people who are facing homelessness (or are at risk thereof), and the impact of homelessness and housing insecurity on a young person's academic engagement and school achievement, both prior to and after becoming homeless;

2) To understand the experiences and educational needs of young people who are homeless and the activities of the school in supporting the academic goals of students and maintaining the engagement of students who are homeless;

3) To learn about current academic services for youth in York Region, specifically what homeless youth find most useful and what areas might require attention to better support the academic success of homeless youth. This project also asks which types of education interventions may have prevented a youth from becoming homeless, or reduced the length and/or effects of homelessness;

4) To raise a greater awareness of youth homelessness in York Region, and in particular how institutional responses and supports can prioritize education and schooling as part of a central strategy to support and respond to young people who are homeless.

For scholarship to make informed recommendations about public policy and professional practice related to youth homelessness in York Region, we need the support of community research partners like you. Further, this project needs your support to mitigate any possible risk to the participants because while both York University and I do consider this research to be of minimum risk to participants, research related to

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Sabina Mirza
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education, York University

homelessness requires a particular sensibility to the challenges faced by homeless youth and the emotions they may experience while discussing their personal experiences. I know the staff at 360 kids youth agencies have the skills, experience, and capacity to support street youth in difficult circumstances. In the unlikely event that participation in this research causes any discomfort or distress to participants, I am confident that with your participation, staff will be ready to provide capable support in the unlikely event that a participant should require it.

I would like to work alongside your staff and agency, and conduct interviews there. I would like to make arrangements with you as a participating agency in order to ensure that data collection runs smoothly and has a minimum impact on service delivery. With your participation, this project will help improve supports for young people who have, or currently are, experiencing homelessness in York Region. I know that with your knowledge, expertise and support, we can all work together to accomplish the goals outlined in this project and improve the educational outcomes of youth who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness. At the conclusion of the project, I would like to offer you aggregate findings in the form of a research report, or research paper, so that we may all work together to make the best use of the data.

If you have any additional questions or require further information from me regarding the project, please do not hesitate to contact me at (insert email here). Alternately, I can be reached by telephone at: (insert my personal phone number here)

Thank you kindly in advance. I look forward hearing back from you at your earliest convenience and hope that we can collaborate on this important research endeavour.

Sincerely,
Sabina Mirza

APPENDIX E
Figures Related to Study Design and Analysis

Figure 1: Demographic Information from the time of the Interviews

N = 40

Self-Identified as Woman: 14 Youth
Self-Identified as Man: 26 Youth
Identified as Indigenous: 11 Youth
Identified as Indigenous and Black (Mixed): 2
Identified as Indigenous and White (Mixed): 7
Identified as Black: 3
Identified as White (Not Mixed): 21

PARTICIPANT	AGE	GENDER IDENTITY	SEXUAL IDENTITY	RACE/ETHNICITY
YOUTH 1 **DENISHA**	22 years old	Woman	Straight-Heterosexual	Aboriginal, Indian (status Indian, non-status Indian), Indigenous/First Nations/Inuit or Metis White Mixed/multiple race consisting of Algonquin/French Canadian mix I identify as: First Nations French Canadian
YOUTH 2 **TIMOTHY**	20 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	Aboriginal, Indian (status Indian, non-status Indian), Indigenous/First Nations/Inuit or Metis White Black
YOUTH 3 **STEVEN**	22 years old	Man	Bisexual	Aboriginal, Indian (status Indian, non-status Indian), Indigenous/First Nations/Inuit or Metis Black
YOUTH 4 **AMANDA**	25 years old	Woman	You don't have an option that applies to me	White
YOUTH 5 **LOUISA**	23 years old	Woman	Straight-Heterosexual	White
YOUTH 6 **LINDA**	22 years old	Woman	Straight-Heterosexual	White (Russian)
YOUTH 7 **DOMINIC**	22 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	Aboriginal, Indian (status Indian, non-status Indian), Indigenous/First Nations/Inuit or Metis White
YOUTH 8 **PAUL**	20 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	White Mixed/Multiple Race (consisting of French and Hungarian)

YOUTH 9 **LAILA**	17 years old	Woman	Bisexual	White Mixed/Multiple Race (consisting of Spanish, Italian and German)
YOUTH 10 **KAMRAN**	21 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	White
YOUTH 11 **SOFIA**	23 years old	Woman	Straight-Heterosexual	White
YOUTH 12 **ALESHA**	25 years old	Woman Gender Fluid Androgynous	Bisexual Pansexual	White
YOUTH 13 **MEGAN**	19 years old	Woman	Straight	White
YOUTH 14 **MAYA**	18 years old	Woman	Pansexual	Aboriginal, Indian (status Indian, non-status Indian), Indigenous/First Nations/Inuit or Metis White
YOUTH 15 **ISAAC**	26 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	Black
YOUTH 16 **AISHA**	23 years old	Woman	Straight-Heterosexual	White
YOUTH 17 **TYLER**	25 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	White
YOUTH 18 **DANIEL**	26 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	Aboriginal, Indian (status Indian, non-status Indian), Indigenous/First Nations/Inuit or Metis Inuit Heritage
YOUTH 19 **MATTHEW**	26 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	White
YOUTH 20 **ADAM**	17 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	Aboriginal, Indian (status Indian, non-status Indian), Indigenous/First Nations/Inuit or Metis Mixed/Multiple Race (consisting of Scottish)
YOUTH 21 **CONNOR**	22 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	White
YOUTH 22 **JUSTIN**	26 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	White

YOUTH 23 **BRYAN**	16 years old	Man	You don't have an option that applies to me	White
YOUTH 24 **MICHAEL**	19 years old	Man	Bisexual	White
YOUTH 25 **JAMES**	24 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	Aboriginal, Indian (status Indian, non-status Indian), Indigenous/First Nations/Inuit or Metis White
YOUTH 26 **HOWARD**	23 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	White
YOUTH 27 **JOANNE**	23 years old	Woman	Straight-Heterosexual	Mixed/Multiple Race (Consisting of Spanish, Haitian and French)
YOUTH 28 **SAKINA**	22 years old	Woman	Straight-Heterosexual	Chinese
YOUTH 29 **NOAH**	20 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	Aboriginal, Indian (status Indian, non-status Indian), Indigenous/First Nations/Inuit or Metis (Half Ojibwe First Nations)
YOUTH 30 **RYAN**	20 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	White
YOUTH 31 **JESSIE**	24 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	Aboriginal, Indian (status Indian, non-status Indian), Indigenous/First Nations/Inuit or Metis White Mixed/Multiple Race (Consisting of Cree and White) You do not offer an option that applies to me. I identify as (please specify): I'm a Reptilian Illuminati
YOUTH 32 **RAZA**	19 years old	(Big) Man	Straight-~~Heterosexual~~	~~West Asian~~ (e.g. Iranian, Afghani, etc.)
YOUTH 33 **MAXWELL**	16 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	White Mixed/Multiple Race (Consisting of Russian, Mexican, Azerbaijan)
YOUTH 34 **MALCOLM**	17 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	White
YOUTH 35 **LAURYN**	19 years old	Woman	Straight-Heterosexual	Black

YOUTH 36 **AMBER**	22 years old	Woman	Straight-Heterosexual	White Mixed/Multiple Race (Consisting of Italian / English)
YOUTH 37 **KEVIN**	22 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	White
YOUTH 38 **MARTIN**	23 years old	Man	Gay You don't have an option that applies to me. I identify as (please specify): "Although I try not to get caught up in labels"	White
YOUTH 39 **CRAIG**	23 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	Aboriginal, Indian (status Indian, non-status Indian), Indigenous/First Nations/Inuit or Metis White Mixed Multiple Race (Consisting of "too many to write")
YOUTH 40 **DAVID**	24 years old	Man	Straight-Heterosexual	Mixed/Multiple Race (Consisting of Black, Indian and Spanish)

Figure 2: Education and Employment Information at time of Interview
N = 40

PARTICIPANT	SCHOOLING / EDUCATION CURRENT LEVEL OF EDUCATION	LEFT SCHOOL BEFORE OR AFTER HOMELESSNESS AND/OR BECAUSE OF HOMELESSNESS	INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT – IN THE PAST 30 DAYS, I HAVE RECEIVED MONEY FROM
YOUTH 1 **DENISHA**	Was enrolled in College but had to drop out due to strike and homelessness	After: "I was homeless upon graduating high school and I went into College homeless to that year" No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Not employed Family or disability benefits. If other, please specify: ODSP
YOUTH 2 **TIMOTHY**	Not in school at time of interview	Before Becoming homeless is the reason why I had to leave school	Not employed Welfare (Social Assistance, income support)
YOUTH 3 **STEVEN**	Not in school at time of interview Reached Grade 12	After Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Choose not to say if employed or not Welfare (Social Assistance, income support)
YOUTH 4 **AMANDA**	Not in school at time of interview	After Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Not employed Other If other, please specify: "no"
YOUTH 5 **LOUISA**	Not in school at time of interview	After Becoming homeless is the reason why I had to leave school	Employed Money from salary or paid work
YOUTH 6 **LINDA**	Not in school at time of interview	Both Becoming homeless is the reason why I had to leave school I could not focus or concentrate because of being homeless	Checked "no" to being employed but then also checked off receiving money from salary or paid work
YOUTH 7 **DOMINIC**	Not in school at time of interview Finished Grade 12	Did not answer	Employed: Contractor Money from salary or paid work
YOUTH 8 **PAUL**	Not in school at time of interview	After School wasn't the problem; I was forced to leave because I was homeless.	Employed: Not Sure Money from friends

YOUTH 9 **LAILA**	Not in school at time of interview	Before Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Employed: Kitchen Manager / Waitress Money from paid work Money from parents, caregivers or family members Money from friends
YOUTH 10 **KAMRAN**	Not in school at time of interview	Before Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Not employed Welfare (Social assistance, income support) Other. If Other, please specify: "I be out there with the squeegee"
YOUTH 11 **SOFIA**	Not in school at time of interview	Before Had already graduated No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone	Employed: Sales Associate Money from paid work Welfare (Social assistance, income support)
YOUTH 12 **ALESHA**	In College at time of interview I am finding it difficult to remain in school	N/A I could not focus and concentrate because of being homeless No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Not employed Money from paid work Other. If other, please specify: OSAP
YOUTH 13 **MEGAN**	Not in school at time of interview	Before School wasn't the problem; I was forced to leave because I was homeless. Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Employed: Tim Hortons Other. If other, please specify: Children Aid
YOUTH 14 **MAYA**	Not in school at time of interview	During School wasn't the problem; I was forced to leave because I was homeless. No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Employed: Auto Part Assembly Other. If Other, please specify: Overdraft – Bank Loan
YOUTH 15 **ISAAC**	Not in school at time of interview	After No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone	Not employed Money from parents, caregivers or family members
YOUTH 16 **AISHA**	Not in school at time of interview	After	Not employed: on MAT Leave Employed:

		I could not focus and concentrate because of being homeless No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	
YOUTH 17 **TYLER**	Not in school at time of interview	Yes Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Magna General Labourer Money or salary from paid work Money from parents, caregivers or family members
YOUTH 18 **DANIEL**	Choose not to answer Not in school at time of interview	Before I could not focus and concentrate because of being homeless	Employed: Not Sure Other. If other, please specify: Settlement from accident
YOUTH 19 **MATTHEW**	Choose not to answer (Independent Learning Credits) Not in school at time of interview	Before Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Money or salary from paid work Welfare (social assistance, income support)
YOUTH 20 **ADAM**	Not in school at time of interview	After Becoming homeless is the reason why I had to leave school	Not employed Panhandling
YOUTH 21 **CONNOR**	Not in school at time of interview	Before Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Employed: "Just Starting" Money or salary from paid work
YOUTH 22 **JUSTIN**	Not in school at time of interview	Before Becoming homeless is the reason why I had to leave school	Employed: Choose not to say Money for salary from paid work
YOUTH 23 **BRYAN**	Choose not to answer Not in school at time of interview	After "I never went to school while homeless"	Not employed Personal/basic needs allowance (from a shelter) Money from friends Money from your partner (girlfriend or boyfriend) Sex/performed sexual acts Theft Selling drugs
YOUTH 24 **MICHAEL**	Not in school at time of interview	After Becoming homeless is the reason why I had to leave school	Not employed Money from your partner (girlfriend or boyfriend) Selling drugs

YOUTH 25 **JAMES**	Not in school at time of interview	After Graduated	Employed: Siding installer Welfare (social assistance, income support)
YOUTH 26 **HOWARD**	Not in school at time of interview	Before or After: Left blank Becoming homeless is the reason why I had to leave school School wasn't the problem, I was forced to leave because of being homeless I could not focus and concentrate because of being homeless Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Not employed Money or salary from paid work
YOUTH 27 **JOANNE**	Not in school at time of interview	Before Graduated I could not focus and concentrate because of being homeless No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone **Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority**	Employed: Program shelter facilitates, same shelters as the one residing at. Money or salary from paid work
YOUTH 28 **SAKINA**	In School – upgrading to adult school	Before No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Employed: Pet Store Family or Disability benefits
YOUTH 29 **NOAH**	Not in school at time of interview	Before Becoming homeless is the reason why I had to leave school	Left blank
YOUTH 30 **RYAN**	"Yes, I am in school" In Igrad program at 360 Kids	Before Pothead	Not employed Welfare (social assistance, income support) Money from parents, caregivers or family members Selling drugs
YOUTH 31 **JESSIE**	Not in school at time of interview	Before No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone	Not employed Money or salary from paid work

		Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	
YOUTH 32 **RAZA**	Not in school at time of interview	Before No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone	Employed: Not sure; Newspaper, Dollarama, Construction Money or salary from paid work Welfare (social assistance, income support) Money from parents, caregivers or family members Money from friends
YOUTH 33 **MAXWELL**	Not in school at time of interview	Before Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Not employed Money or salary from paid work Money from friends Panhandling Theft Selling Drugs
YOUTH 34 **MALCOLM**	In school at time of interview Currently between Grade 9-12	Before or After: N/A I could not focus and concentrate because of being homeless	Not employed Money or salary from paid work Money from parents, caregivers or family members
YOUTH 35 **LAURYN**	In school at time of interview Currently between Grade 9-12	Before or After: Yes I could not focus and concentrate because of being homeless [OMG YES →] No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone	Employed: Cosmetic Store Money or salary from paid work Welfare (social assistance, income support)
YOUTH 36 **AMBER**	Not in school at time of interview	After No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone	Employed: Animal Rescue (on call) EI (employment insurance) Money from parents, caregivers or family members Money from friends
YOUTH 37 **KEVIN**	Not in school at time of interview	After School wasn't the problem, I was forced to leave because of being homeless	Employed: Towing Money or salary from paid work
YOUTH 38 **MARTIN**	Not in school at time of interview	Before No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone Because of the experience of homelessness, school became less of a priority	Employed: Stock at a furniture store Money or salary from paid work

YOUTH 39 **CRAIG**	Not in school at time of interview	Before No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone	Not employed Money or salary from paid work Other. If other, please specify: ODSP (Disability)
YOUTH 40 **DAVID**	Not in school at time of interview	After Becoming homeless is the reason why I had to leave school I could not focus and concentrate because of being homeless No one understood what I was going through, I felt/feel isolated and alone	Not employed Money from your partner (girlfriend or boyfriend)

Figure 3: Homeless Experience and Shelter Usage at time of interview
N = 40

PARTICIPANT	HOMELESS EXPERIENCE	ABSOLUTE/TEMPORARY HOMELESSNESS	SHELTER EXPERIENCE
YOUTH 1 **DENISHA**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Stayed with boyfriend/girlfriend Emergency/domestic violence shelter	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Other. If other, please specify: Hospital	Resides at shelter Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 2 **TIMOTHY**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Someone else's place (friend or family)	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Someone else's place (friend or family)	Resides at shelter Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 3 **STEVEN**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Stayed with boyfriend/girlfriend	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Boyfriend or girlfriends place	Resides at shelter Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 4 **AMANDA**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Shelter where we interviewed	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Transitional housing	Resides at shelter
YOUTH 5 **LOUISA**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Your own place	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Emergency/domestic violence shelter	Resides at shelter Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 6 **LINDA**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Your own place Boyfriend or girlfriends place Someone else's place (friend or family) Emergency/domestic violence shelter	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Someone else's place (friend or family) Emergency / domestic violence shelter	Resides at shelter Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 7 **DOMINIC**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Emergency/domestic violence shelter	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Emergency / domestic violence shelter	Resides at shelter Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 8 **PAUL**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Parent's/caregivers place Someone else's place (friend of family)	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Parents/caregivers place Someone else's place (friend or family) Transitional housing	Resides at shelter Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 9 **LAILA**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Your own place Boyfriend or girlfriends place Emergency/domestic violence shelter	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Your own place Someone else's place (friend of family)	Resides at shelter Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 10 **KAMRAN**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Someone else's place (friend or family) Emergency/domestic violence shelter	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Emergency/domestic violence shelter	Resides at shelter Day use of shelter services

YOUTH 11 **SOFIA**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Parent's / caregivers place Emergency/domestic violence shelter	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Parent's / caregivers place	Resides at shelter Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 12 **ALESHA**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Emergency/domestic violence shelter Group home or supervised residence	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Emergency/domestic violence shelter	Resides at shelter Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 13 **MEGAN**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Your own place Transitional housing	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Your own place Transitional housing Motel or hotel	Resides at shelter Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 14 **MAYA**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Your own place Someone else's place (friend or family) Emergency/domestic violence shelter	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Your own place Someone else's place (friend or family) Emergency/domestic violence shelter	Resides at shelter Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 15 **ISAAC**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Someone else's place (friend or family)	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Someone else's place (friend or family)	Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 16 **AISHA**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Your own place	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Your own place	Day use of shelter services (Came to shelter for bus passes)
YOUTH 17 **TYLER**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Your own place	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Your own place	Day use of shelter services (Came to shelter for bus passes)
YOUTH 18 **DANIEL**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Your own place Someone else's place (friend or family) Group home or supervised residence	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Other	Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 19 **MATTHEW**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Transitional housing	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Transitional housing	Resides at shelter
YOUTH 20 **ADAM**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Emergency/domestic violence shelter	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Public space (e.g. sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, bus shelters)	Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 21 **CONNOR**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Group home or supervised residence	**Where have you spent most nights in the past month?** Group home or supervised residence	Resides at shelter

YOUTH 22 **JUSTIN**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Other. If other, please specify: Men Shelter	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Emergency/domestic violence shelter	Resides at shelter
YOUTH 23 **BRYAN**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Emergency/domestic violence shelter	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Transitional housing	Resides at shelter
YOUTH 24 **MICHAEL**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Boyfriend or girlfriends place Group home or supervised residence Public space (e.g. sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, bus shelter)	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Boyfriend or girlfriends place	Resides at shelter
YOUTH 25 **JAMES**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Parent's / caregivers place Your own place Someone else's place (friend or family) Emergency/domestic violence shelter Public space (e.g. sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, bus shelter)	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Emergency/domestic violence shelter	Resides at shelter
YOUTH 26 **HOWARD**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Makeshift shelter, tent or shack Other. If other, please specify: Shelter	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Other. If other, please specify: Shelter	Resides at shelter
YOUTH 27 **JOANNE**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Emergency/domestic violence shelter Public space (e.g. sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, bus shelter)	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Emergency/domestic violence shelter Public space (e.g. sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, bus shelter) Makeshift shelter, tent or shack Abandoned or vacant building Motel or hotel	Resides at shelter Been homeless for 7 years on and off
YOUTH 28 **SAKINA**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Transitional housing	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Transitional housing	Resides at shelter
YOUTH 29 **NOAH**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Someone else's place (friend or family)	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Group home or supervised residence	Resides at shelter Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 30 **RYAN**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Every fucking where!	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Public space (e.g. sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, bus shelter)	Resides at shelter
YOUTH 31 **JESSIE**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Someone else's place (friend or family)	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?**	Day use of shelter services

	Public space (e.g. sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, bus shelter)	Public space (e.g. sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, bus shelter)	
YOUTH 32 **RAZA**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Parent's/ caregivers place Group home or supervised residence	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Group home or supervised residence	Resides at shelter
YOUTH 33 **MAXWELL**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Someone else's place (friend or family) Emergency/domestic violence shelter Public space (e.g. sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, bus shelter)	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Public space (e.g. sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, bus shelter)	Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 34 **MALCOLM**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Parent's/ caregivers place Emergency/domestic violence shelter	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Parent's/ caregivers place	Resides at shelter
YOUTH 35 **LAURYN**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Transitional housing	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Transitional housing Other, please specify: foster parent	Resides at shelter
YOUTH 36 **AMBER**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Someone else's place (friend or family)	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Someone else's place (friend or family)	Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 37 **KEVIN**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Your own place	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Your own place Motel or hotel	Day use of shelter services
YOUTH 38 **MARTIN**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Emergency/domestic violence shelter	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Emergency/domestic violence shelter	Resides at shelter
YOUTH 39 **CRAIG**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** Emergency/domestic violence shelter	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Emergency/domestic violence shelter	Resides at shelter
YOUTH 40 **DAVID**	**Over the past month, I have stayed at:** My own apartment	**Where have you spent <u>most</u> nights in the past month?** Your own place	Day use of shelter services

Figure 4: Information About Shelters from the time of Data Collection

SHELTER and CONTACT	ELIGIBILITY and PROGRAMS/SERVICES
SUTTON YOUTH SHELTER 20898 Dalton Rd Sutton West, ON L0E 1R0 Toll-Free: 1-877-972-0898 Phone: 905-722-9076 Open 24 hours Wheelchair Accessible	**Information taken directly from: http://suttonyouthservices.ca/** Provides emergency and transitional housing for at-risk youth between the ages of 16-26, and a drop-in centre, programming and outreach. Also provides beds, meals, essential personal supplies and encouragement to youth. **Day Programs:** Support for counselling and referrals / employment / education / housing / **drop in centre** **Emergency Housing:** 16 emergency beds **Transitional Housing 364 days:** 10 transitional beds. Must contact for fee structure. Fee Reduction: Transitional room fees are geared to income and do qualify for Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program **Youth Reach Drop-in Centre:** Open 7 days a week - Monday - Friday from 10am - 6 pm **Increased Hours** Saturday and Sunday from 9 am - 9 pm **Aftercare Services:** Based on a Housing First model of service delivery. Aftercare is intended for a year, provides supports and services in the youth home with the community, and will assist with keeping a youth successfully housed. **Onsite Supportive Services:** Specialized support areas that focus on the development of key skills required for housing stability, such as education and employment.
BLUE DOOR SHELTER 835 Gorham St, Newmarket, ON L3Y 1L7 Toll-Free: 1-888-554-5525. Phone: (905) 898-1015 Open 24 hours Committed to making services accessible to people with disabilities in compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.	**Information below taken directly from: https://bluedoor.ca/** Provides temporary shelter for males between the ages of 16 and 26 and up to 12 male youth at a time. An intake interview is conducted to determine financial eligibility Blue Door offers a day program that also provides support through various activities. **Emergency Housing:** 2 no-fee emergency beds in the basement of the house **Transitional Housing:** 10 people in the upstairs of the house **We provide the following wraparound supports for youth staying with us:** Support to find and maintain affordable housing Accommodation and food Supportive counselling Assessment Referral to appropriate treatment programs and community services Assistance to obtain identification Connection and mediation with landlords Budget/financial planning Service referral Assistance with housing search
BELINDAS PLACE 16580 Yonge St, Newmarket, ON L3X 2N8 Phone: (289) 366-4673 A multi-service facility for supporting women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	**Information below taken directly from: http://www.belindasplace.ca/** This facility offers emergency and transitional housing to homeless women, age18+ and drop in and aftercare services to women at risk of homelessness in the community. Belinda's Place cannot support women who are fleeing violence and we cannot accommodate children. However, we can refer you to support services **Emergency Housing:** (28 single rooms)-operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and providing basic needs. Women may stay up to 30days.

	Transitional Housing: (9 self-contained units) -supporting women to develop skills to live independently. Women may stay up to 364 days. **Drop-In Services:** supporting women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, by providing them with supplies and connecting them with services. Drop-in services are available from 9 a.m.-9 p.m.,7 days a week. **After care:** offering continued support to all newly housed women including follow-up case coordination and practical assistance services up to 12months.
360 KIDS 10415 Yonge St, Richmond Hill, ON L4C 0Z3 Phone: (905) 475-6694	**Information taken directly from: https://www.360kids.ca/** **Eligibility:** Youth 16 – 26 years old Experiencing a housing crisis; Are unaccompanied by children; Possess the ability to care for their own basic physical needs (e.g. can clothe, bathe, and feed themselves). **Connections and Emergency Housing:** Connections is the first emergency housing facility in the southern part of York Region for homeless youth. The facility offers 14 single-occupancy rooms, 7 days a week and provides basic needs (food, bedding, hygiene supplies, etc.) wraparound services; and assistance finding appropriate, affordable, and stable housing. Maximum stay is For 4 months Connections is a safe space that incorporates all communities including trans, gender nonconforming individuals and LGBTTQ. Any youth seeking emergency housing who does not match the target population may be temporarily accommodated until they can be transferred to a more appropriate residential program. **Supportive Transitional Apartments for Youth (STAY)** **- voluntary transition to an independent living program** Between 16-26 years of age and in need of minimal support(s) to live independently Have some type of legal income source; Can legally reside in Canada Willing to enter into a Transitional Support Plan (i.e. goal development) **HOPE Program: What we offer survivors -** 6 bedrooms for female youth 16 – 26 housing for up to 1 year counselling employment and other supports through 360°kids **Youth Residential Homes** **Our youth residential program is a voluntary program that offers a combination of housing and support for youth, primarily 16-19 years of age, who are facing a housing crisis. Youth seeking this service may be unable to reside at home due to abuse, emotional neglect, family dysfunction/breakdown or educational difficulties.** Housing Programs Employment Programs **Wellness & Support Programs** **Education** Low school participation is a factor for most homeless young people. Still, the majority of these young people would like to return to school. The iGrad program at 360°kids, in partnership with the York Region District School Board, provides an opportunity for youth to earn their high school diploma while getting the additional supports needed to be successful. iGrad: Students registering for this opportunity will work with the teacher in doing on-line, e-Learning courses. The classroom will be open between 9:30 am and 3:30 pm each day (Monday to Friday) and the teacher will support students in working on specific courses independently on-line.

APPENDIX F

Map of York Region with Services (Adapted from https://www.yorklink.ca/amazon/)